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CONTINUES –
Margaret Throsby and
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under the bed

MEDIA WATCH on
Phillip Adams, Alan Ramsey
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memories

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MR SCOTT’S FIVE YEAR PLAN

In July 2006 Mark Scott commenced work as managing director of the Australian Broadcasting Corporation. Initially appointed for a five year term, Mr Scott recently had his contract renewed for a second term by the ABC Board. Shortly after his appointment, Mark Scott’s office approached The Sydney Institute with a proposal that he deliver his first major public on the ABC to the Institute. The offer was willingly accepted and the talk took place on 16 October 2006.

In his address, Mark Scott correctly pointed out that he was both managing director and editor-in-chief of the public broadcaster. He acknowledged that there is “a sense that the organisation has issues with balance and fairness” and conceded that the ABC had “been at times too defensive in the face of such criticism”. Mr Scott acknowledged that “there is now the expectation...that there is demonstrated plurality of opinion and perspective” within the ABC. Mark Scott praised the *Insiders* and *Lateline* programs for “ensuring a range of political perspectives on the issue of the day” (*Insiders*) and encouraging “a good range of voices to be heard on issues” (*Lateline*). He indicated that a new program, *A Difference of Opinion*, would “ensure that on contentious issues of the day, there is opportunity for the full range of opinions and perspectives to be heard”. *A Difference of Opinion* first went to air in 2007 and was replaced by *Q&A*. Mark Scott also told the Institute that the *Media Watch* program would be reviewed “to ensure there is more opportunity for debate and discussion around contentious and important issues”.

So, five years later, what has changed? The answer is – not a lot. Take *Media Watch*, for example. There were some changes to the format in 2007 but it has now reverted to type – with one presenter laying down the law and no opportunity for debate and discussion on air. There is more diversity of opinion on the Fox *Newswatch* program than there is on *Media Watch*. Moreover, Mark Scott has not been able to find one political conservative to present one of the key news and current affairs opinion programs on the public broadcaster. Not one. There are, however, numerous leftist or left-of-centre presenters – including Phillip Adams (*Late Night Live*), Fran Kelly (*Radio National Breakfast*), Jonathan Holmes (*Media Watch*), Kerry O’Brien (*Four Corners*), Tony Jones (*Lateline*), Tim Palmer (*The Drum*) and Deborah Cameron (*Mornings on 702* in Sydney). And more besides. Ms Cameron has even turned what is supposed to be a current affairs program into a platform for the advocacy of green-left causes.

Mark Scott has some achievements at the ABC and deserved to have his term renewed. However, he has not delivered on his promise to meet the “expectation...that there is a demonstrated plurality of opinion and perspective” on the taxpayer funded public broadcaster.
In his 1937 book *The Road to Wigan Pier*, George Orwell defended “the ordinary decent person” against “the intellectual, book-trained socialist”. He wrote that the:

…”[latter] type is drawn, to begin with, entirely from the middle class, and from a rootless town-bred section of that middle class at that. …It includes...the foaming denouncers of the bourgeoisie, and the more-water-in-your-beer reformers of whom [George Bernard] Shaw is the prototype, and the astute young social-literary climbers…and all that dreary tribe of high-minded women and sandal-wearers and bearded fruit-juice drinkers who come flocking towards the smell of “progress” like bluebottles to a dead cat.

**HAYDN KEENAN AND MARGARET THROSBY ON ASIO AS A JOKE (OR WORSE)**

The musician Holly Throsby was interviewed by Paul Connolly for the *Sunday Life* magazine (20 February 2011). Early in the interview, Holly Throsby – who was born in 1978 – reflected on growing up in Sydney:

“I grew up in Balmain and it was great. These days Balmain is gentrified, but then it still had a bohemian hangover. Mum was a real hippie when she was younger – she can remember every lyric to every ’60s song – and a lot of the families around were very left-wing, interesting people. Us kids were always barefoot, making mud pies, selling paintings on the street. We had a lot of freedom.

Holly's left-wing, hippy mother was none other than Margaret Throsby. No surprise, then, that Holly’s mum became an ABC presenter. She commenced at the public broadcaster in 1967. What better qualifications are there for a taxpayer funded job at the public broadcaster? Inner-city Balmain. Hippie. Left-wing. Sandal-wearer.

And so it came to pass that Holly’s mother became the presenter on *Mornings with Margaret Throsby* on ABC Classic FM where, each day, she conducts “The Morning Interview”. Invited guests talk about themselves and nominate a selection of music to be played in between the conversation.

On Monday 27 June 2011 Margaret Throsby’s guest was Haydn Keenan, a documentary maker with Smart Street Films in Sydney. Mr Keenan is also a leftie.

Haydn Keenan has written and directed a four-part documentary titled *Persons of Interest* on the Australian Security and Intelligence Organisation which will air on SBS TV later this year. An exhibition based on the documentary and curated by Haydn Keenan, titled “Persons of Interest: The ASIO Files”, is currently showing at the Justice & Police Museum in Sydney. It was the occasion of a report by Greg Miskelly on the New South Wales edition of the ABC 7.30 NSW program on Friday 17 June 2011.

As would be expected, when the leftist sandal-wearer Margaret Throsby sat down in the ABC studios in inner-city Ultimo with the leftist sandal-wearer Haydn Keenan a wonderful left-wing time was had by all. In a Sandalista kind of way.

**THROSBY’S ERRORS ABOUT MR AND MRS PETROV**

Margaret Throsby introduced the program by referring to the defection of Vladimir Petrov (the third secretary of the Soviet Union’s embassy in Canberra) and his wife Evdokia (an employee of the Soviet Embassy who was a code breaker). The time was April 1954. Let’s go to the transcript.

*Margaret Throsby*: Margaret Throsby with you on ABC Classic FM. If you’re old enough to remember the expression “reds under the beds”, you’ll certainly remember the Petrov affair. 1950s Australia was a suspicious place. Robert Menzies was the prime minister and anti-communist feelings were running high. The Third Secretary of the Soviet Embassy in Canberra, Vladimir Petrov’s defection in 1954 caused headlines around the world. Even more dramatic were pictures of his wife being hustled off a plane in Darwin by ASIO agents. ASIO – the Australian Security Intelligence Organisation – was at that time about five years old.

Vladimir Petrov defected in Sydney on 3 April 1954. Evdokia Petrov defected at Darwin Airport on 19 April 1954. Mrs Petrov was photographed being
hustled on to a plane by KGB agents who had come to Australia from the Soviet Union – they were intent on forcing her to return to the USSR. After Mrs Petrov indicated her intention to defect to Australia, Northern Territory police freed her from the grip of two powerful KGB men. Contrary to Ms Throsby’s recollection, Mrs Petrov was not “hustled off a plane in Darwin by ASIO agents”.

The Throsby/Keenan interview continued very much in this way. ASIO was the subject of criticism and occasional ridicule. Haydn Keenan did concede (i) that the Soviet Union was intent on spying in Australia, (ii) that at least two of the Soviet Embassy officials – Vladimir Petrov and Ivan Skripov – did spy in Australia, (iii) that the Communist Party of Australia (CPA) was directed and financed from Moscow and (iv) that some CPA members engaged in espionage for the USSR. But the general theme of the interview was that ASIO officials were obsessive types who trampled on the civil liberties of upstanding sandal-wearing citizens like Mr Keenan and Ms Throsby.

Consequently, it was ASIO – not the Soviet Union or the CPA – which was the subject of most criticism on

Mornings with Margaret Throsby. Take, for example, the discussion on the impact of Vladimir Petrov on Australian politics:

**Margaret Throsby:** How important is Petrov in this story then, do you think?

**Haydn Keenan:** Not incredibly. He’s more important politically. What Petrov did was – ASIO and the conservative government were very interested in connecting the Communist Party of Australia with the ALP. If they could do that, they could secure electoral victories till the cows come home. Which they effectively did.

**Margaret Throsby:** Which they did.

**Haydn Keenan:** The Communist Party had blackened its own name because the main – I suppose if you want to be novella about it – spymaster, a chap called Wally Clayton who lived at 27 Station Street, Baulkham Hills -

**Margaret Throsby:** In Sydney?

**Haydn Keenan:** Yes. No 007 ring to that lot, is there? He was passing on the information to the Tass representative, [Fedor] Nosov.
The fact is that Vladimir and Evdokia Petrov were two of the most important Soviet diplomats to defect to the West during the Cold War. Moreover, as Mark Aarons documents in his book *The Family File*, there was a connection between the CPA and the ALP – this was not a creation of ASIO. The very existence of Wally Clayton – a CPA member who spied for the Soviet Union – validated the need for ASIO’s existence.

Later in the interview, Keenan referred to the CPA’s ineptness and accused it of “kowtowing to Moscow for so long”. This overlooks the fact that the CPA was controlled by Moscow and also received funds from Moscow. The CPA’s existence entailed that it kowtow to Moscow. In any event, the CPA’s leaders believed in Lenin and Stalin and all the other Bolsheviks.

**KEENAN’S HAROLD HOLT CONFUSION**

Margaret Throsby went along with Haydn Keenan as he argued that “the worst thing that happened for ASIO is the collapse of the Communist Party” and maintained that “the last people who resigned from the Communist Party were the CPA agents… because they were out of work, then”. Laugh – how Throsby laughed. Then Keenan added: “You know what I mean? So, we must have something to fear”. In fact, ASIO had scaled down its surveillance of the CPA before the end of the Cold War – since it had other security threats to deal with.

Keenan ran the line that ASIO really likes spies – even terrorists. According to Keenan, we must have “something to fear” so that ASIO can stay in existence.

**Haydn Keenan:** The Hilton bombing was a shot in the arm [for ASIO]. The World Trade Centre was a massive shot in the arm. The winners of those things are al Qaeda and the intelligence agencies. The losers are the person in the street.

Margaret Throsby and Haydn Keenan even gave a run to the hoary-old-theory that Prime Minister Harold Holt – who drowned in December 1967 – defected to Communist China:

**Haydn Keenan:** I mean, for reasons beyond me, there’s a lengthy [ASIO] film shot at Harold Holt’s funeral. And I’m sort of thinking – now, what’s the interest here?

**Margaret Throsby:** Well, they thought that he’d been pinched by a Chinese submarine, didn’t they?

**Haydn Keenan:** Well, we have got one agent – a volunteer whose life was pretty well destroyed. He was one of the nine communists in Bendigo and he does tell us that, a little while after Harold Holt’s disappearance, he got a phone call in Bendigo from his handler asking whether he’d heard anything about Harold Holt and a Chinese submarine.

**Margaret Throsby:** See, we’re sort of making a bit of a fun jokey thing. But it’s not funny stuff, is it?

**Haydn Keenan:** At all. At all. I mean a number of the people we’ve spoken to in the 50s said to me “Haydn, you must remember. They called it the ‘Cold War’ but for us it was a very hot war.”

**BELIEVE IT OR NOT – ASIO + AUSCHWITZ COMPARED**

There is no evidence that ASIO ever believed that Harold Holt had fled Australia in a Chinese submarine. This is just barking mad – but it fits the Sandalista mindset that ASIO is replete with fools and idiots. Also the supposed recollections of an ex-communist in Bendigo, four decades after Holt’s death, is not evidence for anything. Later in the interview Keenan even compared ASIO with Nazi Germany’s death camps:

**Haydn Keenan:** A friend showed me his [ASIO] file. And it was a sort of a tattered piece of – the thing with the files is they’re incredibly boring. They are, I’m sure, a little bit like the records of Auschwitz. And I don’t mean that facetiously. In the sense that they are obsessed with identification – height, weight -

**Margaret Throsby:** You’re talking about the banality of evil here, aren’t you?

**Haydn Keenan:** That’s very much -

**Margaret Throsby:** In the Auschwitz example.

**Haydn Keenan:** Exactly. And it reminds you continually – this is a bureaucracy.

Here in the interview, the two Sandalistas compared the democratically regulated ASIO with the worst excesses of the worst of the World War II Nazi death camps – Auschwitz in occupied Poland. Then, at the end of the interview, Keenan said that ASIO was just like the worst of the communist secret police forces:

**Haydn Keenan:** You know, I must say that
one of the senior ASIO officers said to us: “Oh we’d have a wonderful Christmas party with the KGB.” And naively I said: “But aren’t you on opposite sides?” “Oh only theoretically, we’re in the same business - we’re in the business of keeping government, status and quo, whoever the government is. Be it Stasi, be it KGB, be it ASIO....

Margaret Throsby: Very interesting. Haydn thanks for talking to us today. We’ve run out of time.

Here Keenan was quoting an alleged anonymous ASIO source. It is not clear whether any such conversation even took place and – if so – when the person concerned was serious. It is most unlikely that, during the Cold War, ASIO officials and KGB types attended Christmas celebrations. When? Where? Why?

The fact is that ASIO’s role was not about keeping the status quo. Following the formation of ASIO, government in Australia has changed on six occasions. Namely – December 1949, December 1972, November 1975, March 1983, March 1996 and November 2007. In other words, ASIO did not preside over the continuation of a governmental status quo in Australia.

Criticism can be made of any organisation in a democratic society. It is acknowledged that ASIO made some errors in the second half of 1960s and early 1970s. However, it performed well during the Cold War in the 1950s and early 1960s when the Soviet Union, assisted by sections of the CPA, was engaged in espionage in Australia with the intention of overthrowing the democratically elected Australian government. And ASIO has performed well over the past decade in thwarting terrorist activities by Islamist groups.

To Margaret Throsby and Haydn Keenan, ASIO is at best a joke – and at worst akin to the vilest excesses of Nazi and communist totalitarian regimes. That’s the Sandalista position.

ABC’S 7.30 NSW BAGS ASIO

A similar mindset was prevalent when the 7.30 NSW previewed the Justice & Police Museum exhibition on ASIO – which was curated by Haydn Keenan. Journalist Greg Miskelly interviewed Haydn Keenan, leftist academic David McKnight and Roger Millis. David McKnight is a former member of the Communist Party of Australia and Roger Millis was a CPA activist for many years. 7.30 NSW did not mention Dr McKnight’s one-time Communist Party membership. No anti-communist was invited on the program. It was the familiar ABC program where everyone agreed with everyone else – in a Sandalista way.

When 7.30 NSW moved to contemporary times, Greg Miskelly interviewed Anglican priest David Smith – who objected to the deportation of a sheik who was assessed by ASIO to be a security risk. No one who supported ASIO’s role in national security was invited on to the 7.30 NSW program.

The message is clear. The Sandalista class do not really believe in national security and do not really like intelligence services. The likes of Margaret Throsby and Haydn Keenan benefit from the security which is made possible by intelligence services and police forces. However, they don’t feel comfortable about ASIO then or now.

POSTSCRIPT – KEENAN’S INTELLECTUAL SNOBBERY

Haydn Keenan’s “Persons of Intent : The ASIO Files” exhibition contains a wall-poster taken from novelist Frank Hardy’s ASIO file and dated 22 December 1964. It is the report of an ASIO agent who attended a weekend conference of the Marist publication Arena at which Hardy spoke. The report reads as follows:

Many of the participants in this conference were long-haired academics and University types who used long words which either do not appear in the dictionary or which have obscure meanings. It was very difficult to follow what the speakers said. Those attending Haydn Keenan’s exhibition at the Justice & Police Museum are expected to laugh at the poorly educated ASIO agent who could not understand what was being said by the Marxist-Sandalista set at an Arena conference. However, anyone who read Arena in the 1960s knows that it consisted of such theoretical Marxism, which was incomprehensible.

In other words, the ASIO agent’s assessment was correct. As for Frank Hardy, in 1952 he wrote Journey Into The Future – a propaganda tract which praised Joe Stalin and the communist dictatorship in Moscow. The irony is that ASIO agents, circa 1964, identified meaningless jargon when they saw it and – unlike Frank Hardy – had a realistic understanding of the Soviet Union. Yet Haydn Keenan regards ASIO as a subject of ridicule. Sandalistas are like that.
GOVERNMENT AND FREEDOM - WHO IS AYN RAND?

Anne Henderson

Atheist and objectivist, Ayn Rand has been scorned for decades – by socialist non-believers and followers of the Christian right alike. Her fall out in the late 1950s with the *National Review*’s William F Buckley was legendary; Christopher Hitchens has condemned the Rand cult as a homage to greed. Today, however, Rand’s name is being invoked anew as a conservative revival takes root in the United States, and with corporate governance – both political and commercial – failing.

A sense of paralysis and civic dysfunction in the US - from budgets to health care to global involvement - has added to cries for individuals to take back power. In this, the name of Ayn Rand is being used as a philosophical signpost for individual freedom against an encroaching state that imposes taxes on personal and corporate industry in order to fund stagnant bureaucracy and public debt.

As Adam Kirsch noted, in *The New York Times* in November 2009, conservative protests against the Obama Administration frequently include placards proclaiming “Atlas Shrugs” or “Ayn Rand was Right”. Kirsch also noted Californian Republican John Campbell as saying, “People are starting to feel like we’re living through the scenario that happened in *Atlas Shrugged*.”

Ayn Rand’s bestseller phenomenon *Atlas Shrugged* (1957) is a 1069 page long, thriller-like saga of a world collapsing as philosopher and inventor John Galt leads the best of human minds into hiding, holding out against the national disease of mediocrity and government regulation. For more than half the book, this hero makes no appearance as people everywhere ask “Who is John Galt?” For a lead character, John Galt makes fiction’s most delayed entrance to any stage. *Atlas Shrugged* continues to hold a record for copies sold; hundreds of thousands of Rand’s books still sell every year.

THE RAND CULT

Love her or hate her, Ayn (pronounced “ine”) Rand holds the unique distinction among twentieth century gurus for spawning an enduring cult around her ideas. What Karl Marx and Frederick Engels managed in the nineteenth century, Ayn Rand achieved in direct reaction to Marxist theories in the century that followed. Unlike Marx, however, Rand’s ideas have not (as yet) spawned revolutions, gulags or civil war. Just book sales, institutes, devoted followers who keep the flame alive and the occasional movie. YouTube screenings of Ayn Rand lectures now also dot the cyberspace. In 2011, *Atlas Shrugged (Part 1)* became a movie.

The story of how Rand evolved to cult status – and her extraordinary life – is fully told in Anne Heller’s *Ayn Rand and The World She Made*. Refused access to Rand’s papers at the Ayn Rand Institute, Heller has not been stopped from constructing the first full biography of Rand, one devoid of devotional culling and replete with vivid storytelling of a complex, even contradictory, figure around which developed a “collective” of professed individualists - what Rand would call a paradox rather than a contradiction.

The ability to rationalise all action around her, was Rand’s trademark. Even before the publication of *Atlas Shrugged*, the tome that defined the Rand ideology of individualistic power against stagnant collectivism, she had gathered around her a group of young acolytes besotted by her ideas and stringent belief in the power of reason. To them she was magnetic, challenging, taking them beyond mainstream university classes to a higher form of Aristotelian thought and practice.

One of these acolytes was Alan Greenspan who would go on to become Chairman of the US Federal Reserve. Chief among them, however, was Nathaniel Branden who became Rand’s lover a year after he married Barbara Weidman. At the Branden-Weidman wedding, Rand and her husband Frank O’Connor had stood by the couple like surrogate parents – and in some ways they were.

Rand, O’Connor and the Brandens’ lives would become more and more entwined over years, in more than eccentric ways, until Nathaniel Branden was forced to reveal his affair with Patrecia Gullison, after which Rand banished not only Nathaniel but also Barbara Branden from her circle and changed her will. Another of her acolytes, Leonard Peikoff, was then named her sole legal heir. He remains her most devoted apostle.

But, such was the cult of Ayn Rand, in the decades that followed her death in 1962, both Nathaniel Branden and Barbara Branden continued their
adherence to what Nathaniel Branden had termed the Rand philosophy of “Objectivism”. Both made strong careers out of Rand from teaching, interpreting, and lecturing on Objectivism and publishing memoirs of their time with Rand. So much has been made public in the story around Ayn Rand – as with the story of any great guru – biographer Anne Heller was able to construct her comprehensive account of the Rand phenomenon without resort to the papers she had been denied in the Ayn Rand Institute.

**RUSSIA**

The key to the Rand perspective is undoubtedly Ayn Rand’s early experiences in Tsarist and Soviet Russia. Rand, an immigrant to the US in the 1920s, was born in St Petersburg in 1905, as Alissa Rosenbaum, to Russian Jewish bourgeois parents. The Rosenbaums were among the millions caught up in the chaos of the Bolshevik and Leninist upheavals after 1917. Moreover, as the most anti-semitic country in Europe, some of Russia’s most violent anti-semitism happened between 1905 until the revolutions of 1917. Then came the violence of the Red Army.

The Rosenbaums were prosperous and relatively free of persecution in their St Petersburg setting until 1917 when they enjoyed one last happy summer holiday on the Russian-Finnish coast. Their lives until then had included travel abroad; at home the Rosenbaums tried to protect their three daughters from the worst of Russian politics and anti-semitism. Rand was a strong willed and intensely bright child whom Heller describes as developing a sense of individual rights as early as the age of four. Told by her strict mother she could not have always what she wanted, Rand recalled in her later writings that she quietly asked herself, “Why do they not let me have what I want?” Her reply was, “Some day I will have it.” That, says Heller, was the determination that would govern Rand’s life and her philosophy of selfishness – her second non-fiction book (1962) being titled *The Virtue of Selfishness*. In addition, the trappings of the Russian Orthodox church and what Rand would see as its double standards soon led her to profess herself an atheist. Arguing, at the age of thirteen, that since God obviously an invention.

