

FORTHCOMING FUNCTIONS AT THE SYDNEY INSTITUTE

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|------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------|
| SPEAKER : | DONALD McDONALD (Chairman, Australian Broadcasting Corporation) | |
| TOPIC : | <i>The Importance of Public Broadcasting</i> | |
| DATE : | Wednesday 4 August 1999 | TIME: 5.30 for 6.00pm |
| VENUE : | The Chifley Conference Room (Rm 102), Level 1, 2 Chifley Square, Sydney | LIGHT REFRESHMENTS |
| SPEAKER : | SUSAN VARGA (Author, <i>Happy Families</i> [1999] and <i>Heddy and Me</i>) | |
| TOPIC : | <i>Families - Fact and Fiction</i> | |
| DATE : | Wednesday 11 August 1999 | TIME: 5.30 for 6.00pm |
| VENUE : | 41 Phillip St, Sydney | LIGHT REFRESHMENTS |
| SPEAKER : | BENNY BARABASH (Author, <i>My First Sony</i> , 1994) | |
| TOPIC : | <i>The Writer - In Conflict and Peace</i> | |
| DATE : | Tuesday 24 August 1999 | TIME: 5.30 for 6.00pm |
| VENUE : | 41 Phillip St, Sydney | LIGHT REFRESHMENTS |
| SPEAKER : | SIMONE YOUNG (Music Director Designate) to deliver <i>The Larry Adler Lecture 1999</i> | |
| TOPIC : | <i>A Conductor's Place</i> | |
| DATE : | Tuesday 31 August 1999 | TIME: 6.30 for 7.00pm |
| VENUE : | Grand Harbour Ballroom, Star City, Sydney | BLACK TIE |
| | COST: \$150 Associates/Ordinary Members and Partners only, \$200 Others | |
| SPEAKER : | THOMAS FRIEDMAN (Author, <i>The Lexus and the Olive Tree</i> [HarperCollins, 1999]) | |
| TOPIC : | <i>To be advised</i> | |
| DATE : | Wednesday 1 September 1999 | TIME: 5.30 for 6.00pm |
| VENUE : | The Chifley Conference Room (Rm 102), Level 1, 2 Chifley Square, Sydney | |
| SPEAKER : | JOHN FAHEY (Minister for Finance and Administration) | |
| TOPIC : | <i>To be advised</i> | |
| DATE : | Wednesday 8 September 1999 | TIME: 5.30 for 6.00pm |
| VENUE : | The Chifley Conference Room (Rm 102), Level 1, 2 Chifley Square, Sydney | |
| SPEAKER : | KERRY CHIKAROVSKI (Leader of the Opposition, NSW) | |
| TOPIC : | <i>To be advised</i> | |
| DATE : | Monday 13 September 1999 | TIME: 5.30 for 6.00pm |
| VENUE : | The Chifley Conference Room (Rm 102), Level 1, 2 Chifley Square, Sydney | |
| SPEAKER : | NICHOLAS ECONOMOU (Lecturer in politics at Monash University, Editor of <i>The Kennett Revolution</i> [UNSW Press, 1999]) | |
| TOPIC : | <i>The Kennett Revolution</i> | |
| DATE : | Wednesday 29 September 1999 | TIME: 5.30 for 6.00pm |
| VENUE : | 41 Phillip St, Sydney | LIGHT REFRESHMENTS |
| SPEAKER : | FRED HILMER AO (Chief Executive Officer, Fairfax) | |
| TOPIC : | <i>The Politics of Media Regulation</i> | |
| DATE : | Tuesday 9 November 1999 | TIME: 5.30 for 6.00pm |
| VENUE : | The Chifley Conference Room (Rm 102), Level 1, 2 Chifley Square, Sydney | |
| SPEAKER : | JOHN ANDERSON (Deputy Prime Minister, Minister for Transport) | |
| TOPIC : | <i>To be advised</i> | |
| DATE : | Wednesday 17 November 1999 | TIME: 5.30 for 6.00pm |
| VENUE : | The Chifley Conference Room (Rm 102), Level 1, 2 Chifley Square, Sydney | |

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THE

Sydney Institute

QUARTERLY

VOLUME 3 NO 2
JULY 1999

PAUL SHEEHAN
loses his evidence

DAVID FLINT
on the media

THE RAT PACK GO
FOR "PRINCESS
NATASHA"

ANNE HENDERSON
looks for a good life

STEPHEN
MATCHETT
reviews the
tabloid twins

MEDIA WATCH
on Bob Ellis, Miranda
Devine and Les
Murray's poetic
license

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with Gerard Henderson's

MEDIA WATCH

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PAUL SHEEHAN'S DISAPPEARING EVIDENCE