With the fall of the Tsar in 1917 and later the takeover of the democratic Kerensky Government by the Bolsheviks, the prosperous Rosenbaums were suddenly out of business. Rand’s horror at the Red Terror and the manner in which its Bolshevik soldiers commandeered her father’s pharmacy business in a single visit found its way into her much used term “looters and moochers”. In *Atlas Shrugged*, the worthy and brilliant are deprived by “looters and moochers”, the hangers on of a government determined to “equalise” standards by consciously regulating the best performing commerce into oblivion.

The Rosenbaums would survive these early years of civil war and Bolshevik pillage by trekking ahead of the Reds – first to the Ukraine and finally lingering in Yevpatoria, a town on the southern tip of the Crimea. Here Rand finished her schooling. Heller, describing Rand’s evolving erudition as a teenager, writes: “In one of her first college courses, she would change her mind about Plato, fall in love with Aristotle, and passionately align herself with Aristotle’s empiricism for the remainder of her life.” When Rand discovered the United States Constitution and its declaration on individual freedom, she became convinced the US held out the future she craved – escape from the moochers and looters of the Soviet system.

Having refused a chance to flee (Rand’s father did not believe the Communists would last), by 1921 the Rosenbaums had become trapped inside the Communist state now overrun by a ragged Red Army and inflation out of control. Money was worthless and individuals, both known and unknown to the family, were frequently eliminated in mock trials and summary executions. Rand’s family returned to St Petersburg where Rand’s mother, a former dentist, became the family breadwinner after qualifying as a Soviet teacher. Rand’s father became the house parent – standing in queues to collect miserable rationed food and cooking for the family. Rand continued her studies at the Petrograd State University, studying history and philosophy. This was a window of opportunity for Rand since before the revolution Jews had very restricted access to university education and, after 1924, university entrance would be denied students whose families had owned property before the revolution.

At university, Rand rejected the prevailing left wing philosophy of “determinism” that preached no free will in individuals. She also became much closer to her father in rejecting the Communist system – her mother travelled more comfortably with Communism at this time. Both Rand and her father were convinced that she stood out from the university crowd as both different and talented in special ways.

In the late 1920s, Rand’s father would write to her in the US: “You must see clearly that you are not like everybody else and be proud of it. Eschew all doubts and continue firmly and with assurance to walk towards your goal.” At the time, Rand was a 22-year-old struggling to gain recognition as a writer of scripts in Los Angeles where she supported herself
with menial suburban jobs, such as waiting on tables, selling door-to-door, clerical work in department stores, and borrowing from her Chicago relatives. As Heller writes: “It was an embarrassing and probably frightening time for her.” Yet, to both Rand and her father, she was “special” – with the sort of heroic qualities she would later develop for the heroes of her novels *The Fountainhead* and *Atlas Shrugged*.

**THE FREE WORLD**

Ayn Rand made her way to the United States in January 1926. She had begged her mother to help her leave; relatives already in Chicago became her sponsors. The application for a Soviet passport claimed that Rand, who had enrolled in the State Technicum for Screen Arts, would study motion pictures in the US before returning to Russia to make propaganda movies. The passport was approved and, with her mother’s sacrifice and sale of family treasures, Rand was able to travel by train to Le Havre via Riga, Berlin and Paris, from where she sailed for New York. She changed her name to Ayn Rand after passing through US immigration and in every sense adopted her new free world. She had already determined never to return to the Soviet Union.

The years that followed this young woman’s émigré trek to California and eventual fame depict in many ways the ongoing story of immigrant success in the US, the country that best embodies the triumph of individual endeavour over the odds. Ayn Rand’s trajectory paralleled others - from foreign speaking immigrant to successful US citizen in the space of a few decades. She endured like others with a sense of purpose and belief in her ability to achieve. Her marriage to Frank O’Connor, a bit part actor in Hollywood, in April 1929 was the act of a young woman besotted by a handsome young man in the best tradition of love stories all over. O’Connor would become her ideal partner – a compliant lover, adapting his interests around Rand’s career moves and indulgence in New York for a younger lover.

But Rand was also different – as her father believed. In the midst of a free world, Rand continued her obsession with the disease she had witnessed in Russia as a teenager - the disease of totalitarian domination of the individual. That many of the US intellectual class, among which Rand sought to belong, had no understanding of her inspiration was a shock to her.

In the US, Rand quickly admitted that mediocrity was not unique to Russia. And, all too often, when her work failed to gain acceptance or was not appreciated, she saw rejection of her talent as something lacking in the reader rather than in her work. Heller writes of one of Rand’s early fictional heroes, “This by the way, is practically a diagnostic description of narcissism”, adding “and also a description of Rand herself.” Narcissism was indeed central to Rand’s drive and philosophical outlook. In addition, however, she was fixed on and fired up about the failures of the Communist society she had experienced in Russia. Writes Heller: “She never returned to Russia, but in many ways, she never really left.”

It would always confound Rand that, in this free world of the United States, as she rose to national and international prominence with the publication of *The Fountainhead* in 1943, it was many of her Hollywood colleagues who mocked her anti-Communist fervour against the Soviet Union, a political universe they believed had lessons to teach the West. These intellectual fellow travellers among US writers and academics would trouble Rand - who quickly came to a belief that the US had little understanding of Communism. Many intellectuals and politicians appeared intensely naïve to her. And history has since shown they were. But in the US, from the 1930s till the 1960s, such elites set the pace of intellectual discussion.

**OBJECTIVISM**

Rand’s philosophical positions varied little over time. In spite of her frustrated beginnings on the fringes of Hollywood, a chance meeting with Cecil B DeMille led to some low grade script writing contracts. From this, in 1936, she had her first novel published – *We The Living* – a dark account of Soviet Communism and as close as any of her writings to an autobiography in fiction. In 1943, came *The Fountainhead*, a 754 page, racy portrayal of architect Howard Roark and his uncompromising stand against what Rand depicts as the hangers-on, and second rate professionals who gain by deals and bureaucratic patronage. From the success of *The Fountainhead* came fame for Rand – and the beginnings of the Rand cult.

The essence of Rand’s beliefs or philosophy was her uncompromising assertion that strong willed individualism – often, for her, capitalism – held the key to successful human endeavour and human progress. The collective, or community action, was death – in spite of Rand gathering a small collective around herself in later years. She developed a doctrine of “selfishness” – citizens did not “owe” their governments anything, not even tax. Selfishness was a magnificent force, a “fountainhead” from which flowed her hero’s emotions and creative values. It gave strength and life to the individual’s struggle against the ordinary. From this, society prospered.
As Rand pushed on with her writings, and against the tide as publishers often turned her manuscripts down, her world view was embodied in her own experience and elevated sense of her talent. She believed she would do for capitalism what The Communist Manifesto had done for Communism. From first supporting F D Roosevelt, by the end of the 1930s she believed Roosevelt was a “second handed humanitarian”.

With Rand’s involvement with Hollywood, during the making of The Fountainhead as a movie, she came to see the movie industry as “shabby and vicious”. By the time of the publication of Atlas Shrugged, in 1957, Rand had developed her intellectual group in New York. From this, Rand acolyte and lover Nathaniel Branden was growing his Nathaniel Branden Institute (NBI) and lecturing on and publishing, with the help of his wife Barbara, Rand’s beliefs as the doctrine of “objectivism”.

William F Buckley fell out with Rand after publishing a review of Atlas Shrugged, entitled “Big Sister is Watching You”, by Whittaker Chambers - like Buckley a strong Christian at the time. The review savaged the novel and called it “silly”. A few years later Chambers would be closer to the Rand position on capitalism than to Buckley on Christianity but the review created a huge debate and ended Rand’s friendship with Buckley. Rand was appalled that she should be accused of a right-wing intolerance akin to the left-wing intolerance she was condemning. But such was the conundrum of Rand.

The endurance of objectivism, or the ideas of Ayn Rand, owes much to the popular appeal of her fictional scenarios - that of the heavy hand of government regulation against the freedom of individual endeavour. Whenever citizens feel the oppression of failed government systems, Rand can be invoked. Regardless of whether her fiction gains approval from the literary establishment, or that her philosophy could ever sustain a successful democracy, readers clearly are taken with her writing and ideas. She hits a nerve; she rings true in some way. Rand, and her teaching followers, have thus created a bottom up following that refuses to disappear, achieving a sort of slow burn people's revolution that quietly simmers on the fringes and bursts onto the political stage as big government fails.

With big government debt reaching crisis proportions in northern hemisphere nations, Ayn Rand and John Galt will be with us for some time yet.

Anne Henderson is editor of The Sydney Papers

I read The First Stone early this year, sixteen years after it was first published. I read it knowing something of Helen Garner's fame, little of the book’s controversy, and basically nothing about the events at Ormond College, Melbourne University in 1992, which it describes.

The book left me unsettled. Garner’s writing was elegant, but her depiction of the two young women who became complainants, in a sexual harassment case against the Master of Ormond College, as possessed by a punitive, frigid feminism, rankled. Garner’s haughty insistence that sexual harassment was not a crime worthy of police involvement was downright offensive.

Yet the course of events described in Garner’s book – her earnest, if misguided, attempts to understand the situation, the complainants’ frustrating refusal to speak, the costly, miserable destruction of the Master’s distinguished career and the blaze of hostility from other feminists – seemed to countenance Garner’s shifting tone of sympathetic, bewildered outrage. Why were the women involved so belligerent, so unrelenting, towards both Garner and the Master? Something about this “non-fiction” account felt treacherous.

As longstanding members of The Sydney Institute would know, my doubt was vindicated – largely at the Institute itself, in 1995, when The First Stone was published and both Garner and her adversary, feminist academic and a player in the Ormond case, Jenna Mead, stepped up to the podium. Mead revealed egregious distortions of reality in The First Stone. Garner had hatched six or seven separate characters out of Mead herself, creating the impression of a hostile feminist network, conspiring to shut Garner out of Ormond.

Garner had twisted the chronology by which the two young complainants had attempted to seek redress within the college, before going to police. She had smoothed over the conflicts of interest in the college committee which dealt with the complaints, being composed of almost exactly the same people who originally appointed the Master. With these and many other elisions Garner had sculpted events to suit her
disparagement of modern feminism. Mead argued that Garner “simply doesn’t see the power of economic and institutional relations that operate between men and women in public.”

Garner, defending herself at the 1995 Sydney Institute Annual Dinner Lecture against an onslaught of criticism from feminists, commentators and the public, suggested feminism had been “commandeered by a bullying orthodoxy”. She insisted that, apart from the “hysteria” of “fundamentalist feminists”, many women and men found the book touching and truthful, and a realistic reflection of their experiences of relations between the sexes. She claimed that feminism could be a force for good, but that young women were being misled by the orthodoxy’s “disingenuousness [and] determination to cling to victimhood at any cost”.

This was the unfolding of a heated – sometimes acrimonious, sometimes circular – but ultimately productive public discussion about feminism in Generation X. Many in Garner’s own generation disagreed vehemently with her and disputed her artificial attempt to carve a mother/(wayward) daughter schism in Australian women’s relations. The young women who grew up with the activism of the First Wave behind them stepped forward and spoke for their own worldview, which, unsurprisingly, was more open, more nuanced and more diverse than Garner had allowed.

They wrote back too – wrote important, thoughtful works like the essays in Bodyjamming, Virginia Trioli’s Generation F and Rosamund Else-Mitchell and Naomi Flutter’s Talking Up. Their writings charted the flux of feminist ideas, articulated the social and political concerns of young women and evaluated mid 1990s Australia’s capacity to provide Generation X with an equal and respectful society in which to make their lives.

But by criticising young women and dismissing the building social consensus against sexual harassment, Garner’s book took a wide and encompassing swipe into the future. If Generation X took feminism in the wrong direction, then what of the next, my generation who grew up following their tracks, guided by the values Garner disdains? By Garner’s account we should be the reigning harpies of political correctness, swooping down to punish every stray male eye and dopey leer; or, at least, we must be stunted – self-victimising, afraid of spontaneity and vindictive to men.

Jenna Price, who, as a journalist for The Canberra Times, detailed the book’s fictitiousness and is now an academic at UTS, says, “I never thought [The First Stone] was relevant because I didn’t think it was right – I thought it painted an inaccurate and inappropriate picture of what those young women did.” But “the idea it embodies, which is that young women are punitive and don’t know their own power still exists”. So The First Stone remains relevant for at least two reasons; first because it was a widely read book which made accusations about where young women were taking the ideals of feminism, and those bleak predictions, to which Generation Y has not had the chance to respond, live on in the minds of its past and present readers.

And second, to new readers The First Stone, washed clean by the passing of time from the accumulation of criticism and correction to its skewed facts, presents itself again as a truthful, non fiction account. Garner’s has endured as a much more recognised name than the roll call of her various critics.

“There’s no apology, there’s no clarification – there’s nothing in here that on any level indicates that it is not a work of journalism,” says Gabe Kavanagh, one of Sydney’s leading young feminist activists. “And I think that’s really morally reprehensible … In the absence of knowing all that came out after it was published you get a really misleading idea of what happened.” Indeed, most young women and men to whom I’ve spoken that read the book in recent years, like me at first, did not know about the factual distortions which allowed Garner to spin such a damning account of the complainants and the feminists who supported them.

THE ADFA CONTROVERSY

Sixteen years on, where does The First Stone stand as a comment on young Australian women? Could it be that the intervening years have validated Garner’s critique, or have they exposed its weakness? More important is that answering that question, like debating The First Stone in the 1990s, serves as an assessment of progress – an appraisal of how far, and where, we’ve come. As it turns out though, “progress” might be an ideal even more mutable than feminism.

It can start with this question: could the scandal at Ormond College happen today? Nina Funnell, who runs sexual consent training for football players and is writing a PhD at UNSW, on online and SMS sexual harassment, thinks it is possible. “You would hope that public opinion has moved on,” she says. “But I suspect if the recent scandal at ADFA is anything to go by – well, they did exactly what happened at Ormond.”

The woman at the centre of the Australian Defence Force Academy incident, in early 2011, who was unwillingly filmed having sex with a fellow cadet was fined by the ADFA for an unrelated incident, sent home on leave and directed to apologise for making her case public. “There is an in-principle agreement that sexual harassment is not okay,” says Funnell, but on the level of individual cases “a lot of people come out of the woodwork saying it’s harmless, or that women are only making these claims to extort money.” The First Stone’s spirit lives on in what Funnell calls “the Lighten Up Squad”.

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Jenna Price, on the other hand, is confident that sexual harassment allegations would be differently treated today: “I think he would have had to resign the next day. First of all, any organisation understands its liability when a case like that comes forward.” And there has been cultural change in universities – acknowledgment of the power an academic wields over students to which Garner was wilfully blind.

“A senior academic would think not just once or twice but ten times before getting on the dance floor with a student,” says Price, referring to the incident which generated the first harassment claim against the Ormond Master.

FACEBOOK - AND ST PAUL’S COLLEGE

Kavanagh also thinks responses have improved. She points to the exposure in 2009 of a “pro-rape, anti-acknowledgment of the power an academic wields over students” Facebook page run by students at the St Paul's College at University of Sydney. “I would never go so far as to say it was handled well, but it was handled much better than the Ormond case. The amount of time between the women reporting these incidents and anything being done – that just wouldn’t fly anymore.”

For others, including Nina Funnell who reported on the St Paul's and other college cases, the very fact of that incident points to the continued existence of a sexist, insular culture in some of these institutions. “While some colleges have been proactive in ensuring they are a safe space for students and addressing gender violence, others have been absolutely woeful, and have stayed firm to the idea that there is no problem,” says Nina Funnell. That includes, according to Sydney University rumour, that some college administrators have helped cover up serious cases of sexual assault among students.

Are these just pockets of obduracy in a wider trend of change? It seems difficult to deny that on a national level, sexual harassment is becoming much more widely recognised and deplored. Organisations, large and small, have policies and procedures in place to prevent and deal with complaints. It is more frequently and openly discussed in politics, business and – ambivalently – the media. The post of Sex Discrimination Commissioner, only six years old in 1992, has become institutionalised, and legislation against discrimination has continued to develop. Price says this institutional support makes women more forthcoming in reporting: “They felt completely powerless before – now they see a legislative instrument saying ‘we’ll protect you, we’ll help you’, and they do.”

At second glance, however, the changes of the past two decades are no straightforward march to progress. New barriers have stacked up which might mean sexual harassment is as daunting to report as ever. Ariadne Wremen, an Associate Professor at Sydney University who studies young people’s political engagement, observes that young women brought up in the 1990s absorbed that decade’s individualistic ethos and tend to see incidents of harassment as singular – their personal responsibility: “Now being the stronger woman means dealing with it yourself.” Far from Garner’s allegation that feminism was teaching young women to see themselves as victims, young women are now more likely to blame themselves for sexual harassment.

SEXUAL HARASSMENT AT DAVID JONES

A thought of the coverage of recent sexual harassment cases may also enough to keep a victim quiet. When Kristy Fraser-Kirk sued her boss, David Jones CEO Mark McInnes and the company for his repeated sexual harassment, two figures were pilloried in the headlines: hers, for being pretty, and $37 million. Within those contours other points were lost: that the money was the punitive damages she was asking as an unprecedented message to the corporate world that sexual harassment is a liability; that Mark McInnes had as good as admitted fault, agreeing to resign in disgrace and leaving the country. That he and David Jones were sufficiently threatened by Fraser-Kirk’s suit to settle was then muffled by the din erupting from Fraser-Kirk’s decision to keep the [much smaller] settlement sum, instead of donating it to charity as she had promised for the million-dollar outcome.

“The bigger risk these days is to go public”, says Wremen. A scandal-happy media armed with the lurid resources of the internet means privacy for victims is almost impossible, and reputation is easily, and enduringly, marred. The internet reacted almost immediately to the David Jones case with quips about how Fraser-Kirk would never be hired again. Funnell points out that the standard journalistic idiom is geared to twist sexual harassment and assault claims against the victim.

Journalists refer to the “alleged victim”, but it is the victim who is doing the alleging, against a person she claims to have committed a crime against her – the alleged assailer. Referring to the “alleged” victim immediately casts the foundation of her claim into doubt; well she might be a victim, or she might be putting the whole thing on. Garner scoffed that there were “less destructive responses” than going to the police over a sexual harassment claim. She meant responses less destructive to a man’s career – but now, women may seek a response less destructive to their own.

FEMINISM SINCE THE 1990S

It is impossible to ignore, when teeing up feminism’s progress since the start of the 1990s, the fact that it appears to have died along the way. According to a study by the Victorian Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission feminism is a “damaged brand”. The hairy-legged lesbian boogiewoman was a
deal breaker for generations to come. This is no sudden shift: Virginia Trioli called Garner on it at the time, writing that the words “young feminist” had become an oxymoron – quite the opposite to Garner’s opinion that they were thundering in the other direction, to extremism. But the trend has intensified. The study concludes young women see feminism as “an anachronism whose job is largely done”.

But thinking that its job is “done” is not the same as rejecting feminism. In fact, it might be so thorough an assimilation of feminist values as to nullify it as an issue. After all, feminism calls for political action to equalise the position of women to that of men. If, as it seems to Generation Y, that goal has been achieved, what is there left to fight for? Jenna Price and Nina Funnell tell almost identical stories about a discussion they have with their students.

Asked to raise their hands if they call themselves a feminist, lecture theatres are unstirring. But asked about the cornerstones of feminism, one by one, virtually every hand registers approval. The entire room believes that women should receive equal pay for equal work; that women should have access to birth control, should have the same opportunities in work. Duh. “Feminism is like fluoride,” says Funnell. “It’s already in the water, so people think, why go out of your way for more?”

So perhaps Garner is right – feminism did become an institution. But this may well have made feminism weaker, not stronger. And much less conducive to the ritual sacrifice of old men than she might have thought. There is an “equality myth” which today’s young women learned as a means of encouragement as they grew up – that feminism had already won them equality, opportunity and freedom from discrimination. “That is a really powerful way to demotivate young women from being feminists,” says Kavanagh.

In this narrative “there’s no need to be a feminist, it is seen as arcane and unnecessary and a completely irrelevant social movement”. Young women and men, brought up in an equal-seeming society by feminist-minded mothers have imbibed the values of equality and, quite reasonably, see no reason to rage against the tolerable status quo.

Which is one reason they are less likely to throw their energy into political movements that try to improve the status of women. Generation Y is pretty blasé on rallies, protests and political agitation, and there is more to it than the dubious cliché of their “political apathy”. Why protest for your right to fluoride? Especially when it clashes with the roster at your part time job? “We now live in a society where it is more difficult to engage with activism,” says Kavanagh. Most people of our generation had any number of demands placed on them in their early twenties which meant that they couldn’t do what people of our parents’ generation did. We’ve got to work 20 hours a week, we’ve got to pay the rent, rental prices are incredibly high, you accrue a significant HECS debt now.”

And yet, Kavanagh’s own work, organising rallies like Reclaim the Night, International Women’s Day - which this year drew the thousands of women and men to march through Sydney’s CBD in support of women’s rights – and the Network of Women Students Australia, is testament to the enduring life of activism. To Price: “We’re going through a period of time when the collective act is not in the forefront of our consciousness.” Although the internet allows us to pool and parlay our common opinions, “‘clicktivism’ has a lot to answer for, because it takes us away from acting collectively.”

But Sara Haghdoosti disagrees. At 23, Sara works for GetUp!, has been a Q&A panelist and a committee member of Reclaim the Night and International Women’s Day. Activism has simply taken a different, more contemporary turn, she says. “Instead of joining a political party young people might talk about an issue on Facebook or they might write about it. They might engage in discussions with their friends, or sign online petitions.”

That this kind of action is commonly treated with suspicion is, for Haghdoosti, “frankly a naive way of seeing today’s politics”. Shecatalogues the power of internet communication in our personal and business lives, and the ever widening online dimensions of politicians themselves. It surely wasn’t for vanity that Barry O’Farrell tweeted photos of his visit to The Sydney Institute minutes after walking in the door. And online action has achieved substantive results.

Apart from GetUp!, which has emerged as a serious presence on Australia’s political scene using the internet as its platform, social media have achieved some low-key, but nonetheless real, results. Earlier this year advertising company Adshell caved in over a single day to the onslaught of online protest against its decision to remove bus shelter ads featuring a gay couple embracing. Bob Ellis’ recent opinion piece on the ABC’s website The Drum was ridiculed far and wide over Facebook and Twitter for asserting that “feminism has gone too far” now that an attempted rape claim has brought down Dominique Strauss-Kahn.

For many of Generation Y, these online victories are the only ones they know. Collective, on the street, banner-waving political action has not looked successful in their lifetimes. The biggest protests in the past two decades, against the Iraq War, which drew many young people into the streets, provoked little more than scorn from the government. “If you ask young people... “When did we actually do this and win?” many of them might not be able to say,” says Haghdoosti. “They don’t have that history, and we can’t expect them to mindlessly believe that collective
action will work unless we're willing to back up with evidence that it has."

Moreover this new activism might be spilling back out into the domain of old-school protest. In June 2011, hundreds of young women marched in Sydney's Slutwalk—an online, international campaign that spawned marches worldwide to protest against the victim-blaming sentiment which led a Toronto police officer to say “women should avoid dressing like sluts in order not to be victimised”. Apparently no amount of social and political change will make women agree with Garner's dictum that there is no such thing as a “right” to wear what one pleases without provoking a male response.

In the same liminality of optimism and pessimism that pervades every attempt to assess feminism's progress, the persistence of activism could be a good sign in a bad situation. Whatever the hold of the equality myth, feminism patently has not achieved all of its aims. Women still earn an average 17 per cent less than men, hold fewer positions of power and are much more likely to experience violence in their lives. There is still, clearly, reason to demonstrate.

Measuring feminism’s progress is, in no small way, a plotting of our society’s orientation. This means it is an exercise hampered by the same difficulty – that whether you think we have come forward or back depends on the direction you happen to be facing. Has feminism made it better to be a young woman in 2011 than in 1992? Or has it withered away, leaving us to fend for ourselves among half-finished attitudes and structures? One thing is certain: Helen Garner's vision of women's future was way off the map.

Taking stock of the feminist movement in 2009, Ariel Levy wrote that “where we think we've been on our great manly march forward often has less to do with our true coordinates than with our fears and desires.” Women’s community leaders and activists offer a judicious set of indicators: equal pay, domestic violence, legalisation of abortion and equal representation in management and politics. We can quantify how far we’ve come on these achievements. But they are not the ones that form our impression of progress. The young and the optimistic, looking forward, will the opportunities they desire to come to pass, and so see a history of betterment and change. Those less striving look back and see each arduous advance stacked precariously upon the last, and see the distance yet to go.

So, in almost two decades, has feminism gained or receded? Go ahead and make a pronouncement – but your answer will be to Levy’s much more personal question. Just as The First Stone was a book much less about Ormond College than about Helen Garner.

Anya Poukchanski is former editor of Honi Soit

BRENDAN NIALL TO GERARD HENDERSON – 22 FEBRUARY 2011

Dear Gerard

Here are some comments on your recent observations on The Riddle of Father Hackett. I did not expect that you would publish without asking me. However, I ought to have sent the further reply that I promised. This has taken quite a bit of time to write so I hope you will add it to the record.

Brenda

Dear Gerard

I didn’t expect you to publish the two emails in which I replied to your comments on The Riddle of Father Hackett. As a courtesy at least, you should have asked my permission. But, having agree to respond to you in more detail, I ought to have done so.

I think these are your main points:

That in 1922 Father Hackett was a supporter of Michael Collins, not De Valera, in the Irish civil war. There is ample evidence against this supposition, much of which I cited, including Hackett’s “Some Facts about the Treaty”; his being welcomed in March 1923 by Archbishop Daniel Mannix who was openly committed to De Valera, and vigorously opposed to the Treaty with Britain; and his enduring friendship with the family of Erskine Childers who was executed in November 1922 by the
pro-treaty men of the emerging Irish Free State. Letters from Hackett’s brother Francis also place him on the De Valera side. You ask why Collins wrote a friendly letter to Hackett. Remember that De Valera, Childers and Collins had all been close until the Treaty; Collins wanted peace, and Hackett was an honest broker.

On the “rumour” that Hackett was sent to Australia because he was infatuated with Erskine Childers’ wife Molly – in Childers’ lifetime. Surely you can’t be serious. Read the letter of sympathy from Hackett to Molly Childers after her husband’s execution (Riddle pp.108-9). Read any of the Childers biographies for testimony of an exceptionally close marriage. “It was a joy to see [your] mutual love”, Hackett wrote to Molly Childers. (The same letter shows that Hackett’s transfer stemmed from his political allegiance.) If there had been any signs of a one-sided infatuation on Hackett’s part (sufficient to reach the attention of the Jesuit Provincial) it would also have been sufficient to ruin his friendship with Molly Childers, her two sons, and the others of the Childers-Barton family who continued to write to him affectionately in his Australian years. Erskine Childers’ sister was among those who addressed Hackett as an inner circle family friend, as did Childers’s cousins. See Riddle pp. 275-6 for a 1930s letter from the younger Erskine Childers, future President of Ireland, reminding about a shared past. The house at Wicklow, which you mention, belonged to the Bartons, not (as you have it) to Erskine Childers; that was the family centre which Hackett most often visited.

It’s worth noting that the Jesuit Provincial, John Fahy SJ, who sent Hackett to Australia, later became head of the Australian province, and in that role entrusted him with the important posts of director of the Central Catholic Library and rector of Xavier College. I think Fahy’s enduring trust casts light on his allowing Hackett go to Cork to see Michael Collins: if anything good had come of it, in a peace move, Hackett’s passage to Australia could have been cancelled. As it was, his name did not appear on the Ormonde passenger list. A passage may have been booked for Father Frost, accompanied by another Jesuit, to be named later.

On my belief that Father Hackett’s relations with BA Santamaria were under strain from 1949 on. You have read, as I did, the minutes of the meeting of the Jesuit Provincial and his consults in April 1949, in which “dissatisfaction” with Father Hackett’s work as Catholic Action chaplain was reported, and his retirement recommended. The Provincial put the matter to the Archbishop and Dr Mannix said that Father Hackett should stay in his post. If the “dissatisfaction” move did not come from Santamaria, where did it come from? As you know, no one else was empowered to speak on behalf of Catholic Action and the Movement.

Granted that Hackett supported the Movement’s anti-communist work, there is evidence in (for example) his correspondence with Paul McGuire that he was not happy with the political direction Santamaria was taking. Moves in 1949 to bring his Central Catholic Library effectively under Santamaria’s control, as part of Catholic Action, were a major threat to Hackett, and to the independence of the Library. (Riddle p. 248)

The chief point of friction with the Catholic Worker was the involvement of the Catholic Church in party politics, and the binding of consciences on particular policies. I quote Hackett’s warning in January 1952 that Movement policy must not be confused with matters of faith (Riddle, p. 253, and Morgan Running the Show, p.196). His insistence (Morgan, p.221) that a new mandate for the Movement should be obtained from the Bishops may have been a strategic move to get the Bishops, belatedly, to rule on the separation of Catholic Action from the Movement. In 1954 Hackett was arguing with Mannix so much that he thought their weekly dinners might have to stop: what was that about? The separation of the Movement from Catholic Action, which Mannix resisted, seems the most likely cause of dissection.

The Catholic Worker, the Movement and Father Hackett: I am sure that Max Charlesworth, a former editor of the CW, has always known the difference between habitual priestly affability and real friendship. When I first asked Dr Charlesworth about Father Hackett, in November 2008, he had just given a characteristically incisive, measured and witty paper at Newman College, in which he was focussing on the 1950s and the lay apostolate controversies. Subsequently he sent me the email that I quoted (Riddle p.300). You might note also the warmth of the Catholic Worker obituary for Hackett (Riddle, p.269), thought to have been written by Gerard Heffey.

I agree that relations between BA Santamaria and Father Hackett were friendly but would question how close they were in later years. In my first months as editor of Rural Life, before Hackett’s sudden death in July 1954, I never saw him in the ANSCA (Australian National Secretariat of Catholic Action) office at 252 Swanston Street. He may of course have come in and out without my noticing, but I would have expected a sighting or two and that he would look in on me, as he knew me well. As Patrick Morgan shows, Hackett attended meetings at Belloc House in his role as chaplain. But he had no place, so
far as I could see, in the daily life of the ANSCA office. I remember Bob Santamaria’s concern on Hackett’s death but it did not cause a ripple in the office. I cannot speak for the men, but none of the women went to the Requiem Mass at St Ignatius’ Richmond.

It was quite different with Hackett’s successor Dr Eric d’Arcy, who had his own room in the office, came in for a few hours most days, and attended the informal lunchtime meetings of the men (the women had a separate lunchroom). He talked to everybody, organised a daily Rosary, and was a buoyant, unifying presence. In other contexts Hackett showed equal pastoral and social gifts, but he didn’t – at least in the only period I can speak of – bring them into ANSCA. It could be that he wasn’t interested, or didn’t feel welcome. My guess is that by then he was out of the loop, and knew it, so didn’t call in, even though his Central Catholic Library was only a few blocks from ANSCA.

You have my permission to publish the above which I think takes our exchange at least as far as it can usefully go.

Brenda Niall

GERARD HENDERSON TO BRENDA NIALL – 3 AUGUST 2011

Dear Brenda

Apologies for the late response to your email of 22 February 2011 concerning the publication of our correspondence re The Riddle of Father Hackett in The Sydney Institute Quarterly (Issue 38, January 2011).

I am writing now because, as requested, I will be publishing your reply in the next issue of the Sydney Institute Quarterly (Issue 39) which will come out soon.

I did not see any reason to seek your permission before publishing our correspondence on an important piece of Australian history in Issue 38 of The Sydney Institute Quarterly. I deleted the only comments in our email exchange which did not directly pertain to your book.

The Riddle of Father Hackett was generously supported by the Eldon Hogan Trust – and the Jesuit order in Australia gave you access to the Hackett Papers. In my view, it is in the interest of the Eldon Hogan Trust and the Society of Jesus in Australia – along with the readers of your book – that there be a considered debate about the claims made in The Riddle of Father Hackett.

In the final paragraph of your substantial reply, you write that your most recent response “takes our exchange at least as far as it can usefully go”. In my opinion, however, your comments of 22 February 2011 do not close down the debate. So I have listed my responses below.

Before doing this, I make two general points.

First, I note that you have not responded to those parts of my letter which challenged your assertion that Archbishop Daniel Mannix “had all his papers burned, so as to frustrate biographers”. There is no documented evidence which supports your assertion – especially since some of Archbishop Mannix’s personal papers did survive his death.

Second, it is up to you to support your claims in The Riddle of Father Hackett with empirical evidence. In your email of 22 February 2011, you adopt the tactic of interrogating me. As a commentator, it is my role to ask questions and challenge assertions. As the author of The Riddle of Father Hackett, who is described on the book’s jacket as an award-winning biographer, your role is to back your assertions with documentary evidence.

For clarity’s sake, I will respond to what you claim are my “main points”.

BRENDA NIALL’S HEADIN G: “THAT IN 1922 FATHER HACKETT W AS A SUPPOR TER OF MICHAEL COLLINS, NOT DE VALERA, IN THE IRISH CIVIL WAR”.

Gerard Henderson’s Response:

The fact is that I made no such claim in our correspondence. I do not know whether Fr Hackett was a supporter of either Michael Collins or Eamon De Valera during the Irish Civil War. And nor do you.

There is no documentary evidence of any kind in your book to link Fr Hackett with Eamon De Valera. You have relied on rumour, supposition and hearsay. That’s all.

As you are aware, the authoritative work in this area – Louis McRendmond’s To the Greater Glory of God: A History of the Irish Jesuits – refers to only two Irish Jesuits who supported De Valera around the time of the Civil War. Fr Hackett is not one of them.

In my view, it is likely that Fr Hackett presented himself as an honest broker between the key players in the Irish Civil War. This explains his involvement with the forces of both Eamon De Valera and Michael Collins.

This is my theory. As the author of the only biography of Fr Hackett, you need more than theories. But that is all you have in your attempt to link Fr. Hackett with Mr De Valera.
BRENDAN NIAULL’S HEADING: “ON THE ‘RUMOUR’ THAT HACKETT WAS SENT TO AUSTRALIA BECAUSE HE WAS INFATUATED WITH ERSKINE CHILDERS’ WIFE MOLLY”.

Gerard Henderson’s Response:

In fact this theory, which I acknowledged as a “rumour” and which was passed on to me by a Jesuit, formed only a very small part of my correspondence with you.

You dismiss this rumour as not serious. However, in the early 20th Century it was quite possible for a heterosexual, celibate priest to be infatuated with a woman of about his own age. Any such infatuation on Fr Hackett’s behalf would not in any way have impacted on what you term the “exceptionally close marriage” between Erskine Childers and Molly Childers. Nor would such an unrequited feeling prevent Fr Hackett from expressing genuine remorse to Mrs Childers following the execution of her husband. Your letter indicates that you have a limited understanding of middle aged men.

In the Catholic Church in the first half of the 20th Century, there was the phenomenon known as “an occasion of sin”. It was quite common for a person to be removed from such a temptation – so that a sin, and the resultant scandal, would not occur. As your book makes clear, Fr Hackett was surprisingly close to Mrs Childers – even to the extent of addressing her by her first name. Such closeness between a priest and a married woman was virtually unheard of in the Catholic Church in Ireland and Australia almost a century ago.

However, as I readily concede, this is all theory. The fact remains that there is no documentary evidence in your book to support your claim that Fr. Hackett was sent to Australia on account of his support for De Valera. None. Fr Hackett was just one of about 60 Jesuits who left Ireland for Australia in the second half of the 19th Century and the first half of the 20th Century. In other words, there was nothing unusual in Fr Hackett being sent from Ireland to Australia – and you have not demonstrated that his case was different from that of his Irish Jesuit colleagues who ended up in Australia.

You are the historian. It’s up to you to make your case – and you have not done so.

BRENDAN NIAULL’S HEADING: “ON MY BELIEF THAT FATHER HACKETT’S RELATIONS WITH B.A. SANTAMARIA WERE UNDER STRAIN FROM 1949 ON”.

Gerard Henderson’s Response:

Here again, you are asking me questions. This time you ask if the dissatisfaction expressed with respect to Fr Hackett at the April 1949 Jesuit Provincial’s consultation did not come from B.A. Santamaria “where did it come from?”.

The obvious answer is – I don’t know. And nor do you. But you are the author of The Riddle of Father Hackett and it is up to you to support your claims with evidence. The fact is that the document, which you cite as evidence for your assertion that Mr Santamaria sought “to replace Hackett” as the Australian National Secretariat of Catholic Action’s ecclesiastical assistant (or chaplin), does not mention B.A. Santamaria’s name. It is mere supposition for you to claim that Mr Santamaria was somehow involved in this matter.

Also, you have completely misread Patrick Morgan’s book B.A. Santamaria Running The Show Selected Documents: 1993-1996 (MUP, 2008). Patrick Morgan made this clear when he reviewed your book for the December 2009 issue of Tintean. The transcript of the conference held at Belloc House on 14-15 January 1953 demonstrates that Fr Hackett completely supported B.A. Santamaria and The Movement at the time – he even argued that, if necessary, the Hierarchy should give The Movement a new mandate (See page 211 of Running the Show – not Page 221 as cited in your email).

As Patrick Morgan commented in Tintean, Fr Hackett’s statement at the 1953 meeting “shows he was a dyed-in-the-wool believer in the Movement’s activities”.

What’s more, the transcript of the January 1953 meeting demonstrates that Fr Hackett was defending The Movement against its “opposition”. The key opponents of The Movement in early 1953 were those close to the Sydney Hierarchy and the Catholic Worker group in Melbourne.

Rather than accept the record of what Fr Hackett said at the 1953 meeting at face value, you opine about what he “may” have had in mind. Once again, this is pure speculation. The unequivocal evidence is that Fr Hackett was a strong supporter of B.A. Santamaria and The Movement in January 1953 – just 18 months before his death in July 1954.

Once again, in your email you have directed questions at me – when you write:

In 1954 Hackett was arguing with Mannix so much that he thought their weekly dinners might have to stop: what was that about? The separation of the Movement from Catholic Action, which Mannix resisted, seems the most likely cause of dissension.

The answer to your question as to what Dr Mannix and Fr Hackett were (apparently) arguing about in 1954 is – I don’t know. And nor do you. What I do know is that there is no evidence whatsoever that they had any disagreement about B.A. Santamaria and The Movement. You posit what you theorise is the “most likely cause of dissension”. This is pure speculation.

Gerard Henderson’s Response:

As one of Australia’s leading historians, you know that Max Charlesworth’s recollections in 2008 – about what he believes was Fr Hackett’s relationship with B.A. Santamaria over half a century earlier – is not evidence for anything. As you know, Max Charlesworth was associated with the Catholic Worker group.

In your email of 22 February 2011, you now invoke your own memory of what took place in the ANSCA office, when you were there, as evidence in support of Max Charlesworth’s theory. However, in your book Life Class: The Education of a Biographer (MUP, 2007) you recalled that, during your time at ANSCA and later at The Movement, you were “curiously isolated” by the nature of your work. You added:

In Santamaria’s office...none of the women ever went to the weekly meetings at which current happenings and policies were discussed. At lunch time, the men played cricket in the narrow back yard behind the office which, from mid-1955, was a Fitzroy terrace house. Inside, the women sat together and knitted, or went out, as I usually did.... But lunch with the men, inside or outside the office, never happened. There was nothing surprising about that. In the 1950s the separation between the men who made decisions and the women who typed and carried tea trays was almost universally observed.

So, in Life Class you wrote that you were isolated from discussions about current happenings and politics during your time at ANSCA and at The Movement. But in your letter of 22 February 2011 you write, viz:

...he [Hackett] had no place, so far as I could see, in the daily life of the ANSCA office. I remember Bob Santamaria’s concern on Hackett’s death but it did not cause a ripple in the office. I cannot speak for the men, but none of the women went to the Requiem Mass at St Ignatius’ Richmond.

The fact is, according to your testimony in Life Class, you had no knowledge about happenings in the ANSCA office so you would not know anything about Fr Hackett’s involvement there. Moreover, the fact that none of the female ANSCA employees went to Fr. Hackett’s Requiem Mass means nothing – since, according to you, the women were not involved in ANSCA beyond doing the typing and carrying the tea trays.

In your letter, you contrast the way Fr Hackett was regarded at the ANSCA office with the treatment received by Fr Eric D’Arcy. Here you are simply confused. Fr Hackett, until his death in July 1954, was the chaplin to the Australian National Secretariat on Catholic Action. ANSCA was not supposed to involve itself in politics and, for the most part, did not do so. ANSCA was formally wound up in September 1954, not long after Fr Hackett’s death. In other words, your comment that Fr D’Arcy succeeded Fr Hackett as ANSCA chaplin is incorrect.

Fr D’Arcy was chaplin to the Catholic Social Studies Movement – i.e. Santamaria’s Movement – which did involve itself in politics. The Movement was formally endorsed by the Catholic Hierarchy in 1945 and this unanimous support continued until the early 1950s, when the backing of the bishops for B.A. Santamaria and The Movement began to dissipate. The Movement itself was dissolved into the National Civic Council in 1957. When you were working in Fitzroy after September 1954, you were working for The Movement or the National Catholic Rural Movement – you were not working for ANSCA.

In the penultimate paragraph of your 22 February 2011 letter, you refer to your “guess” that Fr Hackett was put “out of the loop” sometime before he died. This underlines the point of my critique of The Riddle of Father Hackett. It is not the role of historians and biographers to “guess”. Rather, their role is to produce evidence to support a thesis – or not raise the issue in the first place.

I accept that it took you “quite a bit of time” to construct your letter of 22 February 2011. However, the fact remains that you have not provided any evidence to support your theories about Fr Hackett which I have challenged in this correspondence.

The Riddle of Fr Hackett contains such terms as “seems” and “presumably”. In your email of 22 February 2011 you use such words as “may”, “most likely” and “guess”. Then, rather than answering questions with evidence – you ask your own leading questions. You also ask questions in your book. Such tactics are a disguise for a lack of documentary evidence.

William Hackett’s story is interesting enough. You should have stuck to the known facts and refrained from making claims which you have not documented – and which you cannot document. This, after all, is the tactic you adopted when writing about Martin Boyd’s sexuality – in the absence of evidence, you declined to speculate. Fr Hackett deserved the same treatment as you extended to Martin Boyd.