In a letter to the *Melbourne Age* (12 June 1999) Paul Sheehan wrote: "Since my book *Among the Barbarians* was published a year ago it has generated hundreds of published comments – good, bad and ugly...". It is a matter of record that the first reviews were universally positive. *Among the Barbarians* was launched by 2UE Radio shock-jock Alan Jones. So strong was the Jones endorsement that the book sold out in Sydney bookshops even before the first review was published. The early comments in Australia's major newspapers were universally positive. Paul Sheehan was fortunate that his key earlier reviewers were ideological soulmates – Michael Duffy (in the *Weekend Australian*) and Les Carlyon (in both *The Age* and *Sydney Morning Herald*). This is comparable to a book by leftist John Pilger being reviewed by, say, Noam Chomsky and Helen Caldicott. Nice luck, if you can get it.

Later on there were some tough-minded critiques of Paul Sheehan's first book. Most notably by Anne Henderson (*The Australian Review of Books*, July 1998) and Professor John Fitzgerald (*Asian Studies Review*, November 1998). For the record, there were more positive than critical reviews. Even so, in the preface to the second edition of *Among the Barbarians*, Paul Sheehan still feels the need to make reference to "the veil of intimidation that hangs over discussion of the most important subjects in Australian life". Many an author would appreciate such "intimidation".

The most controversial part of *Among the Barbarians* is Chapter 4. In his new preface the author writes: "Some cuts have been made from the original edition to make way for new facts and two new chapters...None of the defining arguments or facts of the original edition have been removed". But what about Wang Gungwu?

Among the Barbarians contains a number of wild - and offensive – generalisations about the Chinese, both the mainlander and overseas varieties. He referred to "the dynamic chauvinism at the core of Chinese culture", maintained that "Chinese self-interest and cynicism in Australia is not exactly hard to find" and alleged that the first generation of Chinese immigrants experience "alienation" from their new country. For the most part, Paul Sheehan's sources were light. With one exception. Chapter 4 in the first edition of *Among the Barbarians* contains the following sentence: "The Chinese immigrant as 'sojourner', never completely at home in the new country, is a portrait built by the work of the Australia-based China scholar Wang Gungwu". In fact, the authoritative Dr Wang is a Singaporean-based Australian of Chinese-Malay background. However, there was no direct quotation from Wang Gungwu's body of work – and no reference to any of his books in the "Sources" section.

This sentence is dropped from the second edition of *Among the Barbarians*. So is the undocumented reference to Australian China scholar Geremie Barmé and his (alleged but unsourced) comment that a strain of self-loathing lies beneath Chinese self-aggrandisement. No explanation is given for these crucial deletions. Did Dr Wang and/or Dr Barmé object to Paul Sheehan's use of their names as authority for his generalisations about the Chinese? Was the author of *Among the Barbarians* unable to document his assertions and junked them the second time round. Or neither of the above? The diminishing evidence for the most outrageous generalisations in *Among the Barbarians* requires an explanation.

HOW THE MEDIA SCORES WITH DAVID FLINT

David Flint, Chairman of the Australian Broadcasting Authority, addressed The Sydney Institute on Tuesday 25 May 1999. An observer of the media for many years, David Flint has some serious reservations about journalists and the journalistic profession in an age of increasing infotainment. The discussion which follows has been taken from the question and answer session at David Flint's address.

Q: You've talked at great length and quite openly about the social compact between the broadcast media and we as the receivers of that media. If we're losing so much confidence in the broadcast media as the purveyors for information, allowing them to become purveyors of entertainment as information, why it is that media proprietors let this happen? Or do you believe that perhaps we just don't care about the compact? That we get our news and information from other sources and that the broadcast media no longer act for us as conveyors of important information?

DF: Well I don't think the public stops using the media but they lower their confidence and belief in the media. This country, very early in the piece, took a remarkable decision. That reflected the fact that we are basically a social democracy. We decided that we wouldn't just have commercial radio. And we wouldn't copy the Europeans with their state controlled radio. But we would mix with commercial radio an independent public broadcaster along the lines of the BBC. I don't think it's any mistake, or any coincidence, that Canada and New Zealand did it also because we are all very similar societies. And we did that, I think, to try to ensure, as a nation that we were getting high quality, independent news alongside the other organs. The public still expects that from its media. The public doesn't stop using the media. But there are many different sources that they can go to. However, there is a decline in confidence. And it registers as a decline in confidence in the media.

Q: If government regulation is not the answer, and codes of ethics for both journalists and broadcasters and the newspapers don't seem to work, presumably you need some sort of cultural change over the long term. That doesn't seem to be happening anywhere in the Western world. Is there an answer to the problem?