Best wishes

Gerard Henderson
FAITH AND POLITICS – DAME ENID LYONS

Anne Henderson

Remember when we used to sing “Faith of Our Fathers”. And how we never thought of it as rather narrow minded. But we should have also been singing “Faith of our Mothers”. Mothers, more often than fathers, kept the faith.

It is one of those mothers I want to talk about today. Enid Muriel Lyons was Australia’s first woman to win a seat in the House of Representatives – she did this in 1943 as a conservative candidate for the United Australia Party, the party her late husband and former prime minister Joseph Lyons had helped to found in 1931.

She also won against the political tide – at the 1943 election, Labor prime minister John Curtin recorded a landslide win. Enid Lyons needed a week of preference counting before she was declared the new Member for Darwin (now Braddon) in 1943, which she had contested standing against six other candidates, two from her own party.

It was a remarkable achievement on several counts. As Enid Lyons put it later about the election: “I was a Catholic and that was a point not in favour there.”

This was another era, when the Protestant-Catholic divide dominated Australian politics. Enid Lyons had ridden the heights of popular appeal beside her husband Joe Lyons through the 1930s. But Lyons, as a political figure, was something of an aberration. And, after his death in 1939, Lyons’ conservative United Australia Party had declined while seeing the return of much of the Catholic vote to Labor.

In addition, Enid Lyons faced huge hurdles as a political candidate, both for being a woman and the Catholic mother of eleven.

THE LYONS PHENOMENON

The political phenomenon that was Joseph and Enid Lyons has been largely forgotten in Australia.

Edmund Campion doesn’t mention them in his *Australian Catholics*.

One wants to ask in all this if Joe and Enid Lyons failed to fit some sort of code for Australian Catholics in some way? It’s possible. For there was nothing lacking in their Catholic faith, or political achievements.

To my mind, it’s all about tribe. Australian Catholicism a century and less ago was all about tribe – a tribe under siege and on the fringes. A tribe held together by its Irish heritage and a tribe made strong by the concerted campaign of its bishops and religious orders to build a Catholic education system in the face of the secular and government system introduced in the Australian colonies in the latter half of the nineteenth century. Even Australia’s first saint – Mary MacKillop – was driven by this tribal urge.

The Lyons couple stood outside the tent in much of their political life. In spite of being the most devoted practising Catholics and an example to the wider community in their very much outsiders’ religious faith

Joe and Enid Lyons not only left Labor in 1931, they also joined the heavily Protestant and Masonic conservative side of politics. And Labor took a decade to recover. Catholic historians of the past half century seem to have deemed them to belong outside the tribe.

SOME BACKGROUND

As prime minister from January 1932 till 7 April 1939 (when he died in office), Joe Lyons still matches only Bob Hawke in popularity as a PM. His win at the December 1931 election remains the record, in spite of Malcolm Fraser in 1975, for the percentage of House of Representatives seats won by any coalition of forces in the history of Australian federation.

Unlike Hawke, however, Lyons was a people’s PM leading a loose force of political groups combining former Labor and conservative supporters.

Lyons, a senior minister in the Scullin Government after 1929, abandoned Labor over financial policy in March 1931, leaving first the Cabinet and soon after voting against Labor treasurer Ted Theodore’s bill to print money for employment relief. Lyons was joined by five Labor colleagues. All were immediately outside the caucus.

So Lyons was a Labor “rat” and would never be celebrated as one of its heroes – in spite of his being a Labor man all his adult life until that point, a Labor MP in Tasmania from 1909 and a Tasmanian Labor premier from 1923-28.
Enid Lyons had married Joe Lyons in April 1915. He was then Tasmanian Treasurer and Minister responsible for education and railways. Until just before her marriage, Enid Burnell had been a trainee teacher. She was still 17 as she married. Lyons was 35.

Regardless of the 12 children they produced, Joe and Enid Lyons’ lives together would be enmeshed in politics. Enid soon joined her husband at state Labor Party conferences and handled a lot of the paperwork in his electorate as the years went by.

Enid Lyons also often partnered her husband on stage; as a child she had entered elocution competitions with the Methodist church and acted in local productions. At a podium, she proved to be a natural thespian. She could draw out people’s emotions while also making her points succinctly. Lyons, on the other hand, was a master at arguing complex cases in words ordinary people could follow. They made a great team.

Moreover, the Lyons union crossed quite significant social divides.

Joe Lyons came from Irish immigrant stock. The Lyons family of the Stanley district of northern Tasmania was Catholic in a state that was more Protestant than most. Enid Lyons, on the other hand, had been brought up a Methodist – her mother Eliza attended church and was involved in church activities while Enid’s father William was a non-believer.

Strangely, it would be politics and the Labor Party that brought the couple together. Enid’s mother, Eliza Burnell, was an early member of the Tasmanian Workers Political League. Here, she befriended Joe Lyons as a fledgling Labor MP. She introduced her daughters to her Labor MP friends on a visit to parliament in Hobart in 1912. Enid had just turned 15. Two years later, Joe Lyons and Enid Lyons were engaged.

It was Eliza, not Joe, who urged Enid to consider instruction in the Catholic faith. Eliza Burnell’s marriage was not a happy one and she believed that difference of religion or lack of it in one partner was a poor foundation for a long-term relationship. Joe Lyons, smitten by his fresh, pretty young fiancee, said he would marry Enid if she was a little heathen.

But, as Enid reflected on the differences of faith between them – and on the Catholic Church’s new teaching that a Catholic could not marry in a non-Catholic church, she was persuaded to take some instruction in the Catholic faith.

Enid’s decision showed not only the place religion played in many middle class homes at the time, but also a sense of faith in Enid herself - for one so young.
Enid Burnell spent a couple of weeks at the Catholic presbytery in Stanley with her mother in early 1915. This was the parish of Joe Lyons’ friend Father Tom O’Donnell. But when O’Donnell was called away to his sick sister in Victoria, it was Eliza who proved the dominant personality in the conversion. Eliza pulled books from the shelves and made Enid read them. Enid came to a belief in the Catholic tradition as the true one. The pope would have been very proud of Enid, indeed even of Methodist Eliza who had done the instruction...

Enid Lyons would record that her conversion to the Catholic faith was absolute. If her engagement had been broken she would not have returned to her Methodist beliefs. She also recorded how her engagement to Joe Lyons cost her many friends; she had no pre wedding parties as her predominantly non-Catholic friends disapproved of her Catholic fiancé. Her local minister tried to persuade her not to go ahead with her conversion. She had been one of his Sunday school teachers and she was abandoning her church.

THAT OLD TIME RELIGION

Enid Lyons’ faith had many trimmings. Converting to the Church of Rome, albeit one infused with Irish sentiment and tradition Down Under, she entered a tribe taking its commands from its bishops. Further, its religious ceremonies were soaked in the Latin of decades. And it was very much male dominated. Enid accepted all this unquestioningly.

However, like Joe Lyons, Enid would never become involved in the extra curricula political activities of Australian Catholic sub groups and the hierarchy. Joe Lyons did not support groups agitating for state aid for Catholic schools. He belonged, as did Enid, to the Australian Labor Party which in its early years believed it could not afford to be infiltrated by groups seeking to use it for sectional interests. The party banned its adherents from membership of such groups as the Catholic Federation.

As a UAP and Liberal Party MP, Enid Lyons did not allow herself to become any sort of mouthpiece for B A Santamaria. In the 1940s she was very friendly with Paul McGuire, who had dealings with Santamaria. But she resisted McGuire’s requests to pressure her Liberal colleagues in any way.

In December 1949, shortly after Menzies had won back government against Labor, McGuire wrote asking if she would prevail on Robert Menzies to “consolidate the Catholic electors who went over at the election .... [because] a strong backing of Catholic opinion is essential if a serious move against the Communists is made” Enid replied that she could not help as she was, in her view, “very small potatoes here”.

The role faith played in Enid Lyons’ politics was strictly of a personal kind. She quite frequently spiced her speeches with references to her faith and belief in God.

Campaigning as a Labor candidate for the state seat of Denison (Hobart) in 1925 she urged upon her audiences the dignity of a worker’s labour, making reference to Jesus as the “central figure in all history”.

The name Enid Lyons went hand-in-hand with a recognition that she was a woman of faith. And a public presence firmly rooted in her Christian beliefs. When asked to appear on American Ed Burrows radio series “This I believe” in April 1954, the ABC’s Richard Boyer encouraged her to do so, writing: “Give ‘em your fundamentals of faith in the meaning of life. Very few are able to do this or, if able, not willing to do so.”

As a Catholic, Enid Lyons remained in part a traditional Methodist. That old time religion of Moody and Sankey hymns and gospel music never left her. She was a member of the ABC Board for more than 10 years from 1951. ABC historian Ken Inglis has recorded how Enid and ABC Board colleague Richard Boyer would break out in “revivalist hymns from their Methodist childhoods”.

Enid Lyons was no concert pianist but she played all her life for sing songs around pianos and at church on Sundays. I was amused to find, in a file of Enid’s music, a small piece of notepaper with the letterhead of the Prime Minister’s residence across which she had scrawled “hymn to the Little Flower”

KEEPING FAITH

Enid Lyons’ faith crossed boundaries; it was a faith she expressed in her language, her speeches and her music. It was also a conservative faith in keeping with the church teachings of her day. With Joe Lyons, Enid expressed solidarity with those less fortunate. Against prevailing notions of economy, she spoke up in the party room for child endowment and even persuaded Robert Menzies, around the time of the 1946 election, that the Liberal Party should have a policy favouring child endowment.

As a Tasmanian MP, speaking up for the “little” man came easily to Enid Lyons – from potato farmers to widows. Her natural affinity in parliament was with
members of the Country Party, in particular Larry Anthony – Doug Anthony’s father. These MPs represented rural electorates like Enid Lyons’ electorate of Darwin, where many electors faced problems of remoteness, precarious and fluctuating markets and the costs of distance.

As a professional – even as her husband at times faced sudden loss of income - the Lyons faith was always to trust in their personal talents, a sort of “God will provide”. Even as she faced widowhood, after April 1939, Enid Lyons believed she could manage on her own with broadcasting and writing.

While she got along extremely well with Robert Menzies as a leader, Enid Lyons’ instincts did not favour Menzies’ rather patriarchal airs. In her second volume of memoirs, *Among the Carrion Crows*, Enid Lyons clashed with Menzies when she recorded her reactions to his speech to the Constitutional Association in October 1938. In that speech, Menzies had criticised Australian political leaders for their weakness in the face of worsening events in Europe.

Enid Lyons regarded Menzies’ comments as a direct hit at her husband. Menzies himself had reported back after visiting Germany in mid 1938 that Hitler was not a problem. Menzies’ resignation from the Lyons ministry in March 1939, the day Hitler finally tore up the Munich agreement and invaded Czechoslovakia, came just weeks before Lyons died – adding to the pressures Lyons had to deal with.

**THE CHRISTIAN MORALIST**

In 1973, asked to give the Silver Jubilee Sir John Morris Memorial lecture – a lecture set up to honour the founding of the Tasmanian Adult Education Board – Enid Lyons delivered an address on the key principles that had guided her in life. She called her speech “The Role of the Christian Moralist in Present Day Australia”.

The Australia that she then saw was one of diminishing Christian values and public figures ready to defend such values. In general, there was nothing extraordinary in apathy about the wider public good: “Only a relatively few in any society seek the general good rather than their own personal welfare,” she reflected. But it was an apathy in leadership that troubled her.

In a democratic society, the fundamental was the morality of human dignity, she argued. But while she agreed that “the few may not coerce the many”, there was a “common right” for any minority to proclaim its views and press its arguments “in the face of overwhelming numbers”. Enid Lyons had come to the end of her life and was witnessing her Christian faith – which had been mainstream when she was a child – now a diminishing reality among the signposts of public morality.

Few in Australia in 1973, she professed, were “pressing for the Christian ethic”. As Enid Lyons put it, “The danger lies not in disagreement, but in indifference; not in argument but in apathy.”

For Enid Lyons, from a Christian perspective, there were many moral signposts Australians had forgotten by 1973. The debt Australia owed Papua New Guinea for its part in saving Australia in World War II was one, any real attempt to make the many non-Anglo settlers streaming into Australia feel at home was another. Along with a failure to solve the dilemma over race and Indigenous Australians, a “go-slow” ethic in the workplace, and true equality for women against the “triumphant male” culture in public and private life.

And there was more. She strongly opposed the permissive society with its growing pornography, abortion, homosexual law reform and the breakdown of family life reflected in growing divorce statistics.

But, in all of her enunciated principles for the Christian moralist, Enid Lyons believed her task was to propose and not impose. She was an advocate not a disciplinarian. Her modus operandi was persuasion not dictatorship.

Without a doubt, Enid Lyons would find today’s society holds even more dilemmas for a Christian moralist. Even her own extended family – from some 50 grandchildren – would have offered occasional challenges to some of her moral codes. In many ways, we all do now – that’s modernity of course.

Enid Lyons remains something of an Australian icon – even if not recognised for this by Catholic historians of a particular generation. Her moral code guided her life as truly as any. She made history as a pioneer of women’s equal opportunity in government. While doing this, she raised her very large family in the shadow of the Catholic church’s strict teaching against birth control. And never questioned it.

Her Christian values and principles were her guide always. A truly great Australian Catholic.

*This talk was given to the Australian Catholic Historical Society, in Sydney, on 17 July 2011*
BOOK REVIEWS

John McConnell

THE FAMILY FILE
By MARK AARONS
Black Inc
Pbk 2010 $34.95
ISBN 9781863954815

Former communist, Mark Aarons, admits in The Family File that:

- Marxism-Leninism is “a fatally flawed ideology”,
- the Soviet Union provided substantial funding to the Communist Party of Australia (CPA) and directed its political strategies from 1920 to the mid-1960s,
- many prominent left-wing ALP members were in fact undercover CPA operatives,
- communists owed a “higher loyalty” to the Soviet Union, leading some to become Soviet spies, and
- many communists struggled to confront the accumulating evidence of communism’s crimes against humanity; some went into denial while others sought refuge in their ideological framework, deciding that such abuses were necessary steps along the revolutionary path to the communist “paradise” envisaged by Karl Marx.

The importance of The Family File derives from the identity of the author and the information he reveals about the Cold War years (1940s to 1980s) – even if there are occasions when Mark Aarons stops short of revealing the whole story.

Sometimes referred to as the Royal Family of Australian communism, many Aarons family members were active in the CPA. Indeed, four generations of the Aarons family dedicated themselves to “revolutionary socialist politics” (IX). Their inspiration was the 1917 Bolshevik revolution in Russia. They sought the revolutionary overthrow of Australia’s democratic system.

Some Aarons family members held senior positions in the party. Mark Aarons’ father, Laurie, reached the pinnacle of party success in 1965 when he became national secretary of the CPA.

Mark Aarons became politically active at thirteen years of age while still at school. He belonged to the CPA from 1969 to 1978, becoming a full-time party functionary in 1971. In The Family File, he discusses the painful realisation that Marxist theory was in error and that Marxism-Leninism had led to terrible crimes against humanity, to totalitarian regimes, mass murders and gulags – to human suffering on a massive scale.

Marxism-Leninism is “a fatally-flawed ideology”, Aarons states, yet it was “the CPA's touchstone” (XIII). Marx’s concept of “the dictatorship of the proletariat” was “ready-made”, Aarons writes, “to justify communism’s worst excesses and crimes.” (XIII) The Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) simply substituted itself for the proletariat and sought to eliminate human beings it defined as class enemies.

Communism in Australia, Aarons states, was “an alien import, controlled by a foreign power” (XVII). Under Lenin, one party ruled international communism. Under Stalin, it transformed into the dictatorship of one man.

Like Communist parties in other western countries, the CPA became a Stalinist party. Power was centralised. The party line was enforced ruthlessly. Differences of opinion were suppressed. Clandestine organising techniques or underground cells became an integral part of its methodology.

Josef Stalin’s infallibility became an article of faith amongst Australia’s Communists until Nikita Khrushchev denounced the cult of personality in 1956. Soviet officials orchestrated periodic purges of the Australian party’s leadership in order to maintain control of the CPA. They manipulated the CPA’s leadership and co-ordinated espionage activities via the Soviet Embassy in Canberra and the TASS newsgency in Sydney.

Mark Aarons examines the Communist cause in The Family File through the lives of family members. His book is based on the oral history available within his family, plus extensive security files accumulated particularly by the Australian Security Intelligence Organisation (ASIO) between 1949 and 1978. (ASIO surveillance continued into the 1980s.)

ASIO was formed in 1949 following the discovery by the United States and Britain that a Soviet spy ring in Australia was passing Western intelligence on to Moscow. Aarons believes ASIO penetrated the CPA effectively in its first two-and-a-half years of operation, “learning many of its deepest secrets.” (2-3) However, he is convinced that ASIO failed to penetrate the most senior layers of the party (129).
ASIO’s files are indeed comprehensive. More to the point, “a powerful and basically accurate thread” runs through them (XII). Basically, Mark Aarons believes that ASIO got it right. Sure, there is “inconsequential dross”. And some information is never likely to surface because “Communists were well-schooled in the use of codes when speaking on telephones.” (XI) However, ASIO collated “extraordinarily accurate intelligence” about the Aarons family, amounting to “a comprehensive account” of their lives (XI).

Altogether, Mark Aarons had access to 209 volumes of family files, photos, films and tapes. More than 32,000 pages all up. The file on Laurie Aarons alone totals 85 volumes or more than 14,000 pages.

Given that communists were intent on overthrowing society, Mark Aarons accepts that ASIO had a “legitimate task.” (XVIII) Moreover, ASIO usually performed its work “within a largely democratic framework.” (XVIII) In contrast, security agencies within communist countries “were principally instruments of repression and often mass murder.” (XVIII)

Soviet financing of the CPA was very significant - more than generally suspected in fact. Soviet payments totalling at least several hundred thousand American dollars were provided to the CPA during the 1950s and 1960s. Two years before his defection, Soviet Embassy official Vladimir Petrov had negotiated a Soviet payment for the CPA; a payment of US $25,000 was handed over by a Soviet official in Sydney in October 1953. This payment created a storm at the Royal Commission on Espionage (the Petrov Commission).

Vladimir and Evdokia Petrov made mistakes in relation to time, date and denomination of bank notes in their account to the Royal Commission. “There were so many inconsistencies,” Mark Aarons writes, “that many Australians were convinced by the CPA’s propaganda claiming it was concocted by the Petros at ASIO’s instigation.” (187) “The belief that their account of the US $25,000 was a ‘myth’”, he adds, “endured among the Australian left for half a century. But it was no myth.” (187)

Soviet funds were channelled also to the CPA via a Romanian trade union front. Remarkably, another Soviet payment was delivered by car to the backyard of Laurie and Carol (and Mark) Aarons’ home in the Sydney suburb of Fairfield. Mark Aarons thinks ASIO failed to observe this delivery. He could not find any reference to it in ASIO’s files (191).

Soviet funds were “Moscow gold” to the Australian communists. But the money came at a price. Such payments reinforced Soviet control of the CPA. Financial inducements, Mark Aarons observes, were an integral part of the Soviet Union’s modus operandi.

Following the CPA’s opposition to Soviet intervention in Czechoslovakia in 1968, Moscow authorised and financed the establishment of the pro-Moscow Socialist Party of Australia (SPA). Similarly, Beijing forwarded large sums of money to Ted Hill to fund his pro-Chinese party, the Australian Communist Party Marxist-Leninist. The substantial nature of the funds supplied to Australia’s communists by foreign communist powers confirms the subservient nature of their position for much of the Cold War period.

The Family File also includes discussion on just how influential the CPA had become in the Australian labour movement by 1945. The CPA either controlled or influenced around half of Australia’s trade unions and ACTU Congress votes by the end of the Second World War. Its reach extended beyond what its peak membership (around 20,000) might have implied.

Not only was the CPA’s strength concentrated in key sectors of the Australian economy - mining, transport, engineering and steel-making. But its foothold in the unions provided a corresponding grip in the ALP, including in Labor’s policy-making conferences at both federal and state levels.

Many individuals during the days of the Cold War, Mark Aarons writes, had dual ALP-CPA memberships. “Many talented ALP left-wingers,” he says, “secretly became dual ALP-CPA members.” (298-299) Their primary allegiance was to the CPA. Their role within the ALP was to gain positions of influence. Some of these undercover communists
were influential in the ALP decision to enter into an arrangement with the CPA on “unity tickets”.

Unity tickets were designed to allow the CPA and the ALP to share key union positions. They appeared to be running separate tickets. In fact, the ALP and CPA were co-ordinating which of their candidates would nominate for particular positions. The two sets of tickets were complementary. In combination, the lists of CPA and ALP candidates covered all key positions in a union election.

Mark Aarons’ revelation that undercover Communists were active in the ALP has come as a bombshell to some individuals who were active within the Labor Party during the Cold War years. It is what B A Santamaria and the Movement claimed at the time. For pointing this out, they were subjected to ridicule (“reds under the beds”) and taunts of “McCarthyism” and paranoia.

Mark Aarons writes that his father placed a high priority on developing relationships with Labor politicians. (301) “No CPA leader,” he insists, “ever had more influence than Laurie at senior ALP levels.” (297) The Family File includes extracts from ASIO’s files on some of the CPA’s undercover operatives inside the ALP. The list includes his father’s main ALP contact, Arthur Gietzelt (an ALP national vice-president and Senator), along with Bruce Childs and John Wheeldon (both of whom became Labor Senators). John Wheeldon died in 2006. His family is insistent that John Wheeldon was never an undercover CPA member.