DF: That's a very difficult question. The very first step could be for at least one university to go back to establishing a centre of excellence in this area. We have university centres which are looking at, for example, the technical aspects of media laws and university centres which take a more left position in relation to the media, media studies and cultural theories. We need, at least in one of our universities, as you find sometimes in some of the American universities, a centre which propagates a centre of excellence in media. And the profession itself needs to change. I agree with you. There needs to be a cultural change. The profession itself needs to occasionally say things about this and examine its role. For example, some of the things that I've suggested are not good practice, not the sort of things which a body like the Press Council or Broadcasting Authority could effectively deal with. But they are matters which good newspapers and broadcasters ought to look at.

Q: I don't quite agree with your view of media standards deteriorating. Nowadays the variety of views in the media has never been more diverse. If you go back 20 or 30 years, someone like Gerard Henderson, for example, couldn't get near a newspaper because his views were not appropriately left wing. Now you can read anyone from Piers Ackerman to leftist feminists. As I see it, the problem is one where it is the institutions that are losing credibility. Not just the media. There's alienation about government. People don't belong to churches anymore. People are better educated and falling away from institutions. The problem is more that the media is having trouble just trying to keep up. How do you respond to that argument?

“What I am talking about tonight is cultural change where there was a greater respect, once. I think there was a “Golden Age” in which fact and opinion were clearly distinguishable.”

DF: There's a place for opinion, and there's a place for good opinion, and I certainly wouldn't object to, and in fact strongly encourage, good opinion pieces. But why is opinion also part of the news pieces? Why do news pieces have to have so much opinion in them? Why, for example, when we listen to the news on the radio is it dispersed with a journalist's view instead of a greater attempt at objectivity. Why is it, for example, that with current affairs interviews it becomes very obvious what the position of the

interviewer is. On the BBC World Service, there still seems to be a standard where you wouldn't have any idea how the reporter felt. You would never know what position the interviewer might take on a subject. Sometimes with our news services we get more from the interviewer than we do from the interviewee. That's what I'm talking about.

Q: If this compact that we speak of exists, why don't we have freedom of the press legislated either in law or indeed enshrined in the Constitution?

DF: We don't have it in the Constitution because the founders of this country, when they looked at the two documents which essentially guaranteed freedom of the press, [found that] one led to the Terror and Bonaparte dictatorships and that didn't seem to augur well, while the other, the American Bill of Rights, was never intended to serve the purpose it serves today. It wasn't about giving freedom to individuals. It was about giving freedom from a central government. That was the purpose of the Bill of Rights. So when our founding fathers looked around the world, the greatest encouragement they got, in terms of freedom, were countries similar to Australia - the United Kingdom, Canada and so on.

So that's the reason why we don't have freedom of the press enshrined in the Constitution. I don't think we're worse off by having it. I used to think we were but I suspect that probably we're just as well off without a constitutional guarantee. Responsible government ensures you get the maximum amount of freedom. What I am talking about tonight is cultural change where there was a greater respect, once. I think there was a "Golden Age" in which fact and opinion were clearly distinguishable. There was an attempt to be very objective in the giving of the fact.

Q: Could you date the "Golden Age"? What time are you talking about?

DF: When I was young of course (Laughter).

Q: That wasn't so long ago. When was the "Golden Age"? Was it the 1950s, 1960s, 1970s?

DF: The 1950s and 1960s were still a period where we were getting news without it being over interspersed with opinion. That doesn't mean you can't analyse. Now there is a great incentive for young journalists with the photograph and by-line to tell you what they think rather than to try and say what really happened.

Q: I wanted your comment on a trend I have observed. I do agree that there is a general loss of

faith in the institutions. And I would say that it's generational. Possibly the change from 1960s idealists to 1990s cynics as age grabs them. However, I also detected in John Alexander's 1998 Andrew Olle Memorial speech, and among some very senior media practitioners (Paul Kelly being one), a concern and recognition that fact and opinion have blended to the detriment of reporting in all forms of media. They seem to be prepared to take a lead in airing this subject. One factor I observed in triggering that was the Hanson factor where the media saw their responsibility in the promotion of Pauline Hanson, rethought their role and were alarmed by it. I've heard Margo Kingston, for instance, from *The Sydney Morning Herald* express a kind of mea culpa. Do you see that trend occurring among senior journalists? Do you think it can be discouraged? That it may be symptomatic of a broader trend among practitioners?

DF: I agree that there are very good senior journalists. Michelle Grattan, when she interviewed me, phoned me back so many times just to double check and triple check that she had got it right, which I think was remarkable. And there are a number of other senior journalists, including some in this room whom I'm not going to embarrass by naming, who obviously do their job very well. But I think they are exceptions. I hope that they're exercising a leadership. You mentioned Ms Hanson. In my paper I used the verb "to hansonise", which means the media making a mountain out of a molehill and giving it a status. A celebrity status beyond its wildest dreams. And that's what happened in that case. The media must bear an enormous responsibility for the phenomenon of Pauline Hanson across the nation. That maiden speech didn't deserve the reaction it got.

Q: When it comes to truth-seeking journalism, which newspaper and which TV program would you say is one of the better ones? Not only here in Australia, but in the English speaking world. Are the New York papers better than ours? Or the British papers better than ours in seeking the truth?

DF: I quite like the *London Telegraph*. *The Spectator* is amusing but for opinion. It's not a newspaper. But there is still quality journalism and there are quality reporters in Australia. I must admit that I spend a good hour in the morning, I suppose, reading the newspapers, reading the solid opinion pieces and getting a lot of pleasure out of them, and getting irritated sometimes. There's been some excellent work done in Australia when you think of some of the disclosures. For example, what happened in Queensland. The ABC and the *Courier Mail* were significant.

Q: It's been argued that the concentration of media ownership doesn't matter because of the proliferation of opinionated journalists who have lots of views and who cross the spectrum. Would that be your view or should we still worry about what may seem to be a trend of concentration of media ownership in this country?

DF: I suspect that a lot of concentration is ephemeral and particularly in relation to media proprietors. Media empires come and go. Today with the greater autonomy of journalists I think it matters less than it did. The other factor is that we're not as cut off as we used to be as nation or state. So it's very easy for news to get in. I remember frequently referring to the fact that in the 1930s in Britain, it was possible for news about the coming constitutional crisis - the King and Mrs Simpson - to be common knowledge and written up widely in the American and French press. But it was completely unknown in the United Kingdom except among a rarified elite. I suspect that concentration, while still important, is not as big a problem as it used to be. But I wouldn't advocate getting rid of the Trade Practices Act. Certainly you need strong general competition. As you know, I have to administer the cross media rules and that's a matter for the legislator to determine. Whether they should remain in place. That's something the Productivity Commission I'm sure will have something to say on.

“I think the Director of Public Prosecutions in New South Wales makes a mistake when he goes around the country talking about the need to change the laws which he is bound to administer.”

Q: Could I ask a question about what became the abdication crisis. Before that it was the dalliance between the King and Mrs Simpson. These were the days when, according to earlier aspects of your speech, you were saying there was great public confidence in the press. But obviously it was misplaced confidence, because that was the biggest story between the wars in Britain, and virtually no Brits knew about it apart from this elite that you referred to. So was that public confidence misplaced?

DF: Public figures are entitled to a degree of privacy. At some stage, that affair crossed between being a private fact and became a public fact which people were entitled to know. I don't think normally one is entitled to know about the sexual lives of our leaders, presidents, kings or prime ministers. There is a time when it does become public. The serious error I suspect in Britain was that all the proprietors got

ANNOUNCEMENT

**Donald McDonald
Chairman
ABC
to address
The Sydney Institute
in
August 1999**

SPEAKER : Donald McDonald
(Chairman, Australian
Broadcasting Corporation)

TITLE : *The Importance of Public
Broadcasting*

DATE : Wednesday 4 August 1999

TIME : 5.30 for 6.00pm

VENUE : The Chifley Conference
Room (Rm102), Level 1, 2
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together like a cartel, instead of each making their individual decisions. There was a failure there.

Q: Just going back to the cross media ownership laws, I was wondering what your position was on any relaxation of those laws, and also what impact this would have, if any, on the level of confidence in the media in Australia?

DF: In my other life, when I was Chairman of the Press Council, I drafted a position paper, which to my great surprise, was accepted unanimously by the council which included representatives of PBL, (Kerry Packer's group), Fairfax and News and public members and journalists. And that argued for the removal of both cross media and foreign investment restrictions but the adoption of a share of voice approach, or measure, whereby you could measure the concentration over and above what is in the Trade Practices Act. Now that I'm Chairman of the Broadcasting Authority I have the duty to administer cross media rules.

“We were correct in finding that he [Brian Powers] was not in control.”

I think the Director of Public Prosecutions in New South Wales makes a mistake when he goes around the country talking about the need to change the laws which he is bound to administer. I'm talking about the drug laws. I don't think it would be appropriate for me, from my position, to argue against the existing laws, to express my personal opinion in public, because then I would be taking over the role of the legislatures. That's their job and I shouldn't move into their field. If I want to do that, I should stand for parliament.

Q: What about the second part of the question then? Do you think any relaxation of the laws would have any impact on people's levels of confidence in the media?

DF: It depends on what you put in their place. What the Press Council proposed was the existing Trade Practices laws and an additional test which was to put a ceiling on a measured share of voice of the proprietor. So, in effect, it proposed a measure of concentration above which nobody could go. If you had only one proprietor of all media in Australia - no ABC, no SBS - then I think public confidence in the media would be zero. I don't think a re-arrangement of cross media would affect confidence. After all, they only date from 1988 in their present form. We didn't have cross media restrictions before then. We had foreign investment restrictions on the broadcast media but no cross media rules. I don't think that

there's been a decline in confidence since 1988 attributable to the cross media rules.