Tom Uren, says Aarons, was a regular visitor to the Aarons family home. Aarons recalls Uren and his father discussing politics beside a radio with its volume turned up to stymie any ASIO attempt to eavesdrop. Wheeldon and Uren became ministers in the Whitlam Government, while Gietzelt and Uren were ministers in the Hawke Government.

The book does not resolve whether Uren was a CPA member. Nor is it clear which other prominent left-wing ALP members – beyond those named in The Family File – were CPA plants.

Mark Aarons includes an intriguing reference to Wilfred Burchett. Burchett, a journalist, denied repeatedly that he was a member of the Communist Party, a claim that has been exposed as a lie. Mark Aarons suggests in The Family File that his great-grandfather Sam Aarons, may have recruited Burchett to the Communist Party in 1937 during a sea voyage to Europe (68). Burchett claimed that he had applied to the CPA for membership but had not received a response.

The spy ring included a number of undercover communists strategically placed in the Department Of External Affairs, as it was then known. It also included members of Dr H.V. Evatt’s private staff during the period when Evatt was Australia’s Minister for External Affairs and Attorney-General (1941-1949).

Clayton told Laurie Aarons that he had passed some very high level information on to Moscow. He had supplied names too, to the Soviet Union, presumably of people he thought had the potential to be trained as Soviet agents (167). Wally Clayton had spied for the Soviet Union, he told Laurie Aarons, with the support of senior CPA members. (167-168) “I’d do it again,” he insisted (162).

Mark Aarons rejects a number of myths in The Family File that have endured among sections of Australian society, particularly among the left. One portrays the 1954 defection of Vladimir and Evdokia Petrov as a political stunt concocted by Robert Menzies and ASIO to harm the prospects of the Evatt-led ALP at that year’s federal election. Another suggests that the Petrovs brought nothing of great value with them.

Mark Aarons accepts that the Petrovs “brought a significant collection of Soviet documents which shed light on both Clayton’s spy ring and the general nature of KGB espionage in Australia” (140). He accepts that no prosecutions arose out of the 1954 Royal Commission on Espionage (the Petrov Commission) due to the need to conceal evidence uncovered by the Venona decrypts - decoded fragments of Soviet radio communications obtained by the Americans in the 1940s (but not released until the 1990s).

Why did so many Communists take so long to face the truth about the horrendous crimes against humanity committed in the name of their ideal? After all, there were books by Western writers pointing to what was happening, in addition to refugees. Mark Aarons acknowledges that during the 1930s and 1940s, “Stalin’s dictatorship grew more controlling and murderous.” (46) Yet “the Australian party blindly supported Stalin’s policies ignoring growing evidence of his crimes.” (46) By the time the Soviets
crushed the “Prague Spring” (Czechoslovakia, 1968), there were between 30 and 50 million victims of Soviet totalitarianism.

Even then, communists such as Pat Clancy and Bill and Freda Brown moved from the CPA to the pro-Soviet Socialist Party of Australia. They knew what had transpired in Czechoslovakia. They knew of the many other injustices that had occurred in preceding decades. But their ideological commitment to Soviet communism outweighed all other considerations.

Before 1968, the CPA and its members – barring some resignations along the way – had supported the totalitarian Soviet Union starting with Lenin’s reign and had continued to do so under his successors in spite of what they knew was happening: secret police, gulags, land collectivisation, forced famine in the Ukraine, the subjugation of the nationalities, anti-Semitism, the 1930s purges, the Nazi-Soviet pact of 1939–1941 involving acts of betrayal against Australia’s war effort and its soldiers, the expansion of the Soviet empire into Eastern Europe and Moscow’s suppression of the democratic uprising in Hungary in 1956.

“The first generation [of the Aarons family] did not live to see Communism’s crimes exposed, including the killing of tens of millions in the Soviet bloc, China and Cambodia,” Mark Aarons writes (312).

Louis and Jane Aarons died in 1941 while the CPA still labelled the Second World War as an “imperialist” conflict. However, Mark Aarons does note that when his great-grandparents, Louis and Jane Aarons, visited the Soviet Union in the 1930s, information was emerging about the Ukraine famine. It would not have entered the minds of his great grandparents, Louis and Jane, he writes, to criticise “Stalin’s murderous policies” (37). They were “entirely blinkered,” he says (37).

The children of Louis and Jane Aarons – Sam, Millie and Miriam – “lived through Khrushchev’s exposure of Stalin’s crimes, the crushing of the Hungarian uprising, Mao’s Great Leap Forward and Cultural Revolution, the Sino-Soviet split, the invasion of Czechoslovakia and serial splits in the CPA.” (312) However, his grandfather Sam, and Sam’s two sisters, Millie and Miriam, were unable to come to terms with the idea of criticising the Soviet Union.

Sam Aarons continued to hold an “uncritical pride” in Soviet achievements for the remainder of his life (50). “Sam was bewildered,” Mark Aarons writes, “by his sons’ denunciation of the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia.” (313) Sam was “rocked to the core” when Laurie and Eric Aarons criticised the Soviet Union (312). Indeed, Laurie Aarons had been “uncritically wedded to both China and the Soviet Union in the late 1950s”.

It was only in the late 1960s that Laurie Aarons began to challenge abuses committed by Soviet communism. Many Communists took ages to confront reality. Elimination of class enemies, they decided, was a necessary step on the path to a Communist paradise. Some Communists never faced up to reality. They went into denial, directing their focus elsewhere. Other Communists found dictatorial regimes appealing.

Ted Hill, we are told, was an “archetypical Stalinist”. He was obsessed with armed struggle (132). According to Mark Aarons, Hill actually believed that Stalin’s methods should be imported into Australia (131-132). Jack McPhillips – well-known for justifying the rigging of union ballots – continued to support Brezhnev’s 1968 invasion of Czechoslovakia for two or three decades afterwards. McPhillips “remained loyal to Stalin’s legacy” until around 2000 (81).

As these examples reveal, it was not that Communists generally lacked understanding of what had occurred. Yet an ABC program “Hindsight”, produced and directed by Jonathan Holmes, made this very judgment in 1990. The program’s presenter, Geraldine Doogue, interviewed eleven former CPA members in “The Party’s Over”. While admitting to relief that these former CPA activists had never achieved executive power in Australia, Geraldine Doogue claimed that “ignorance” explained their support for the excesses of Stalinism.

Plainly, this is incorrect. Communists were aware of the facts. They knew about the purges, gulags and Stalin’s crimes. Many turned the ideological dial to “blindness”. Others, such as the third and fourth generations of the Aarons family, only grappled with the reality of their commitment during the final three decades of the twentieth century.

Australian Communism’s many failures, Mark Aarons writes, include “its four-decade long embrace of Stalinism, its uncritical acceptance of Mao’s ideology in the 1950s and rationalisation or outright denial of Moscow’s and Beijing’s numerous crimes against humanity from the 1920s to the 1960s.” (XII)

In The Family File, Aarons comments that he and NSW Greens Senator Lee Rhiannon (nee Brown) were “red-diaper babies”. This, he explains, was an affectionate reference among CPA members “to the children of Communists destined to inherit their parents’ political genes.” (274)

Up to the late 1960s, the Aarons and Brown families shared a close friendship. Freda Brown was a full-time functionary working for the Union of Australian Women, a CPA front. Bill Brown was “an avowed
Moscow loyalist” in the CPA. (245) So much so, that Laurie Aarons is quoted in The Family File suggesting that Bill Brown tried to assist a KGB member of the Soviet embassy, Ivan Skripov, with names of potential Soviet agents. (170, 228). Skripov, the First Secretary at the Soviet Embassy was expelled from Australia in 1963 for engaging in espionage.

The friendship between the Aarons and Brown families did not survive the Soviet Union’s intervention in Czechoslovakia in 1968. The Brown family, including Lee Rhiannon, joined the pro-Moscow Socialist Party of Australia. Then, when Soviet Communism was disintegrating in the late 1980s, she joined the Greens. Mark Aarons alleges that Lee Rhiannon refused to condemn the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia.

In a letter to the University of New South Wales student paper, Tharunka, in 1972, Brian Aarons – Mark Aaron’s brother – called on Rhiannon to say whether she supported the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia, the shooting of Polish workers by the then Communist regime controlling Poland and the suppression of social democracy in the Soviet Union. (Tharunka, 30 May 1972, page 2)

Lee Rhiannon replied in Tharunka two weeks later. She argued that the correct way forward involved building international unity for socialism and peace; however, she failed to respond to Brian Aaron’s challenge regarding the specific issues he had nominated previously. (Tharunka, 13 June 1972, page 4)

In 2011, Lee Rhiannon claimed that no member of her family supported Stalinism. Lee Rhiannon, Mark Aarons insists, refuses to admit mistakes. Writing in The Monthly, Mark Aarons stated: “In 1977, Rhiannon led an SPA delegation to Moscow at the invitation of Leonid Brezhnev’s neo-Stalinist regime...nowhere does she acknowledge how dreadfully wrong she was about the Soviet Union, nor express regrets for her gullible admiration of this abominable system.” (The Monthly, May 2011, pages 10-11)

The CPA closed down in 1991, although the Socialist Party (SPA) reclaimed the name in 1996. The first generation of the Aarons family had been there at the CPAs formation. Some 70 years later, the fourth generation witnessed the party’s burial.

Mark Aarons must have faced some demanding moments writing The Family File. He clearly regards his father, Laurie Aarons – the central character in the book - with affection and respect. However, he recognises his father’s limitations in the pages of The Family File – both personal and political, while admitting to the major faults of communism at both theoretical and practical levels.

The Family File deserves wide readership.

MY FATHER’S DAUGHTER:
MEMORIES OF AN AUSTRALIAN CHILDHOOD
By SHEILA FITZPATRICK
Melbourne University Press
Pbk, 2010 $27.99
ISBN 9780522857474

My Father’s Daughter examines Sheila Fitzpatrick’s relationship with her parents, especially the relationship with her father, Brian Fitzpatrick. Brian Fitzpatrick (1905–1965) was a journalist, radical historian and prominent civil liberties advocate in Melbourne during the 1940s and 1950s. His daughter, Sheila Fitzpatrick is the Distinguished Service Professor in Modern Russian History at Chicago University and an annual Visiting Professor at the University of Sydney. Her mother and brother also became historians.

Sheila Fitzpatrick brings a professional awareness to My Father’s Daughter of the difficulties involved in recalling, accurately, personal relationships and events. She is “an unreliable narrator”, she states, undertaking considerable cross-checking in writing the book.

Brian Fitzpatrick was a controversial figure on the left between the 1940s and his death in the mid-1960s. He wrote a number of books on Australian economic history, was a founder of Melbourne University’s pro-Communist Labor Club – not to be confused with the university’s ALP club - and was the main public figure associated with the Australian Council for Civil Liberties during a period of two and a half decades.

Growing up, Sheila Fitzpatrick identified strongly with the left. She studied history, music and Russian at the University of Melbourne at the beginning of the 1960s. Left-wing parents, she recalls, encouraged their children to learn Russian. They were keen to support enrolments in the department. But the department’s only effective teacher, she writes, was believed by the left to be an ASIO plant.

Brian Fitzpatrick was a socialist. However, his patronising manner to members of the working class jeopardised any claim to being egalitarian, his daughter notes. He brought a Marxist perspective to his analyses of Australia’s economic history and a “socialist prism” to his unpaid role with the Australian Council for Civil Liberties. His outlook was particularly tribal.

Solidarity among the left was a high priority. Fitzpatrick did not believe that people on the left should criticise each other. His understanding of the left incorporated an international community of like-minded people.
While Brian Fitzpatrick was ready to condemn perceived civil liberties infringements in democratic Australia, a different rule applied to the Soviet Union. Being critical of the Soviet Union was not an option, except in most unusual circumstances. Where the Soviet Union was involved, Brian Fitzpatrick suspended his deep scepticism towards government.

However, Fitzpatrick explored his predisposition to the full in regard to Australian politics. And despite his critical stance towards government, Brian Fitzpatrick enjoyed being an Evatt insider while Bert Evatt was Attorney-General and Minister for External Affairs between 1941 and 1949, and Opposition leader during the 1950s. He also gave advice to Communist barrister, Ted Hill, during the Petrov Royal Commission, which Brian Fitzpatrick viewed as a put-up job.

Sheila Fitzpatrick believes that the absence of prosecutions vindicates her father’s evaluation. This interpretation, however, fails to account for the need to maintain confidentiality concerning the evidence about espionage obtained as a result of decrypting Soviet radio communications.

Many people suspected that Brian Fitzpatrick was a Communist Party member. Sheila Fitzpatrick states that her father was “far too much of a contrarian and iconoclast to put up with party discipline”. She believes her father’s ASIO file contains a “reasonably accurate” picture of him; ASIO’s judgment was that Brian Fitzpatrick was not a Communist, but rather someone who associated with Communists and Communist causes.

Brian Fitzpatrick had a life-long problem with authority. Following the party line with the inevitable policy twists would have proved onerous. Probably, the CPA had its doubts about Brian Fitzpatrick too. Rather than CPA member, Brian Fitzpatrick probably is best described as a fellow-traveller.

For most of his adult life, Brian Fitzpatrick was without a paying job. He did not have a regular source of income. During typical mornings, he preferred to tap away at his typewriter before going to the library or joining his inner-city left-wing academic friends for an afternoon’s drinking at a city hotel.

The Fitzpatrick family were poor but they lived in a prestigious Melbourne suburb. The children attended leading private schools. Relatives assisted the family and Sheila Fitzpatrick’s mother tutored in history at Monash University once both children were going to school.

Growing up, Sheila Fitzpatrick idealised her father. He was her hero. She felt she was at the centre of his universe. She felt loved and admired. She never doubted in those early years that she was first among her father’s priorities. Meanwhile, her relationship with her mother was a competitive one. They were not close. The relationship lacked warmth.

Sheila Fitzpatrick lapped up her father’s encouragement to question everything. Nothing was immune from criticism, he told his daughter. Adolescence was a particularly difficult time. Sheila Fitzpatrick decided that her mother had never liked her. With her father’s encouragement, she began to criticise and challenge authority. When she directed her critical thinking in her father’s direction, their relationship hit rock-bottom.

The more questioning Sheila Fitzpatrick undertook of her father, the more she realised that he did indeed hold some subjects as taboo. His drinking was one. His affairs were another. Sheila Fitzpatrick contrasted the importance her father assigned to loyalty among the left with the betrayal she felt on learning that he had considered leaving the family during one of his affairs.

More complications arose in the 1960s. Leaving Australia to study at Oxford University and partly to escape the father-child relationship, Sheila Fitzpatrick determined to “punish” her father. For six months, she did not write to him. Then, she received notification that he had died.

It was 15 years before she returned to Australia. Thirty years passed before she began to visit Australia regularly. The author reflects deeply on her unhappy and complex family life, her upbringing and
the circumstances of her adult life with a tribal vision of the left during the Cold War in the background.

While not sharing her father’s left-wing politics, Fitzpatrick says that she has inherited his notion of solidarity with the left. Just as her father had caused pain to others, she came to realise that an affair of her own – with the husband of one of the young women her father was interested in – had been a “consciously malicious act”.

In the latter years of her mother’s life, their relationship improved. Those years were an almost “cloudless period”. Her mother was proud of her, conveying approval and affection. It was, Fitzpatrick notes, as if her mother had become a different person.

Sheila Fitzpatrick explores these issues very candidly in My Father’s Daughter. Near the book’s conclusion, she asks: “Did I get Brian right in this memoir? Was I fair to him? Does it matter? Did he, in the final analysis, matter?”

In some aspects, Sheila Fitzpatrick continues to take her father at his word.

Tales from a Mountain City: A Vietnam War Memoir
By QUYNH DAO
Odyssey Books

Tales from a Mountain City relates the story of a young girl growing up during the final years of the war in South Vietnam and the first three years under Communist rule. Quynh Dao (pronounced “Quinn Dow”) blends her personal memoirs with Vietnamese history, political and social life.

The author combines these elements into an enthralling account spanning three generations of her family. The darkness in her story fails to overwhelm Quynh Dao’s spirit. Fortunately, she belonged to a loving family. Family bonds and security helped to counteract the grief destabilising family and social life.

The Dao family lived in Dalat, a mountain resort located 300 kilometres to the north of Saigon. Before he retired, her father Nam Dao had been commissioner of taxation for the city. There are delightful descriptions of her mother (Lan) working away in “a multi-coloured mini-botanical garden” and of her father storing away all sorts of treasures – old clothes and books for example – for future use by family members.

Vietnam’s multilingual and multicultural society contributes to the background of this story. The family’s comfortable life is transformed when the Communist forces approach Dalat in 1975. The family flees to Saigon. The North Vietnamese Communists seize control of South Vietnam. Quynh Dao is just 15 years old.

When the family returns to Dalat, their home has been ransacked. Soldiers are living there and order the family to leave. Sometime later, they are allowed to return, but the Communist rulers impose many deprivations and restrictions on their daily lives. The regime demands unquestioning loyalty. It strictly supervises the lives of individuals. Communist cadres spy on friends and neighbours. Bourgeois elements are condemned. It becomes necessary to wear peasant clothes to avoid being seen as the class enemy.

There are re-education camps, political education classes, forced labour camps and food rationing. Bonfires destroy “decadent” books, i.e. French and English publications. The cult of Ho Chi Minh prevails; his photograph and red banners are everywhere. Loud speakers disseminate party propaganda from street corners. A money exchange program places an effective limit on family wealth.

Fear, suffering and tragedy all impact on Quynh Dao’s family. In the midst of turmoil, Quynh Dao discovers an impressive resilience. After escaping from Vietnam to Malaysia, Quynh Dao arrived in Australia as a refugee just over three decades ago.

Tales from a Mountain City is a perceptive and sensitive account of a life in South Vietnam in the 1970s.
REVIEW OF THE REVIEWERS

Stephen Matchett

The gods of politics have a sense of fun which is as malign as Machiavellian. First they require people in politics to suppress their own identities to play the role of impeccable public figures (well perhaps not the Nationals, or the Greens, or come to think of it Barry O'Farrell's backbench). But just about everybody else understands that they must never appear in public with a hair or line out of place and when there is private mess, more often than not involving a bribe, a bottle or (because it is mainly men) a broad there is a public fuss. So the game generally goes to those with either an absence of imagination or a dedication to discipline.

That's the Machiavellian demand politics places on people. The malice comes from politicians' desperate desire to get their version of what happened on the record so they are remembered as they want to be. But it is all pointless - the voters know enough to make up their minds about prominent politicians while they are still in office. As John Howard puts it, saturation media coverage limits the shelf life of all modern political leaders.1

Even so, the gods propel politicians to always want to explain why they acted as they did, to add to their achievements, to again argue cases no one else cares about anymore. There is a lot of this about basically because modern political autobiographies in Australia are politics by other means, an attempt to keep playing the game from the post parliamentary grave. As Sean Scalmer argues:

Today, inside accounts constitute a major form of political history. Moreover, there has been a change of quality as well as quantity: new political memoirs are more diffuse, confessional, immediate, ambitious, interventionist and cynical than most previous efforts.2

The cruellest part is that autobiographies generally reveal politicians as they want to be seen, thus providing an insight into the way they really were in office, by no means the same thing.