Q: Can I just ask a final question on your role in the ABA? You recently had to make a decision on the concept of control. In a rapidly developing industry like the media, how do you come to that judgement? Do you look at precedent? Do you look at overseas examples? What's the process of coming to that decision?

DF: That was about Brian Powers and his position in John Fairfax Limited. To find a breach of the Act you would have had to have found that Brian Powers was in control of Fairfax. He was chairman of Fairfax. You would have had to have found that Brian Powers was an associate of Kerry Packer, as defined in the Act. You're asking about control. Control we decided was a practical matter. It was a down-to-earth commercial matter. There are some guidelines in the Act which tell you how to approach what is essentially a commercial, down-to-earth matter.

We looked at how Fairfax was actually being run. We asked ourselves, was there a Board which was functioning? Did the Board have command over what it was doing? What about the committees of the Board? Was the Board meeting regularly? Was there, between the chairman and the staff, a CEO? Was the chairman an executive chairman? And having looked at what happens in other public companies, we found that this was a company in which the Board was in control. The Board is several people - and there wasn't a majority which, for some reason, had to show deference to Brian Powers. They weren't in his control. It was an independent Board and they were actually running it. And there was a CEO. We restricted our finding to the period before what we called the interregnum - when John Alexander was dismissed and before the then CEO, Bob Muscat, left. A committee of three was set up (Brian Powers chairing it) to manage. But we had a very clear indication from them that they would, as soon as possible, find a new CEO. Which they did. The new CEO, Professor Fred Hilmer, has demonstrated that he's actively operating under the Board at Fairfax. It's something we will keep under surveillance, monitoring. And I think this demonstrates that we were correct in finding that he [Brian Powers] was not in control.



THE SEARCH FOR A GOOD LIFE

Anne Henderson

A lot can happen in a thousand years. Millenarianism in early Christianity, as described in Norman Cohn's *The Pursuit of The Millennium* (1970), believed a messiah (Christ) would bring salvation for the faithful, the deserving poor, in an earthly kingdom lasting 1000 years. Today, the idea of millennium is simply one hell of a party, starting 31, December 1999.

Not much salvation is apparent at the end of the second millennium. "Happiness" is a film depicting human nature as a dark undercurrent in ordinary experience. Television news reports for the last Easter weekend before 2000 recorded a flood of refugees spilling from Kosovo as millions did in other chapters of 20th Century history - under Stalin, Hitler, Ataturk, Pol Pot to name a few. Only now it's live on television. The messiah is technology. And the faithful are alienated.

Church has given way to state. Government now provides for the needy, arbitrates codes of community behaviour and sets the vision for nations. Moreover, decades of contest between communism and capitalism have finally declared the latter the winner. Madonna's material world is for real. Viewing the mass media each week, market predictions, the GDP, the Dow Jones index and the value of the dollar, hold a central place in measuring national success. And if we can master the information technology revolution and value add the country's raw materials our future is made. But, if belief in the market is our millenium salvation, it's a long way short of satisfying community needs and desires.

With ideological politics behind us, we're falling back on experience and feeling. For many, in spite of good economics, that's not reassuring. Major political parties are bearing the brunt of widespread disenchantment. Moreover, competition economics leaves many discarded citizens in its wake.

Take voting. In October 1998, less than three years after one of the greatest election wins ever, John Howard's Coalition managed just 39.5 per cent of first preference votes, scoring below Kim Beazley's Opposition which managed 40.1 per cent. Over 20 per cent of voters chose neither of the potential government parties. Six months later, with economic

news recording something of a national boom, the Howard Government was preferred by just 43 per cent of voters, the same as for Labor. In the New South Wales State election in March, the Carr Government won something of a landslide with only 42.8 per cent of first preference votes and the Coalition was walloped on 33 per cent.

The voices of alienation have most audibly surfaced in the rise of the One Nation Party. It reflects disquiet at rapid displacement of familiar norms - be it monolithic ethnicity or old style banking. One Nation policies echo similar voices in Europe and America. They scapegoat immigrants, globalisation, "elites", welfare recipients, Indigenous groups, prisoners. Not materially poor, they're intimidated by incoming global pluralism dominated by the well educated.

The fluidity of today's politics is both a challenge and a dilemma. Conservative John Howard, New Labour Tony Blair and Bill Clinton have capitalised on electorates eager to wind back the welfare budget. Mutual obligation, expecting welfare recipients to make some contribution, is now favoured practice. Dole recipients can be made to do menial work for their allowances. Single mothers likewise. Policies of zero tolerance and prison for minor offenders mark a more authoritarian approach. In the US 1.5 per cent of the potential workforce is in prison, another several million have vanished off the work/dole statistics. Libertarianism from the 1970s is being reigned in.

It's a utilitarian clean up. It seeks to draw the boundaries tight, to balance the accounts, to offer security. But it hasn't satisfied voters.

Why is it, after all the public policy experiments - welfare state, free market economics - people are disgruntled? More so than ever. Britain's New Labour think tank Demos believes it's a major problem facing democracies and it recently published *The Good Life* (29 contributors) seeking to solve the problem. Conservatives like Roger Scruton link up with progressive thinkers like Will Hutton, Helen Wilkinson and Geoff Mulgan.

The overall consensus of the contributors is that whatever delivers happiness it's more than money. While those in richer countries are happier, extremes of wealth and poverty don't make for contentment. When market driven democracies deliver greater gaps between rich and poor, as they are doing, dissatisfaction rises. Over 40 years, consumer spending has doubled but it's shared unevenly across consumption categories. Federal Reserve chairman Dr Alan Greenspan recently conceded that exorbitant CEO salaries were a waste of shareholders money. Voter dissatisfaction cannot be solved by measurement of the GDP.

We're a lot better informed. Not just about refugees and NATO bombing, but also about the wealth of some and the impoverishment of others. As Will Hutton points out, when we become more aware of difference in our ranks, more informed about our social condition, inequality is more psychologically damaging. "More unequal societies," he warns, "are those with higher suicide rates, less trust and more violence"

So material consumption runs the risk of reducing rather than improving the quality of our lives. We become alienated and angry at conspicuous consumption. "I find it obscene that Gordon Brown can spend more on a haircut than families receive or earn in a week," writes Bob Holman.

For political leaders there's an irony here. Pressed to wind back the welfare state, by voters as much as by a need to balance budgets, pressed to allow more competition among individuals, more individualisation, governments are caught with policies that don't necessarily improve the overall condition of voters. Individualisation can be central to national grumbling.

Individualisation has led to a shift from institution to relationship. It has also led to increased expectations. Once marriage delivered easy-to-follow formats. Mother at home, father at work and so on. Now marriage, especially for young women, is expected to meet needs for companionship, personality development and emotional security. "A relationship without partnership," writes Penny Mansfield, "has no anchor." But partnership is harder. Hence marriage breakdown and single mothers have become a social concern, especially for the care of children.

The ethos at the onset of another millennium is competition. "We live in a world of increasing complexity in which constant reform is necessary to keep ahead, let alone lead. To stand still is to go backwards," shadow treasurer Simon Crean told *The Sydney Institute* in March. His colleague and shadow minister for finance Lindsay Tanner, author of *Open Australia*, has challenged Labor to walk away from outmoded attitudes and accept the market driven information age as reality: "Rethinking the boundaries of universal, residual and private provision is the first requirement of reforming our welfare and community services."

Ian Donges, president, National Farmers Federation, recently told the VFF Grains Group the good news from agriculture - higher yields, gross value of rural production catapulting to \$28 billion and cotton production surpassing wool for the first time in Australia's history. In two years, agriculture and agribusiness had created 20,000 jobs. There aren't enough young people to fill the vacancies. And that's

the catch. Emerging farmers are tertiary educated. Successful farming is high tech, at the cutting edge of food research and development.

So what happens to those in rural communities that can't come up to expectations? The findings of two reports on rural communities - *Bush Talks* (HREOC) and *State of the Regions* (NIEIR) - point to inequalities both between and within regions in Australia. Rural people not in primary industry, as regional services shadow minister Cheryl Kernot reminded the Lismore Workers Club earlier this year, "have been pretty much left off the agenda". The Minister for Regional Services John Anderson echoed this, telling the National Press Club he fears Australia is becoming two nations: the opportunity-rich city and the alienated, declining bush. Competition has left large numbers of voters (as one *Bush Talks* voice put it) wanting governments to acknowledge that they are "part of a society rather than part of an economy".

Another millennium dawns with serious doubts about the ability of market economics to provide for all. In December 1998, Employment Minister Peter Reith, a market believer, wrote to John Howard of his concern that "there is plenty of evidence that permanent marginalisation of particular groups will generate high social risks down the track". So far there is scant evidence the Howard Government has any idea how to tackle the problem. Unemployment figures are down but having a job doesn't necessarily mean earning a sufficient living.

We live in an age of abundance, according to David Goldblatt in *The Good Life*, but have no idea how to enjoy it. Australia invests heavily (\$60 million annually) in deterring and detaining refugees while border camps across the globe fill with homeless millions, many well educated and from professional backgrounds. The world's richest 20 per cent account for 86 per cent of expenditure on personal consumption.