ON POLITICAL MEMOIRS PAST

Bill Hayden was happy to present himself as a self-absorbed and, intellectually at least, self-satisfied thinker. On the basis of his self-assessment Question Time tactics can't have been all that effective:

I recognise that more than anything my values have been those of a secular, liberal humanist; above all else, it has been these values which have been constants in my belief system ... Human understanding, like human beings more generally, is flawed and we cannot avoid error, but we should try to avoid fault as much as possible and by our efforts lead a better life based on improved knowledge and a demonstrated sense of community responsibility.3

Bob Hawke never abandoned his belief that he was the great Labor leader of his age, capable of crucifying all comers, at least from the other side of the partisan divide. That he also presented himself as a martyr demonstrates the depth of his self-belief. Thus he describes his tenuous position at the end of November 1991:

I had defeated every Liberal leader in turn – Fraser, Peacock, Howard and Peacock again – each one of them a more formidable opponent than Hewson, and I knew I could destroy him and his repugnant ideology. But events were moving quickly to ensure that, despite this record, I would not be given the opportunity.4

John Cain explains why everything that went wrong was not his fault in a book, which demonstrates as much about the man as his ministry's monstrous failure. Consider the way he attributes blame for the banking disasters on his watch:

The greed and dishonesty of many in financial circles was ignored. The financiers and bankers who had lost millions of other people's money in the marketplace took no responsibility for their excesses. They variously blamed high interest rates and failure of government to watch and regulate. These people and others had demanded total freedom to act as they wished in deregulation. ... So players in the excesses of the 1980s, the banks and other financial institutions as well as the Reserve Bank and the federal government were all happy to see furious concentrated media attention on Victoria as the cause of
the economic and financial failures. The media were happy to oblige. It was a simple, easy line to adopt and the pack enjoyed its part.\(^5\)

Graham Richardson famously demonstrated that he was not a master of the dark arts of ambition and intrigue by telling the world he was:

I was there when many significant decisions were taken. I was on one end of hundreds of the thousands of telephone calls made to bring about the birth and death of the Labor leadership on two occasions. Labor has governed for fourteen of the last twenty-two years and when Labor made an important decision I was in there somewhere. So I am uniquely qualified to give not just an account of what really happened but to convey a sense of the human drama involved.\(^6\)

And then there is Mark Latham, who revealed as much about himself in his diaries as he could have in a memoir. For example consider his entry for 28 April 1999:

I’m part of a dying breed in the ALP: Whatever happened to the Party’s interest in ideas and reform? It has been sucked dry by the machine professionals and smarties. Also whatever happened to Labor’s knock-around culture? It has been sucked dry by the self-conscious careerists.\(^7\)

And whatever happened to self-obsessed dummy spitters? Not all political memoirs reveal their authors as so self absorbed that they believed politics existed to serve their egos. Sometimes they reveal people probably too decent to be in the biz. You learn more about the Labor Party than John Button in his memoirs and what there is about him reveals a decent bloke, as self-aware as he was self-effacing:

In politics and football, there are small triumphs and sometimes big prizes. It’s the same in most people’s lives and for countries too. But you have to go after them and persevere. You have to take sides and, win or lose, accept the consequences. On the road to Geelong I keep the faith that my team will make it, and Australia too. It may take time and I’m quite unsure which will get there first.\(^8\)

And Peter Walsh remembered a great deal more about policy than he did about his own career in his memoir, a book that merits re-reading in an age when economic reform appears off the agenda. As for a judgement, he explains why he thinks he failed to impose economic sense on his party, “I did not develop the skills for building the alliances and coalitions which are often a requisite for desirable policy changes. But I am not sure I possessed those skills anyway.”\(^9\)

Memoirs are scarcer on the other side of the fence. Malcolm Fraser with a little help from a friend has written up his career in a way that reflects his own, but not everybody else’s, memory of events. Peter Costello’s memoir demonstrates he either did not want to be prime minister badly enough to risk damaging the Liberal Party, or did not want to be seen to care too much for something he never tried to take:

Leadership is not only about winning; it is about departing. The only Liberal Leader who understood that he had to settle the time of his departure, for the sake of the party was, Sir Robert Menzies. ... Unlike Menzies, Howard never managed a transition. He did not accomplish generational change. After the best economic record of any Australian Government and after an Age of Prosperity – [the unaccountable caps are his] - from a golden era of continuous economic growth the Coalition was defeated in the spring of 2007. We lost because we failed to renew. We mismanaged generational change.\(^10\)

As insights, often unintentional, into their authors all these quotes demonstrate nothing beats an autobiography. But there is nothing as ex as an ex and who cares all that much what sort of bloke the former minister for this or that was? And as Scalmor points out, by their very nature all political autobiographies and memoirs fail – their authors and us – as a guide to politics past:

Even an accomplished autobiography cannot offer a reliable guide to the politics of the past. No matter how encompassing the individual contribution, there is always a broader context. ... Unfortunately, the purveyors of contemporary reminiscence seem unacquainted with these limits. Arrogant of their capacities, they increasingly conflate the perspective of the insider with the achievement of ultimate truth. No longer a supplement or a resource, the political memoir is increasingly presented as the sum of political history itself. This is likely to reshape our understanding of the politics of the past. It is also likely to consolidate popular understandings of politics as cynical, Machiavellian, self-interested and elitist.\(^11\)
So where does that leave the supreme politicians who suffer from the ultimate failing in public life, a desperate desire for respect and a self-belief so strong, that they think what they variously experienced, assumed and imagined is the whole record? In such desperate straits that they use their memoirs to keep on campaigning. Political lifers never give up trying to find the words to win the argument, deliver them the numbers, to advance their ideas and aspirations, intrigues and ambitions and above all prove that they were right.

And when they fear the good they did, and the conspiracies and circumstances that stopped them doing more will be forgotten, they write their memoirs. Not so much to settle scores or advance their ideas but to keep them in the game – to ensure that their successors are always compared to them. This is less vanity than a desperate desire to keep influencing events from beyond the (political) grave.

And the more there is to explain the more there is of the memoir, which explains these books by three former leaders whose temperate tone does not disguise their determination to make their version of the politics of their times the accepted wisdom.

Granted only one of them is by an Australian. But, in their very different ways, George Bush and Tony Blair are easily associated with John Howard. Bush presents himself as just your average patrician, a commonsensical sort of bloke who wants to help folks do their best – a cross between a wet-Liberal and one of Pauline Hanson’s saner supporters. Tony Blair would have been happy in Keating Labor, reveling in the chance to spend the cash economic reform provided on self-help programs. And both of them are anxious to present themselves as classless men in societies with flat social structures. That neither of them is, perhaps explains why their efforts to explain themselves are more strained than Howard’s attempt.

GEORGE W BUSH’S DECISION POINTS

Of the three, George W Bush’s autobiography, Decision Points, is the least satisfactory; in fact it is outright awful. This is an embarrassment for people, like this writer, who believed Bush is brighter than he presented in office and thought he was harshly judged. John Howard alludes to this when, he suggests the president’s problem was that the office does not allow its occupants to engage in the routine of political debate, “their job specifications required them to propound and declare but not to argue and persuade. … The most perplexing characteristic, to me, about George Bush was the big difference between his persuasive and well-informed attentive and charming presence in private and his often stilted and unpersuasive presentation style in public.”

Blair is equally apologetic about his mate:

One of the most ludicrous caricatures of George is that he was a dumb idiot who stumbled into the presidency. No one stumbles into that job, and the history of American presidential campaigns is littered with the political corpses of those who were supposed to be brilliant but who none-theless failed because brilliance is not enough. … George had immense simplicity in how he saw the world. Right or wrong, it led to decisive leadership.

But, on the basis of his own telling the tale of his presidency, there is no denying that while George W Bush is no dill he was out of his depth in the Oval Office. Bush says he took Ulysses S Grant’s war memoir as his model. This is doubly disingenuous. For a start, the jobs of a general and a political leader are entirely different. Grant was always pursuing other people’s objectives. In contrast, President Bush supervised a war of his own making, which was nearly lost for lack of planning at a political level. He failed as president because he ducked too many inconvenient issues. Surely the enduring image of George W Bush’s presidency is not Iraq but his inability to confront the economic crisis that commenced with the bankruptcy of Bear Stearns in March 2008. Where Grant just reports what he did and what occurred on his watch Bush, in the way of the modern memoir, seeks to explain and excuse.
Grant, (relatively) poor and dying as he wrote his memoirs, plainly stated in the preface he told his story because he needed the money:

> The comments are my own, and show how I saw the matters treated of whether others saw them in the same light or not. With these remarks I present these volumes to the public, asking no favor but hoping they will meet the approval of the reader.

Bush, on the other hand, wanted to get his version of events on the record for posterity: “I believe it will be impossible to reach definitive conclusions about my presidency – or any recent presidency for that matter for several decades. ... My hope is that this book will serve as a resource.”

It doesn’t. For a start, Bush does not explain himself. Certainly he acknowledges his alcoholism, Christian faith and family background and he offers once over lightly explanations of how he came to run for office – but there is no adequate explanation of why he wanted to be Texas governor (“I had the political bug again”) and President (listening to a clergym an convinced him he had the nod from God).

Nor does he explain how some of the worst errors on his watch occurred. Certainly he admits that the failure to find WMDs in Iraq “was a massive blow to our credibility – my credibility – that would shake the confidence of the American people”. But he does not explain how it happened.

While he takes the rap for the federal government’s slow response to Katrina, he does not appear to understand that it was up to him to push things along. And although Bush acknowledges the delay, he blames others for not addressing it: “Democrats opposed my efforts, and support in my own party was lukewarm.” From the way he describes elections to the policy process there is a sense that Bush was more observer than participant in his presidency, that the buck may have stopped in the Oval Office but he was never across the implications of everything he took responsibility for. The irony is that while Bush was doubtful on the detail, he got the biggest picture of all, he understood democracy could save peoples, for a start in Iraq:

> From the beginning of the war in Iraq, my conviction was that freedom is universal – and democracy in the Middle East would make the region more peaceful. There were times when that seemed unlikely. But I never lost faith that it was true. ... Every American who served in Iraq helped to make our nation safer, gave twenty-five million people the chance to live in freedom, and changed the direction of the Middle East for generations to come. There are things we got wrong in Iraq but that cause is eternally right.

And in a book written before the Arab spring, Bush explained there is nothing in Islam that dooms the Middle East to dictatorships. Thus he described a 2008 trip to Dubai and Abu Dhabi where he met young women in powerful positions:

> In the desert that night, I saw the future of the Middle East, - a region that honours its ancient culture while embracing the modern world. It will be decades for the changes set in motion in recent years to be fully realised. There will be set backs along the way. But I am confident in the destination: The people of the Middle East will be free, and America will be more secure as a result.

However, in the end, this book does what the gods of politics intend memoirs to achieve – it demonstrates Bush as a man who never realised he was not up to the job, demonstrated by his choice of anecdotes:

> One day in the Oval Office I ribbed [Federal Reserve Secretary] Ben [Bernanke] for wearing tan socks with a dark suit. At our next meeting the entire economic team showed up wearing tan socks in solidarity. “Look at what they’ve done,” I said to Dick Cheney. The vice president slowly lifted the cuff of his pants. “Oh no, not you too!” I said.

(Oh and for all the books on politics and history he says he read in the White House Bush somehow missed a biography of Burke, whom he describes as Sir Edmund.) John Howard and Tony Blair both rate the 43rd president as a good man and a great leader – saw something that is not revealed by Bush in his own book.

**TONY BLAIR’S JOURNEY**

Tony Blair’s brilliance, on the other hand, in *A Journey* is blindingly obvious on every page of what he says is not a traditional memoir. But it is. Granted there is not a lot of biography in the book. The peaks into the personal are contrived and while Blair packages himself as a man who is more than politics, he still presents us with a package. What really makes it a memoir is Blair’s anxiety to set the agenda, to explain why what he did was right, and why the substance of whatever went wrong was not his fault. And his temperate tones do not disguise what is less anger than obsession with the bloke he blames for everything that went wrong, Gordon Brown.
Brown’s presence is ever-present and it demonstrates the way even very, very talented policy thinkers are always overwhelmed by politics. Thus, at the beginning, Blair describes the mutual benefits of their long standing friendship, with Brown teaching him the way Labour worked and Blair giving Brown, “a normal person’s view on politics”. And so it goes, every couple of pages there is a reference to Brown, which more in sorrow than in anger details the decline of the relationship from friendship to partnership to outright enmity as Brown allowed his allies to organise the internal opposition to Blair.

Thus Blair claims Brown undermined education reforms: “Gordon will protest that he never opposed the programme, and to be fair he never did so head-on; but it was obvious that his people weren’t in favour and getting anything out of the Treasury required a machete constantly slicing through the thick foliage of their objections day by day.”

At the end, Blair describes Brown as a failure as both a politician and a human being:

I could see Gordon’s enormous ability, extraordinary grasp and unyielding energy and realised they were all big qualities in a leader. Unfortunately, what I had also come to realise was that those qualities needed to be combined with a sure political instinct in order to be fully effective. And that instinct comes from knowing what you truly believe, not vaguely or at a high level of generality or “values”, but practical, on the ground, everyday life conviction. And at this utterly crucial epicentre of political destiny I discovered there was a lacuna – not the wrong instinct, but no instinct at the human gut level. Political calculation, yes. Political feelings, no. Analytical intelligence, absolutely. Emotional intelligence, zero.

It makes Howard and Costello look like mates and it reveals Blair as something of a hypocrite, trying to use honeyed tones to mask his bile, and a bit of a fool for thinking he can convince his readers that he is bigger than his ambitions.

This does not diminish the value of the book. Blair presents a comprehensive record of the major fights of his time in office. Some are still relevant to Australia (like his discussion of why Iraq was the right war even without WMDs). Other aspects are irrelevant to an Australia which looks to Asia rather than the UK. A generation back, Princess Diana and the Ulster settlement would have generated all sorts of interest, not so much now.

But what is still interesting, especially for Labor loyalists here striving to work out a way to keep the party in business, is the way Blair sets out a strategy for reformers who are always stretching the truth and presuming on the electorate’s trust: “The public are quite discerning and discriminating between politicians they don’t trust at a superficial level, i.e. pretty much all of them, and those they don’t trust at a more profound level. This level of trust is about whether the public believe that the political leader is trying to do his best for them, with whatever mistakes or compromises, Machiavellian or otherwise, are made. This is the level of trust that really matters.”

And he demonstrates he was always a realistic reformer recognising that there are limits to what the politics of compassion provide. Most asylum claims are not genuine, he baldly states, and as for pensioners, there is “little or no correlation between the largesse bestowed on them and the volume of complaint.”

Above all, he understood the political reformer’s journey. Initially, Blair argues prime ministers with reform on their mind believe they can change outcomes with the same public sector standards. Then they realise this is not possible – which is why Blair tried to end the bureaucratic monopoly on government services in his second term. Most important, Blair sets out how to push through reform in the face of public service and party opposition:

The change is proposed; it is denounced as a disaster; it proceeds with vast chipping away and opposition; it is unpopular; it comes about; within a short space of time it is if it had always been so.
… if you think a change is right, go with it. The opposition is inevitable, but rarely is it unbeatable. There will be many silent supporters as well as the many vocal detractors. And leadership is all about the decisions that change. If you can’t handle that then don’t become a leader.29

And if you do become a leader, then lead rather than stay in office at any price. As he describes his position upon losing a vote in the Commons on terror-suspect legislation in 2005, “I believed the only way to keep power was to be prepared to lose it, but always to lose it on a point of principle.”30

In the end, he less lost power than saw his authority ebb away as he ceded authority to Gordon Brown. Of course this is not the way Blair seeks to sell it, but in explaining how he was in politics for a purpose, not just to hold office, he demonstrates how utterly obsessed he was, and is, with power.

JOHN “LAZARUS” HOWARD

John Howard did not seek to change as much as Blair, but he was probably the better politician. That his book, Lazarus Rising, is a hit says a great deal about the man and the way he understood the electorate and (he would probably add) spoke for enough of it to win four general elections.

This is not the way the Howard haters expected it to be. The assumption among the grant-dependent literary left, the people who award literary prizes to Malcolm Fraser, as much for his apostasy as his memoir, is that conservatives can’t write and their supporters can’t or won’t read, at least not for recreation. And yet Howard has sold 75,000 copies, an extraordinary number for a serious book on Australian politics, and a record for a political leader’s autobiography.31

The achievement is understandable because Howard presents himself as the sort of man older Australians idealise: an ordinary bloke doing extraordinary things. There is certainly a great deal that is engaging in the way Howard presents his career. He does not hide his hard work and by admitting his obsessive ambition makes the unappealing understandable, if not attractive.

In doing so Howard demonstrates why self-selected sophisticates who did not see him operating in person at first underestimated him and then came to loathe him for outsmarting them. There was never anything ordinary about Howard’s energy or ability, his guile or gumption – from his start in the Liberal machine he obviously decided to win by working harder and hanging tougher than everybody else.

In the hands of most political leaders this would create the memoirs of a monster – or the sort of try-hard whose efforts embarrass all those who observe them. But Howard writes with such self-awareness that it is hard not to admire, if not like him.

Howard admits mistakes, such as his failed first Liberal leadership in the 1980s and his disastrous speech warning Asian immigration put social cohesion at risk. He acknowledges his attempts to talk John Hewson out of taking the leadership were at least “partly” self-interested.32

He is also willing to reduce the record of his triumphs, as in the way he accepts that wearing a bullet proof vest when he addressed a gun owner protest against the 1996 buy-back was mistake.33

And the way he explains his response to Pauline Hanson demonstrates both a respect for ordinary Australians which is utterly lacking among self-righteous and self-appointed opinion leaders across the political spectrum as well as the great politician’s ability to combine self and national interest. He saw no need to insult her supporters when she was always going to self-destruct:

The truth, and this was something which I felt from the very beginning, was that Pauline Hanson was something of a metaphor for a group of Australians, most of whom did not have a racist bone in their bodies, who believed that in different ways they had been passed over, left out or generally short-changed by the pace and the intensity of economic and social change. … Could the impact of Hanson have been less if I had attacked her more strongly and openly immediately after her maiden speech? I think not. Pauline
Hanson was an accident, but accidents constantly happen in history. A more vigorous response from me would have intensified the frustrations felt by those Australians to whom she gave a voice, and gratuitously alienated them from me – and for what purpose other than the political benefit of the ALP?  

Yet for all Howard’s common sense and apparent self-awareness there is still slyness in what he reports and the way he writes. Some of the inevitable blues and blunders that curse all political careers are under-written. While Peter Hollingworth gets two mentions there is no mention of Howard’s dopey appointment of him as Governor-General. The failure to find weapons of mass destruction in Iraq is glibly dismissed. Granted, a strong case for invading Iraq could be made without them and there is no compelling evidence that WMD was an excuse. However, assuming their existence was a staggering blunder, one which Howard cannot explain away by arguing that because Saddam Hussein had equipped himself with WMD in the past he could again in the future. The inescapable fact is that when the invasion occurred he was unarmed.

Howard also ducks the wheat for weapons scandal, asserting “we had not done anything wrong. There had been no cover up.” This is okay but the scandal consumed enormous amounts of time and damaged the government’s credibility - to dismiss it in a couple of sentences makes it look like Howard is embarrassed by the whole affair.

It is the same with the Children Overboard affair. While Howard deals with it in greater depth, there is the same anxious effort to prove that he did not play fast and loose with the truth at the time. Certainly, he admits the original claims were wrong but he seems more annoyed that the scandal took the gloss off his 2001 election victory than by the way ministers at the time were left looking like liars, opportunists at best.

And, while he recognises the damage Work Choices did, he never adequately explains how he allowed ministers and mandarins to make such a mess of it. In a big book which ends in a humiliating defeat there are just two sentences that explain what went wrong: “The important difference between the new Fair Pay and Conditions Standard and the old no-disadvantage test was that penalty rates and overtime loadings were no longer absolutely guaranteed as part of a person’s pay package. In political terms, this proved to be a bad mistake.” You think?  

Perhaps the greatest glossing-over is Howard’s failure to organise an orderly succession. Peter Costello’s ambition is not ever-present in the book, as
it was during the later Howard years. Howard’s argument that there “were two isolated incidents… involving the leadership” is not what anybody vaguely interested in politics will recall. Nor is it sufficient to dismiss Costello as if he choked at the prospect of challenging and the discord was accordingly all his fault:

The leadership dynamic post 2004 meant that Peter Costello had two available options. The first and most sensible one was that he could simply accept the obvious and wait until I chose to retire. … Having won four successive elections, the great bulk of the party wanted me to stay as long as possible, and would react angrily to pressure applied or deadlines imposed by Peter or his acolytes. The other alternative was to plan and endeavour to execute a challenge. That was his right. He was entitled to openly confront the Liberals with a choice between him and me. Regrettably he chose neither of these options.*

This is at best disingenuous, an attempt to explain away the great internal conflict of the Liberal Party, the stain on Howard’s record that prevents him presenting as the leader who always selflessly acted in the party’s interest.

But the greatest failure of the book is Howard’s inability to explain, even understand, the way he wasted the benefits of the first boom. There is no doubting his ability to sell unpopular policies, demonstrated by his achievement in gun control, or push through transformative politics – perhaps the greatest achievement of John Howard and Peter Costello was the introduction of the GST. However, this makes the Howard Government’s profligacy and Howard’s obvious inability to see anything wrong with it all the more appalling.

Thus, he cheerfully admits his “total focus on rebuilding the Government’s political support in 2001,” and follows with details of the giveaways in the lead-up to that year’s election, especially to the elderly, who “gave above-average support to the Coalition”. And he justifies one-off payments to core constituents, because they are not permanent drains in revenue, which rather avoids the obvious issue – that they should not be made at all. 37 He also devotes much of his chapter on social policy (“the human dividend”) to an explanation of why the state should assist families supporting children, regardless of government’s capacity to pay and opportunity cost.

His claim that “my Government always gave high priority to personal taxation relief, believing that
people were better judges than governments on how to spend their money,” is all very well. However, it rather ignores that the money he gave away was not as much the result of productivity improvements or cuts to government outlays as the benefits of a natural resources boom born of good fortune and the taxes paid by the people at the top of the PAYE scale.

John Howard led a reforming government, in touch with what welfare receiving middle Australia wanted in his early years of office. In the end, he was undone by his commitment to economically important but electorally impossible industrial relations reform. But from the 2001 election on, Howard also spent money because it was there to spend. Thus he writes of the 2007 budget, which both he and Costello knew would be the Coalition’s last “for some years”, “the nation’s fiscal position was enviable, so a popular budget would be fully consistent with sound economic policy.”

In the end, as at the beginning, Howard was a restorer, not a reformer, intent on assisting Robert Menzies’ moral middle class of small business people, where his roots were, even if doing so reduced competition:

When on-balance judgements were called for, I confess to usually siding with the small operator, even if some violation of free-market principles might be involved; my support for newsagents and pharmacies comes readily to mind.

There is a shameless sense throughout this book that Howard believed he endured so much to become prime minister and because he was a better policy politician than any of the alternatives that anything that kept him power was justified.

Fair enough, but this does not sit well with his persona of a grounded bloke who had grown a thick hide but developed no side and suffered much in the service of Australia.