While inequality abounds, voters will increasingly view leaders with indifference. That's not good for business or government. A good life is something greater than the sum of what we can consume before we die. It would be sad to think this was more universally recognised at the end of the last millennium than at the close of our present, supposedly more enlightened, one.

(Anne Henderson is Deputy Director of *The Sydney Institute*)



THE GALLERY AND "PRINCESS NATASHA"

A.B. Cassandra

I've never really liked the Democrats. I mean it's not as if they ever really stood for anything. They dreamt up a good slogan - "Keep the bastards honest"- which, when you think about it doesn't really mean a whole lot except - "hey, look at us we're the referees." It's hard to keep the bastards honest though when you've become one yourself, and well, the GST deal has pretty much made sure of that.

The party now has a deputy leader who appears to be something of a celebrity. I've never met Stott-Despoja, never spoken to her. Never understood what all the fuss was about. In fact, the most substantial thought I think I've had about Despoja was where did her name originate from?

Being something of a bad tempered conservative who avoids the Democrats like the plague, I was quite happy then to leave it there until this latest bout of Natasha hysteria.

It appears because Despoja was the youngest woman to enter parliament - 25 in 1995 - she has for the last four years been the focus of endless media profiles and attention. Messrs Keating and Fraser both entered Parliament at the same age. The press did not pay them any real attention for years. They were not women and our national media did not gyrate in apoplexy over two 25-year-old gawky males until they actually did something.

Natasha, it seems, has been the subject of enormous interest, for just being Natasha. This, it is now claimed, is part of Despoja's "ruthless use of the media" for self-promotion. Of course, the media itself is not ruthless, so benign in fact that it allowed itself to be manipulated by a 25-year-old newly appointed Senator from South Australia. Manipulated into writing puff pieces of no substance for four years! Now it seems the gig is up. Despoja has been unmasked as "more sizzle than sausage". What an intrepid group of investigative journalists our press gallery has become. Four years to discover Despoja is "more sizzle than sausage".

So now Despoja is in a spot of bother, it appears, over the GST and all manner of strange stories that are appearing about her. At the end of April, Despoja

travelled to Albania to visit the Kosovo refugees. A series of strategic leaks led to reports in the *Daily Telegraph* and *Sunday Mail* alleging that she had variously:

1. Travelled to Albania for 24 hours and then spent weeks shopping in Rome;
2. Travelled to Albania without advising the Senate;
3. Travelled to Albania without properly advising her party;
4. Travelled to Albania whilst the GST debate was on.

As it turns out, Despoja stopped over in Rome for several hours between connecting flights, advising the Government, Senate and the Democrats of her trip. Indeed, it appears that everybody including the Whip's office had been appropriately informed with all the requisite approvals granted. The GST debate began in the Senate the day before Natasha returned. The debate has been going for a year. Natasha is not the Democrat spokesperson on tax. She has little carry of the debate beyond her later objections and at that time (pre Senator Harradine's dummy spit), the focus of the debate was hardly on the Democrats.

During the course of the recent parliamentary GST debate there have been at least 30 Members absent from Parliament for various reasons, including Treasurer Peter Costello who took off to Malaysia for an APEC Conference the day before Senator Harradine ruled out a GST compromise and the whole debate spun into crisis. But no sooner had the Kosovo beat up subsided than a new manufactured crisis was bedevilling Despoja. "Her commitment and depth as a politician and Democrat deputy leader are being questioned by her peers, of all parties as never before? Senator Stott Despoja will still be in demand as a guaranteed crowd puller for TV shows, quiz nights and speaking engagements requiring celebrity refinement", thundered one column.

It appears Despoja is all fluff and no substance. It's that sizzle factor. "Natasha should spend less time on *Good News Week* and more time working" - claims an anonymous source to the *Daily Telegraph*. "She has let celebrity get in the way of professionalism," claims Frank Devine in *The Australian*. "She's there for the fame, not for her ability to lead or produce credible politics," says the *Herald Sun*. Pretty heavy fire. But is it true?

Despoja shouldn't be on *Good News Week*. Why not? Politicians are lining up to be on it, in fact, anything on TV that will give them exposure.

In recent weeks Senator Amanda Vanstone and Barry Jones have both appeared on *Good News Week*.

Both Peter Reith and Peter Costello would boogie on down with Elle McFeast. Jeff Kennett is falling over himself if there's an audience under 30. Labor Senator Kate Lundy is on any electronic medium that will resonate with the X generation. In fact Labor is throwing buckets of money at the Internet to try to cash in on the perceived "Natasha vote" their internal polling tells them the Democrats are pulling in. John Howard is doing policy gyrations to bring in the X generation vote. And Tim Fischer tells rock station listeners that he's a fan of the band silverchair.