BUSH AND BLAIR IN REVIEW

The reviewers did not get all that worked up by the two foreign memoirs, certainly the coverage in the main media was much less than it would have been a decade ago. Perhaps this is because there is so much continual comment online that the big set piece story has no impact. It is hard to imagine anybody not having made their mind up about George Bush long before this book. Or perhaps it is because a more mature Australia is not as interested in our great and powerful friends any more. Whatever the reason, the Bush memoirs were not extensively considered.

Much of the coverage was a re-run of the ranting that passed for Australian analysis of Bush’s presidency. Consider the following inane anger from Jeff Sparrow who wrote of the President’s book:

... the whole project was bolted together and prompted by a compliant, greedy and morally bankrupt publishing industry that paid Bush US$7m for the privilege of creating a complete fiction that reads as though a trailer for Syriana has been rewritten to make it look like an ad for Return of the Jedi but with dialogue and narrative that would look cheesy even there.

Tony Walker damned Bush with faint praise while blaming Dick Cheney for the presidency’s problems:

If Bush’s (book) has a virtue it is that it suggests a much better man than the swaggering cowboy of popular caricature might have emerged if he had made some different choices early on, including the most critical of all: Cheney for vice-president.

Greg Sheridan wondered why Bush admitted to the problems his drinking caused him and his mistakes over Iraq. The president has been criticised for many things but surely this questioning of his willingness to admit to error is a first. Overall, while Sheridan found the book “a little disappointing”, he graciously approved of it:

You don’t look to Bush for literary style. Instead you get a sincere telling of his life and political works as he sees them. This book is surely not to everyone’s taste, yet Bush’s reputation is slowly making a comeback. If the process continues for another decade or two, a roughly balanced evaluation may be possible. This memoir is an important part of that.

It was left to Alexander Downer to produce the most substantial assessment of the book, explaining why Bush detailed his problems with the grog and pointing to the cultural difference that led him to bang on about religion in a way no Australian politician wisely would.

Unsurprisingly, Downer argues that Bush took the “least bad option” in invading Iraq and realistically accepts that while it is unfair to claim the US had no plans for the occupation, “the trouble was they weren’t very good plans”. Downer blames the Bush White House for not seeing the sub-prime crisis coming, calling it “the greatest weakness of the Bush presidency”.

Overall, however, Downer offers an ally’s judgement: “he was a much better president than the liberal media establishment and the Democrats claim. This book is subjective, but it explains why.”
Perhaps everybody was bored with Tony Blair by the time he finally went but, whatever the reason, his book was ignored in the books pages, where even a decade ago it would have received long and respectful reviews.

Tim Soutphommasane (The Weekend Australian, 2 October, 2010) began with a bad idea, that Blair and David Hicks had both used “journey” in the title of their books. Spooky huh? After dismissing Blair’s writing Soutphommasane went on to use most of his space on Hicks’s book. Jason Steger in The Age, (16 October) briefed Blair along with Howard and Bush in a piece which compared how many pages each produced, pointing out Howard and Bush both wrote 512 pages. Even spookier! Except it isn’t, the Virgin edition of Bush’s Decision Points is 497pp and Lazarus Rising comes in at 711 pages.

HOWARD IN REVIEW

But it was the response to Howard’s book that really demonstrates the final futility of politicians believing their memoirs will make their preferred version of the past the record. Reviewers well disposed towards the man were kind, writing about the book as well as Howard’s political record.

Like Peter Reith, “From the first word, I knew it was all written by John. I could feel it. It reads like a Howard speech: easy enough to understand, it flows well. ... Don’t be surprised. I reckon it’s a good read.”4

And Imre Salusinszky:

This is a thorough, even-tempered and engaging autobiography. There is a soothing, suburban hum to the prose that assures us this is Howard unplugged, not Howard as filtered and amplified through ghost writers and researchers. And to describe it so is not to imply the book is badly written. Those who condemned Howard as orator for eschewing the rhetorical flights of Gough Whitlam or Paul Keating will hate his prose for the same reason, and they will be wrong for the same reason: there are many ways of being articulate and Howard’s use of “middle diction”, neither demotic nor “high-falutin” is one of them.15

While Lindsay Tanner is no fan of the man, or many of his claims, he saw the book as exemplifying Howard’s political strengths:

His capacity to express his thoughts clearly, calmly and simply shines through. He was extraordinarily effective at connecting with voters in a common-sense, pragmatic and straightforward fashion. Lazarus Rising is written in the same style that made him so popular with ordinary people who weren’t greatly interested in politics. Unfortunately they’re not the ones who are likely to read it.46 (Except that with sales of 75,000 it’s likely that some have.)

But, if Howard hoped his memoirs would become an effective official history of his four terms in office, other reviewers made it clear it was nothing doing. “Despite the self-styled nobility, John Howard’s memoir exposes an arrogant man prepared to betray his colleagues to indulge his own ego and hubris,” Laurie Oakes argued.47 And, what a surprise, Peter Costello weighed in:

The title of his book is designed to hide the obvious truth. This Lazarus is not rising. This Lazarus was terminated by the voters of Bennelong in 2007 ... in any political career there are failures. You don’t make them go away by denying them. An honest acknowledgement allows you to focus on the successes. I have written of Howard’s many achievements in my book, The Costello Memoirs. There were four election victories for starters. But the worst thing about blaming others for your failures is that it invites people to re-evaluate a whole lot of other things as well.48

Costello is right. However coherent and comprehensive a memoir, however carefully constructed to convince readers now and forever that the author’s version is the one to trust, the audience never is. Memoirs result from human need, which is not, and cannot be, objective – and it shows in these three books.

ENDNOTES

1 John Howard, Lazarus Rising: a personal and political autobiography (Harper Collins, 2010) 648
3 Bill Hayden, Hayden: An autobiography (Angus and Robertson, 1996) 567
4 Bob Hawke, The Hawke memoirs, (William Heinemann, 1994) 550
5 John Cain, John Cain’s Years: power, parties and politics (Melbourne University Press, 1995) 239-240
6 Graham Richardson, Whatever it takes (Bantam Books, 1994) X
7 Mark Latham, The Latham Diaries, (Melbourne University Press, 2005) 104
8 John Button, As it happened (Text, 1998) 403
9 Peter Walsh, Confessions of a failed finance minister (Random House, 1995) 13
SENATOR
BARNABY JOYCE
POLITICS, MINORITY
GOVERNMENT AND
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SPEAKER: SENATOR BARNABY JOYCE
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10 Peter Costello with Peter Coleman, The Costello Memoirs (Melbourne University Press, 2008)
11 Sean Scalmer, op cit 101-102
12 Howard, op cit 470-471
13 Tony Blair, A Journey (Hutchinson, 2010) 393-394
15 Ulysses S Grant, Personal Memoirs (Charles L Webster and Co, 1885) I, @ www.gutenberg.org/files/4367/4367-h/p1.htm recovered on July 3
16 Bush, op cit
17 Ibid 53. 61
18 Ibid 262
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29 Ibid 480-484, 482
30 Ibid 583
31 Stephen Romei, “Lazarus rises to become bestselling political memoir,” The Australian, May 12
32 Howard, op cit174-175, 184
33 Ibid 253
34 Ibid 258, 262
35 Ibid 570
36 Ibid 603, 608
37 Ibid 370-371
38 Ibid 634
39 Ibid 20
44 Peter Reith, “In the eye of political storms,” Sydney Morning Herald, November 6 2010
46 Lindsay Tanner, “A plain dealer’s last hand,” The Age, November 6 2010
47 Laurie Oakes, “Howard’s end is ego,” The Courier Mail, October 23 2010
48 Peter Costello, “Howard: the great architect of failure,” The Age, October 27 2010
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. In 2009 Gerard Henderson’s Media Watch Dog commenced publication as a weekly e-newsletter – it appears on The Sydney Institute’s website each Friday.

Media types who publish their memoirs, or their collected works, obviously feel that they have something important to say. Over the past year, three prominent Australian commentators have issued their thoughts in book form. First up there was Phillip Adams’ Backstage Politics: Fifty Years of Political Memories (Viking, 2010). Followed by Alan Ramsey’s The Way They Were: The View From The Hill Of The 25 Years That Remade Australia (New South, 2011). Followed by Robert Manne’s Making Trouble: Essays Against The New Australian Complacency (Black Inc, 2011).

All three are well known commentators. Adams (born 1939) worked in advertising, film and related industries before becoming a weekly columnist in The Weekend Australian Magazine and the presenter of the ABC Radio National Late Night Live program. Ramsey (born 1938) commenced in journalism in 1953 and retired in 2008. Manne (born 1947) has spent his entire career as a tenured university academic and has been in La Trobe University’s Political Department since 1974.

PHILLIP ADAMS AFTER 50 YEARS – IS THIS ALL THERE IS?

According to Backstage Politics, Adams has written 19 books – eight of which have his name in the title. His scholarly output consists mainly of republished columns along with three collections of jokes. Adams’ list of publications does not recognise co-authors – but there have been quite a few.

There is a notable difference between Adams the broadcaster and Adams the writer. Late Night Live – which has been presented by Phillip Adams since 1991 – provides a range of interviews on a variety of issues. Adams has the annoying tendency of talking a lot about himself, even when interviewing others. Moreover, he tends not to take matters too seriously – unless, of course, they involve criticism of him. However, Late Night Live is an important program. Here Adams is assisted by a large and hard-working production team who set up the talent to appear on the program and who read the relevant material, prepare questions and anticipate answers. Late Night Live embodies the cult-of-Adams-personality. But, in fact, it is very much a team effort.

As a columnist, however, Adams is essentially on his own. This explains why his written work does not have the class of his radio presentations. On Late Night Live, there are people employed to do Adams’ research. Writing in The Weekend Australian Magazine, however, Adams either has to do his own work or to wing it without preparation. He invariably adopts the latter option. Moreover, reports from those who oversee Adams’ written work indicate that his columns are invariably subjected to a considerable degree of corrections and sub-editing.

It is Adams-as-columnist style which is evident in Backstage Politics. Sure, it is a memoir. Nevertheless, it is excessively self-centred. Moreover, lacking the taxpayer funded research staff he has at the ABC, Adams’ memories are replete with errors and omissions. Here’s an examination of Backstage Politics.

• Page 1. Adams defines “Australia’s political opinionista” into “Howard-huggers” and “Howard-haters”. It’s as simplistic as that. According to Adams, during the period of John Howard’s prime ministership – between March 1996 and November 2007:

   The huggers dominated, both in number and volume, with the likes of Andrew Bolt, Janet Albrechtsen, Piers Akerman, Gerard Henderson, Christopher Pearson – and later Noel – forming an anvil chorus of triumphalism. With John Winston firmly in the saddle – and a little later George W. and the neo-cons astride their horses for the apocalypse – the few on what might loosely be called “the left” felt enfeebled and ridiculed. Andrew, Janet, Piers, Gerard, Christopher and the rest were waging what they believed to be winning wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, and on history, culture, drugs, refugees, the ABC, the republic, reconciliation and what was left of federal Labor.

This is an example of Adams' intellectual laziness – when there is no one around to do his research. It is simplistic to regard the six people named as agreeing on everything. For example, Gerard Henderson is a member of the Australian Republican Movement, has never spoken or written about drugs, is on record as being sympathetic to asylum seekers and gets on well
with the Labor Party. When Henderson pointed out these to howlers to Adams, neither he nor Penguin Books even acknowledged the correspondence. In short, Adams had no evidence to support his assertions. Also, the idea that critics of the Howard government were somehow “enfeebled” during the time of the Howard government is unsustainable. Adams, along with many leftists, had ABC gigs at the time. Then, as now, the ABC did not have even one conservative presenter. Not one.

- Page 31. Adams writes that Robert Menzies was “denied membership” of the Melbourne Club. At Page 31, however, Menzies merely was “effectively blackballed” from the Melbourne Club. The claims are not identical – and neither is correct.

- Page 8. Adams writes that not all his recollections are detailed in Backstage Politics:

Sadely, many of the best of my best stories, including an intriguing insider’s account of the nature of the marriage of John and Janette Howard, cannot be included. Either they are too cruel, too personal or likely to provoke a libel action. Let Bob Ellis remain pre-eminent in the telling of political anecdotes that provoke litigation.

This is just gutter journalism. Who is the “insider” who knows about “the nature of the marriage of John and Janette Howard”? What does he/she know? If Adams is not prepared to name names and cite evidence, this paragraph should have been omitted.

- Pages 19-20. Adams writes about the 1968 Labor leadership contest between incumbent Labor leader Gough Whitlam and left-winger Jim Cairns. Adams supported Cairns against Whitlam and claims to have written the former’s statement in support of his bid to topple Whitlam as Labor leader. In Backstage Politics, Adams writes:

What wasn’t understood – either by Whitlam at the time or by Gerard Henderson in a recent column – is that neither Jim nor I wanted to win. Jim knew he was perceived as too radical to lead the party to victory, most of all in those turbulent Cold War years with Vietnam raging. Our purpose was simply to give Gough a kick in the backside. It was so painful a kick that Gough took years to forgive me (if he ever entirely did), always drawing himself to full height and snarling down at me, “Jim Cairns’ campaign manager!”

This is rationalisation for Adams’ disastrous 1968 judgment of regarding Jim Cairns as more suitable than Gough Whitlam to lead Labor and, subsequently, Australia. As one prominent former Labor politician, who discussed the issue with Cairns, has written to Gerard Henderson: “Jim was in it to win it.” Quite so. And Adams really was, as Gough Whitlam later declared, Cairns’ campaign manager. It’s just that Whitlam prevailed over Cairns – and, four decades after the event, Adams wants to be on the winning side.


- Page 31. Adams claims that Robert Menzies was “effectively blackballed” by the Melbourne Club. There is no evidence that such an occurrence ever took place.

The fact is that Menzies preferred the ambiance of the Savage Club and the East Brighton Club – which is not surprising since he did not much like the business types who frequented such institutions as the Melbourne Club and the Australian Club in the Melbourne CBD.


- Page 41. Adams writes that Robert Menzies was “denied membership” of the Melbourne Club. At Page 31, however, Menzies merely was “effectively blackballed” from the Melbourne Club. The claims are not identical – and neither is correct.

- Page 135. Adams claims that he received “10,000 letters” from his readers concerning asylum seekers following one of his columns. This seems very high and is not supported by any evidence.

- Page 140. Adams writes: “A deep aversion to invading people’s privacy is one of the reasons I didn’t enjoy commercial broadcasting”. Yet Backstage Politics is replete with gossip and rumour – particularly of the sexual kind.

For example, Adams hints that he has knowledge about the marriage of John and Janette Howard (Page 8). And he hints that a woman he names had an affair with one-time South Australian Labor premier Don Dunstan (Page 86). He writes about the details of Don Dunstan’s marriage to Adele Koh and about “Dunstan’s homosexuality” (Page 78). He writes about rumours concerning Malcolm Turnbull’s alleged one-time infatuation with “an uncommonly attractive young woman” whom he names (Page 217). And so on.

- Page 145. Adams defines political leaders:

The great British radical Tony Benn (in a previous life a viscount) once told me that every politician, irrespective of era, country or political system, came in one of three categories. They were straight men, fixers or “maddies”. It’s pretty easy to allocate leaders accordingly – Thatcher, Reagan, Doc Evatt, Kennett, Keating, Bjelke-Petersen, George W. Bush and Ceausescu were typical maddies. Neville Wran, Bob Hawke, Bill Clinton, Mikhail Gorbachev and Harold Macmillan were archetypal fixers. And straight men also abounded – the likes of John Cain, John Major, Ben Chifley, Harold Holt, Nick Greiner and Dwight Eisenhower.

What’s this about? Ceausescu was a dictator and a murderer. And, while not in the Ceausescu league, Gorbachev was not a democratically elected politician and oversaw the deaths of some individuals who opposed him. Dictators like Ceausescu cannot be compared with democratically elected politicians like Paul Keating or Margaret Thatcher. Adams’ categorisation of politicians is hopelessly misplaced.

- Page 167 Adams writes about the need for former Liberal Party leader Malcolm Fraser to write his memoirs – Adams believes that the memoir could
contain the following insight.

The evolution of someone who was inspired by the quasi-fascist Ayn Rand to become one of Australia’s greatest left-wingers, at least on issues like race and refugees.

There is no evidence that Malcolm Fraser ever read Ayn Rand. Ms Rand was in no sense a “quasi-fascist”. Moreover, when Malcolm Fraser wrote his memoirs in 2010 – they contained no reference to Ayn Rand.

- Page 168. Phillip Adams is not exactly slim. Yet he refers to American folk singer Mary Travers – of Peter, Paul and Mary fame – as a “hugely fat blonde lady”. Perhaps weight, like love, is in the eye of the beholder.
- Page 172. Phillip Adams renews his obsession with the Howard marriage:

A senior member of the ALP and I used to amuse ourselves by imagining the high and mighty in sexual congress. And we agreed that John Howard would observe an enduring Australian tradition by not removing his socks. More importantly, he’d leave his spectacles in place. Which, we agreed, were unlikely to steam up.

This school-yard humour is an example of what Adams regards as funny – that is, sneering at individuals you don’t like.

- At page 175, the Adams “humour” continues:

Meanwhile, something nasty arrives in the mail. Not a dose of anthrax or some plastic explosives. A turd. Gift-wrapped in glad-wrap. I can only applaud the post office for its professionalism. It seems that half the CDs I get arrive in shards, but the turd is in mint condition. Unsurprisingly, there is no return address. Nor is there any accompanying correspondence. I feel like demanding ballistic tests to see if it can be matched to the sphincter of a Gerard Henderson, Paddy McGuinness or Andrew Bolt. But apparently Australia isn’t up to the technological standards of CSI Miami, Vegas or New York. The arsehole remains enigmatic.

This is an example of Phillip Adams’ humour. By the way, FP. McGuinness died in 2008.

- Page 223. Adams writes that Tom Switzer was unsuccessful in his attempt to win Liberal Party pre-selection for Bennelong. Switzer unsuccessfully sought pre-selection for the seat of Bradfield, not Bennelong (which is currently held for the Liberal Party by former tennis player John Alexander).

Reviewing Backstage Politics for the Daily Telegraph (13 November 2010), Martin Crotty wrote that Phillip Adams’ political memories are “a little on the light side”. In The Age (20 November 2010), Lorien Kaye wrote that “this book has been dashed off with verve rather than care”. She commented that many of the anecdotes feature Adams himself. And Martin Thomas wrote in The Canberra Times (27 November 2010) that Adams had exhumed “some quite old, tired and well-worn political tales”.

In fact, Backstage Politics is a mess. This is not surprising since – like all of Adams’ written work – the words have been dictated to his long-time personal assistant Sandra Blood, who transcribed his “tales as fast I dictate them” (Page 216). There is a difference between the spoken and written word – the former being much more imprecise. Impression is at the core of Backstage Politics.

In any event, it is not clear what Backstage Politics is about. The book contains the author’s political memories – along with the anecdotes of others. For example, five pages of the book are taken up with the anecdotes of Independent MP Rob Oakeshott. Needless to say, they are of the self-serving genre – and prolix.

Backstage Politics commences with the recollections of one-time Labor MP Fred Daly and ends with an instance involving the first wife of the one-time Victorian Labor leader Clyde Holding. Fred Daly’s point was that “ministers were rarely appointed to departments that had anything in common with their life experiences”. Big deal. And, once-upon-a-time, Margaret Holding verbally abused a policeman outside Government House in Melbourne. Really.

If the Backstage Politics manuscript had been written by anyone other than Phillip Adams it would almost certainly have been rejected as unsuitable for publication – poorly written, lacking in structure and lightweight.

THE WAY ALAN RAMSEY WAS


In 2011, New South (an imprint of University of New South Wales Press) decided that more was better – and published another 178 of Ramsey’s columns in a book titled The Way We Were: The View From The Hill Of The 25 Years That Remade Australia (New South, 2011).

The Way We Were commences with a prologue titled “Men and Women of Australia” dated 10 November 2010. It is the only original piece in the book. The Prologue provides a convenient insight into the author. He is a bitter left-winger who opposes both the Coalition and Labor from the left and tends to regard everyone other than himself as hopeless or corrupt or spineless – or a combination of all three. Alan Ramsey admires a few Labor types – but not many. This is what Ramsey has to say about Australian politics in recent years:

...following Labor’s struggling resurrection after the political turbulence and vice-regal treachery of the Whitlam years, and the Hawke takeover after the hard graft of the Hayden years, we got the highs and black lows of the 13 Hawke/Keating years before the deceit, debauchery and sly opportunism of the 12 Howard years. Between them, across a quarter of a century, these three latter Prime Ministers re-made the insular and still largely Anglo-Celtic Australia of the 1960s and ’70s into the self-absorbed, debt-ridden, “modern”, and too often ugly
community of the still-evolving multicultural Australia’s new century.

So there you have it. At the end of 2007, Australia had one of the strongest economies in the Western world – if not the strongest – with no net government debt. Moreover, Australia was one of the most tolerant and accepting nations – with a relatively low level of ethnic motivated crime and a relatively high level of inter-marriage between ethnic groups.

But to the personally bitter Alan Ramsey, Australia in 2007 was self-absorbed, ugly and debt-ridden. Ramsey went on to write that “somewhere between the Hawke ascendancy [early 1983] and the self-immolation of Kevin Rudd in June 2010, the ‘Labor’ Party disappeared up the flab of its own backside”. Ramsey likes attempting to shock readers with such language. Elsewhere in the chapter, he claims that Bob Hawke, Paul Keating and John Howard “set about (excuse me) fucking over the public interest”. Yes – we will excuse him. Gosh. Shocking. How daring? And so on.

The author’s misogynist streak is evident when he depicts Julia Gillard as someone who “looked and sounded like Mrs Stringbag from a West Footscray council by-election”. Later on Ramsey wrote about how Mrs Stringbag (Julia Gillard) replaced Mrs Handbag (Jenny Macklin) as Labor’s deputy leader in December 2006. He also referred to one-time New South Wales Labor premier Kristina Keneally as “Ms Hairdo USA, 2009”. Pretty funny, eh?

Yet Alan Ramsey still dislikes the Coalition more than Labor. Robert Menzies’ period as prime minister is described as the “indolent Menzies years”. Malcolm Fraser’s time is referred to as “the bitter Fraser years” and John Howard’s time in office as “the diseased Howard years”. However, Ramsey evens up the criticism somewhat when he describes most politicians as liars.

According to Ramsey, Howard lied as did Hawke as did Keating. In fact, in the author’s view, any politician who changes his opinion on account of changing circumstances is a liar. This is a grievously simplistic view of politics – but it suits Ramsey’s sense of alienation and his contempt for contemporary parliamentarians.

As Michael Sexton wrote when he reviewed The Way They Were in the Sydney Morning Herald (12-13 March 2011):

The columns are studded with ferocious insults. Julia Gillard is described as “Mrs Stringbag from a West Footscray council by-election”; Kevin Rudd as a “prissy, precious prick”; Kristina Keneally as “Ms Hairdo USA”; Brian Burke as “a convicted thief, liar and political debaucher”; John Howard was “a worm” and Natasha Stott-Despoja as the Anna Kournikova of federal politics – “a beguiling clothes horse with minimum talent”.

Alan Ramsey apparently believes that abuse is clever. However, his infatuation with personal comment also reveals a flaw of the Canberra Parliamentary Press Gallery – Ramsey and his colleagues are too close to the politicians they write about obsessively. Michael Sexton, who worked as a staffer in the Whitlam Labor Government, queried precisely who was really interested in excessive personal detail in Ramsey’s columns – which were a product of political inbreeding in Parliament House:

One thing that is obvious from many of the columns is the amount of time that politicians and journalists spend together in Canberra. This is, in many ways, a natural result of the press gallery being located inside the new Parliament House, as it was in the former building. It presumably does much to explain the obsessive and highly personalised coverage of national politics in the Australian media. It is hard to imagine that most members of the public have any real interest in these constant opinion pieces thinly disguised as news stories. Certainly, the readers of, for example, The New York Times seem to survive quite well without this portrayal of politics as an endless spectator sport.

Even when outside Australia, Canberra’s politicians and journalists continue to cling to each other. One column recounts an excursion to London by Prime Minister Bob Hawke in 1989 in an aircraft that carried 23 officials and 22 journalists. It might be noted, however, that despite – or because of – this close relationship between politicians and journalists, it is rare for anything relating to a politician’s private life to be published in Australia.

For all the 178 columns in The Way We Were, Ramsey provides no particular insight into Parliament House or Australian politics. The same was true of the 150 columns re-published in A Matter of Opinion. The same would be the case if the remaining 1945 Herald columns find a publisher.

Following the presentation of A Matter of Opinion in 2009, Alan Ramsey was the subject of two lengthy interviews by Phillip Adams on Late Night Live. Ramsey came back for more after the publication of The Way We Were. It was one of those familiar leftie moments on the ABC where Alan Ramsey agreed with Phillip Adams who agreed with Alan Ramsey.

Highlights of the third Phillip Adams-Alan Ramsey interview, which went to air on Late Night Live on 3 February 2011, are set out below:

On Economic Reform

Alan Ramsey: ...You’re getting into the economic argument as to whether or not we had to lower the barriers and compete with the world. And that’s how it was presented to the Australian people. It created all sorts of stresses and strains and goodness-knows what else. And one could say: “No of course not. We could not remain isolated from the rest of the world”. All I’m saying is that with the so-called – whatever those benefits that came with the economic change – came all
sorts of social changes and a lot of them are not good. Were not good. And they still [sic] – as they say, we've become a much much greedier country. We really do. The dollar rules everything.

Interesting reflection – even if Alan Ramsey is not known for his personal generosity.

On the Greens

Phillip Adams: One of your articles is very revealing about the Press Gallery. It's 2005, Melbourne's Herald Sun incorrectly reports that the Greens back illegal drugs, or that their policy supported open door for all refugees, or family home tax and gave the nod to gay marriage. Now Bob Brown complained to the Press Council. And you make the point that only four reporters out of 150 reporters showed the slightest interest.

Alan Ramsey: That's right. That's what happens in this Gallery. I mean Bob Brown and the Greens are almost non-people. They are pushed into the background by the major parties and the major parties hate having to rely, either one of them, having to rely on Greens' support. But I'll tell you what, if they don't – they are the conviction politicians, these days. The real conviction politicians are the politicians in the centre – and I say in the centre in terms of between the two major parties.

The fact is that the Greens receive widespread media coverage. Also the Herald-Sun in 2005 was broadly accurate in its reporting of the Greens’ policies.

On Newspapers

Alan Ramsey: I don't read the papers anymore. I really don't read them. We don't get newspapers that come into our house now. The only paper I get is The New York Review of Books.

Alan Ramsey made a living out of writing for newspapers. However, on retirement he bagged the print media as worthless. In an interview with Jon Faine on ABC Radio 774 on 9 February 2011, Ramsey said that all modern journalists are pretty hopeless except for his wife Laura Tingle.

On the Liberal Party

Alan Ramsey: ...[what] the Liberal Party's going to have to learn with is the fact that if they don't get Malcolm Turnbull back, they're not going to get back into office.

This is wish-fulfillment dressed up as analysis.

On the ABC

Phillip Adams: We replayed the other night my first Late Night Live. And it was on, guess what, on ABC bias. David Hill, Sam Lipski, Brian Toohey, Gerard Henderson. And it was about the ABC's alleged mismanagement of the reporting on Gulf War One. Now that argument is still alive and kicking and Gerard Henderson is still making exactly the same

points, twenty years later. What do you think about bias and the ABC. Have you come to a view about it over the years?

Alan Ramsey: Oh I think it's a lot of nonsense. Look, bias, you know as well as I do. Bias is like beauty, it's in the eye of the beholder. Look, the Gerard Hendersons of this world are going to go moaning on forever. It doesn't matter what you do – unless, unless they absolutely agree with him, agree with Gerard.

Phillip Adams: Eh?

Alan Ramsey: Unless everybody actually agrees with Gerard.

Phillip Adams: Oh! Sorry, I thought you were advocating that as a socialist policy. Oh, my heart just turned.

Alan Ramsey: No, no. No. No, no. As I said, the Gerard Hendersons of this world, unless everybody else agrees with Gerard, then Gerard's not happy.

For the record, Gerard Henderson is not mentioned in either A Matter of Opinion nor The Way We Were. Presumably Phillip Adams had not read The Way We Were before his interview with Alan Ramsey and was winging it.

MAKING ROBERT MANNE

Robert Manne, Professor of Politics at La Trobe University, has not written a serious work of history, contemporary history, politics or government for around a quarter of a century.

Professor Manne’s last substantial work was his important book The Petrov Affair: Politics and Espionage, which was published by Pergamon in 1987. Since then Robert Manne has mainly engaged in the public debate as a commentator – by means of newspaper columns, essays, edited collections, radio broadcasts and television interviews. Much of his commentary has involved advocacy, often of the polemical kind. He edited a number of collections which railed against John Howard and the Coalition government.

Robert Manne joined the La Trobe University Politics Department in 1974 – and he has remained there since. For the last two decades, he has used his tenured university position to take part in the political debate.

This is unusual. In Australia, most professional commentators either work in the private sector – or experience life without tenure in politics or the trade union movement. There are also private sector commentators in the media, in think tanks and policy forums, in business. What unites all of the above is that their ideas are tested in the market place of ideas. In a sense, there is no test for Professor Manne’s ideas – since he enjoys permanent employment per courtesy of the taxpayer along with taxpayer subsidised superannuation benefits.

There is no problem with academics taking part in the public debate. However, tenured professors are expected to be other than polemicsists. In his latest book Making Trouble: Essays Against The New Australian
Complacency (Black Inc, 2011), Robert Manne claims that “after the mid-1990s, the dominant voices” in the Australian public debate “were the attack dogs of the right like Andrew Bolt, Piers Akerman, Janet Albrechtsen and Alan Jones”.

This upsets Manne. But the likes of Bolt, Akerman, Albrechtsen and Jones all work in the private sector media. Manne wants to take on what he terms the “attack dogs of the right” from what he concedes is his position as a “radical” on “the left”. No problem there. It’s just that Manne expects that the Australian taxpayer will fund his tenured employment at La Trobe University while he engages in public polemics – even to the extent of using terms of personal abuse against his opponents and despising the so-called complacency of the society which supports his comfortable, tenured lifestyle. 

Making Trouble runs for 430 pages – only the first ten pages contain any new material. Much of the book consists of essays previously published in The Monthly (of which Manne is editorial chairman). The book contains neither endnotes, nor footnotes, nor a bibliography nor even an index. It is unprofessional for Black Inc to print a book of previously published columns without an index – since people who have read Manne’s work in its original form may not want to re-read it all and may prefer to check subjects and individuals by referencing an index. Morry Schwartz, the property developer who publishes Black Inc, should be able to afford an index.

Clearly Making Trouble is a polemic. In his ten page introductory essay, Manne makes it clear that “most of the essays reflect my arguments with the Right”. Manne’s enemies are clear. Namely John Howard (“the greatest enemy of Australian self-criticism and re-invention”) and Rupert Murdoch (“the sponsor-in-chief of Anglophone populist conservatism”). Manne refers to his “deepening detestation for Rupert Murdoch” whom he blames for “placing the ‘very future of the Earth at risk’”. Professor Manne has adopted the cause of eco-catastrophe and holds the view that “corporations dominate democratic politics”. In short, a Greens agenda. Which is no surprise really, since Robert Manne announced that he voted for the Greens at the 2010 Federal election. These days he admires, and is fascinated by, Julian Assange.

In his introduction, Robert Manne writes:

Making Trouble is a sequel to a previous collection, Left, Right, Left. It contains many political and historical essays written since 2005. I introduced Left, Right, Left with a political autobiography which tried to explain why after an early attachment to the social democratic Left, grounded in reflection on the attempt by the Nazi German state to remove the Jewish people from the face of the Earth, my politics had moved rightwards during the Cold War and leftwards following the collapse of European communism.

What’s missing from Making Trouble is any explanation of, or rationalisation for, Robert Manne’s changing position on economics – before and after 2005.

Robert Manne’s first edited collection was published in 1982, under the title The New Conservatism in Australia. It contains essays by, among others, Frank Knopflacher, B.A. Santamaria, John Carroll and Patrick Morgan along with Manne himself. In his introduction Manne wrote:

I must admit to having no competence in economics whatsoever... To those for whom the central question for an Australian “new conservative” ought to be tariff barriers, money supply, tax levels, rural subsidies and “small government” I can only offer apologies and suggest they turn to the occasional publications of the Centre for Independent Studies.

In 1990 Robert Manne was the editor of Quadrant. On 30 April 1990 he forwarded a letter to Liberal Party parliamentarians urging them to subscribe to Quadrant. In his pitch to Australia’s political conservatives, Robert Manne made it clear that – as Quadrant editor – he supported economic and industrial relations reform and was committed to the values of free enterprise. The letter commenced as follows:

As Australia enters the 1990s many of us feel that our nation’s future is at risk. Many of us feel that only with fresh ideas – concerning the economy, immigration, defence, the family, education, environment and industrial relations – can we extricate ourselves from the crisis we now face.

For more than 30 years Quadrant has been Australia’s most influential liberal-conservative magazine of ideas – committed to the values of free enterprise, traditional morality, and the open, unregulated society. We have frequently broken new ground. It was in our pages that the “Industrial Relations Club” was first identified.

The reference was to Gerard Henderson’s article titled “The Industrial Relations Club”, which was published in the September 1983 issue of Quadrant magazine.

Soon after he wrote this letter, Robert Manne switched sides in the economic debate. In 1992 he co-edited Shutdown: The Failure of Economic Rationalism with John Carroll. In their preface, Manne and Carroll declared that what they described as economic rationalism had failed. They predicted “permanent high unemployment, with real figures in the order of 15 to 20 per cent, threatening to turn sections of our cities into social wastelands, ghettos of broken families, personal misery, delinquency and squalor”. The editors declared that “the Australian way of life is at risk” and advocated that Australia should follow the economic policies of Japan which was described as a “model of success”. Around this time Japan entered a recession which ran for two decades.

From 1992, in his many polemical essays, Robert Manne opposed Australia’s economic reform agenda – which, at the government level, was implemented by Labor’s Bob Hawke and Paul Keating in 1983 and continued by the Coalition’s John Howard and Peter Costello from early 1996 until the end of 2007.
Unlike Japan, Australia has experienced continuous growth since 1992. By the middle of the first decade of the 21st Century, Manne felt the need to acknowledge that his polemical attacks on economic reform in Australia had been misplaced. During an interview with Terry Lane on the ABC Radio National program The National Interest on 26 June 2008, Manne made the following admission:

*I think, I think I made a big mistake in, um, in


giving so much energy and time to the


argument against economic rationalism. Not


because I necessarily think it was wrong. I


mean, I think part of what I predicted hasn’t


turned out and part of it probably has. But I


didn’t know enough, actually.

Um, I’ve never been interested in economics. Um, I have never studied economics formally and found – pretty quickly when I became, you know, began to argue about economic rationalism or neo-liberalism – I found myself out of my depth and I knew it in a way as soon as I got into the area. And I, sort of, have learnt a lesson that I should stay with things that I know pretty well. It’s one of the times when I felt that I’d entered an area which was not my strength.

So, in 2005 Robert Manne admitted that not only was he out of his depth when he opposed economic reform from 1992 on – but that he knew he was out of his depth. Nevertheless, he continued to oppose the economic reform agenda of both Labor and the Coalition for around two decades. Moreover, in 1994 Manne cited Shutdown in his application to be promoted to an associate professorship at La Trobe University.

On 19 April 2010, John Carroll wrote to The Australian acknowledging that Shutdown was “basically wrong”.

My view today, with the benefit of hindsight, is that Shutdown was basically wrong. I was principally troubled in 1992 with Australia’s escalating international debt and the consequent foolishness of running down the local manufacturing industry (which would also aggravate a then already high unemployment rate) My prediction was that an economic crisis loomed.

The reality turned out to be just the opposite: high on two decades of unprecedented economic growth. Moreover, industry policy in 1992 to encourage local manufacturing would have been almost entirely doomed once Chinese export production got into full gear – something that could not have been foreseen then. To me now, the past two decades support the maxim: if in doubt trust the free market.

John Carroll further developed this argument in an opinion piece which was published in The Weekend Australian on 24-25 April 2010.

It seems that John Carroll’s apologia provoked Robert Manne to re-assess his own role in Shutdown. In May 2010, Robert Manne and Henry Ergas were invited by The Australian to take part in correspondence with the intention that it be published subsequently. In this exchange – which was published in The Weekend Australian on 15-16 May 2010 – Robert Manne conceded:

*I mistakenly opposed parts of the Hawke-Keating reforms.

This was an ambiguous statement – since Manne seemed to imply that he supported other parts of the economic reforms which took place during the time of the Hawke and Keating governments. The fact is that Robert Manne opposed all of the Hawke/Keating economic reforms during the 1980s and early 1990s. He also opposed the Howard/Costello economic reforms.

Professor Manne welcomed the election of Kevin Rudd in November 2007 and Barack Obama in November 2008. In the introduction of Making Trouble, Robert Manne concedes that the great hopes he held for Barack Obama and Kevin Rudd were “impossibly naïve”. And that is one of Manne’s problems. He has never worked outside the tenured life of a university and his attitude to politics is invariably born of naivety and practical ignorance.

Manne has not worked in business nor run a small business. He has not had a job in politics – working in government or opposition. And he has never been employed in the public service. In other words, Manne has no inner knowledge of how politics or government works. Yet, from his taxpayer funded desk at La Trobe University, he has engaged in a quarter century long polemical telling politicians and public servants what to do.

Manne has survived as a commentator because his ideas have never been put into operation. If, for example, the Hawke Government had followed Robert Manne’s advice in 1992 and adopted the Japanese economic model – then Australia would have entered into ongoing recession and Manne would have been discredited. But the Hawke/Keating Government rejected Robert Manne’s advice – and he went on to be voted by his peers as Australia’s leading intellectual.

The internal struggle between Manne-the-academic and Manne-the-polemist is evident in The Way They Were. The book reprints an article which was published in the December 2007 issue of The Monthly. Here Manne claimed that a “relentless campaign” against the ABC TV Media Watch program, conducted by The Australian, “drove the presenter [Monica Attard] and the producer [Tim Palmer] to resign” at the end of 2007.

Manne’s statement, made without fact-checking, was recklessly false. Jonathan Holmes, who succeeded Attard, told The Age Green Guide’s Larry Schwartz that Manne’s claim was “rubbish” – adding that The Australian’s criticism of Media Watch was “certainly not the reason that Monica or Tim left the program”.

When Larry Schwartz asked Manne for a response to Holmes’ claim, Manne conceded that he had no idea why Monica Attard or Tim Palmer left Media Watch (The Age’s Green Guide, 14 February 2008). In other words, Manne just made up his claim about The Australian. Yet his original (false) claim about Media Watch is reprinted uncorrected in Making Trouble. That’s unprofessional.
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**SPEAKER:** SENATOR BARNABY JOYCE (Leader of the Nationals in the Senate)
**TOPIC:** It’s Time to Get Real
**DATE:** Monday 5 September 2011  **Bookings from 22 August only**
**VENUE:** Mallesons Conference Room, Level 61, Governor Phillip Tower, 1 Farrer Place, Sydney
**TIME:** 5.30 for 6pm

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**SPEAKER:** REV. EDMUND CAMPION (Author and historian)
**TOPIC:** John Henry Newman – A Cardinal For Our Times
**DATE:** Tuesday 13 September 2011 **Bookings from 30 August only**
**VENUE:** 41 Phillip Street (between Bent & Bridge Street), Sydney
**TIME:** 5.30 for 6pm

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**SPEAKER:** KATHARINE BIRBAL SINGH (UK education reformer, blogger & author best selling To Miss With Love)
**TOPIC:** Sharia in the West - is this a reality?
**DATE:** Tuesday 20 September 2011 **Bookings from 6 September only**
**VENUE:** Mallesons Conference Room, Level 61, Governor Phillip Tower, 1 Farrer Place, Sydney
**TIME:** 5.30 for 6pm

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**SPEAKER:** THE HON TANYA PLIBERSEK MP (Minister for Human Services; Minister for Social Inclusion)
**DATE:** Tuesday 27 September 2011 **Bookings from 13 September only**
**VENUE:** Mallesons Conference Room, Level 61, Governor Phillip Tower, 1 Farrer Place, Sydney
**TIME:** 5.30 for 6pm

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**SPEAKER:** RAHEEL RAZA (Award winning writer, professional speaker, diversity consultant, documentary filmmaker and playwright and author of Their jihad…not my jihad)
**TOPIC:** Joseph Lyons – The People’s Prime Minister – A Book Launch
**DATE:** Wednesday 5 October 2011 **Bookings from 21 Sept only**
**VENUE:** Maddocks, Level 21 Angel Place, 123 Pitt Street (between Hunter Street & Martin Place), Sydney
**TIME:** 5.30 for 6pm

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**SPEAKER:** THE HON JOHN HOWARD AC
**TOPIC:** Politics and the Media
**DATE:** Tuesday 18 October 2011 **Bookings from 4 October only**
**VENUE:** Clayton Utz Seminar Room, Level 15, 1 Bligh Street, Sydney
**TIME:** 12.30 for 1pm

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**SPEAKER:** ANNABEL CRABB (Journalist & commentator; Chief Political Writer, ABC)
**TOPIC:** To be advised
**DATE:** Wednesday 19 October 2011 **Bookings from 5 October only**
**VENUE:** Maddocks, Level 21 Angel Place, 123 Pitt Street (between Hunter Street & Martin Place), Sydney
**TIME:** 5.30 for 6pm

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**SPEAKER:** MAURICE NEWMAN AC (Chairman, Australian Broadcasting Corporation)
**DATE:** Thursday 20 October 2011 **Bookings from 12 October only**
**VENUE:** Corrs Chambers Westgarth, Level 32, Governor Phillip Tower, 1 Farrer Place, Sydney
**TIME:** 5.30 for 6pm

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**SPEAKER:** DAVID IRVINE (Director-General, Australian Security Intelligence Organisation [ASIO])
**DATE:** Wednesday 16 November 2011 **Bookings from 2 November only**
**VENUE:** to be advised ASSOCIATES AND ONE GUEST ONLY
**TIME:** 5.30 for 6pm

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**SPEAKER:** DR MARTIN PARKINSON (Secretary to the Treasury)
**DATE:** Tuesday 13 December 2011 **Bookings from 9 November only**
**VENUE:** to be advised
**TIME:** 5.30 for 6pm

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