So why is it unacceptable for Despoja? Seems as though we see her face too often. Apparently, Natasha only does profile. "She's the one politician who's famous only for being famous? There's less to Natasha Stott Despoja than meets the eye", sums up the *Herald Sun*. She's a lightweight. She's dumb. Took an army of journalists four years to work it out but now the secret is finally out and everyone suddenly worked it out at the same time - she's a dumb blond.

Since the beginning of the year alone, Despoja has produced more than 150 speeches, press releases and opinion pieces. That's not a bad innings for six months. Apart from the Ministry there wouldn't be many MPs who could boast those figures in parliament. Bother to read *Hansard* and one soon realises that her contributions are quite substantive.

On Voluntary Student Unionism she's given the government a bit of a run for their money. She has made considerable contributions on the Export Market Development Grants Legislation, Broadcasting Services Amendment (Online Services) Bill (internet censorship to you illiterate computer nerds), Job Network, Bank Fees, Youth Policy, Job Creation, Genetically Modified Food, Women's issues, Referendum Legislation Amendment Bill, Republic Preamble, Drugs policy and more. The government has on several occasions been forced to acknowledge the quality of her substantial policy contributions. Had anyone bothered to check, they would have quickly learned that she's not at all stupid. Quite a dilligent and intelligent Senator actually, particularly when you put her up against a dozen or so MPs twice her age that come readily to mind.

But if Despoja thought things were getting tough the "Impossible Princess" as the *Courier Mail* has dubbed her was about to get flattened. The first shot began on 22 May. Stott-Despoja, seeing her leader set to enter into talks with the government over the tax package claimed "there's very little room to move" on the Democrats GST position, noting that the

parliamentary party position was obligated to the party membership.

When Natasha raised her hand to speak out in a party that prides itself on giving its members the freedom to vote with their conscience, let alone policy, her party leader Meg Lees spat the dummy! Natasha made a comment. Lees banned all her Senators from saying another word on Tax. Now, it's meant to be Natasha who spits the dummy. But when the pressure's really on, it's Meg Lees who over reacts.

Not only does Meg Lees gag her party, but for good measure this quote about Natasha is anonymously leaked to the Australian: "It was not helpful to say the least", said one member of the Democrats camp. She is young and immature and she thinks she understands power politics, but she doesn't".

Meg Lees and co have graduated from "Junior politics with Training Wheels 101" for exactly 12 minutes and already they're experts in power politics. As for Despoja, - just one comment and Lees has gagged her whole party. So who doesn't understand power politics?

By Friday 28 May, the tax agreement had been signed with the government. But Lees had not yet received 12 hours of good press coverage before her problems would begin. Will Natasha cross the floor? Will she stand by party policy? "A stand of conscience by Despoja", "Book betrayal". Lees cuts the deal, Despoja is again the star. Not bad for someone who doesn't understand power politics. What does Meg Lees do? According to our sources, Meg explodes.

Meg's first 20-minute foray into power politics is about to go belly up. She's got three former leaders, John Coulter, Janet Powell and Cheryl Kernot all attacking the deal. She's got Andrew Bartlett about to join Despoja in crossing the floor. Sections of the party membership are up in arms. What to do?

By the next week the strategy becomes clear. The leaked attacks and briefings against Natasha have turned from a steady stream into a torrent. Meg Lees is all about a serious political party "We are not a lobby group. We are a serious political party." And Natasha? Well Natasha opposed the deal. So she represented all that was old and bad about the party. Natasha embodied the fairies at the bottom of the garden tag that the party carries. Bellowed a compliant Melbourne *Age* "Natasha Stott Despoja's antics suggest there is a world of difference between political players and a political party." What antics? Despoja it seems, is guilty of trying to maintain the integrity of her party's pre-election commitments.

The point lost on most is that the Democrats are not a serious political party. The most enduring myth in this whole sordid tale is that because Meg Lees sat down for four days with the Prime Minister, overnight, her party has become transformed from a collection of counter culture refugees into the American Enterprise Institute. As for serious power politics, well the only people who believe that are Meg Lees, three of her born again former school teacher followers, any Canberra press gallery journalist that Lees press secretary John Schumann has been whispering to. Welcome to the real world of Australian power politics.

But back to Natasha. By the weekend there were horror headlines in Sydney, Melbourne and Adelaide. "Suicide Blonde -Stott Despoja under pressure over GST and love life". "The Democrats bright young deputy leader has taken a brave stand against the GST compromise, but does Natasha Stott Despoja have what it takes to withstand the pressure?" screamed the *Sunday Telegraph*. And just in case she doesn't - well we're going to push her over the edge.

So we learn that Natasha "now finds a romantic relationship interfering with her previously obsessive pursuit of power? There are rumours her health is being sapped? More sizzle than sausage? The Kosovo trip? Princess Natasha." It's all guns blazing, power politics Democrats style. We hear about Despoja's relationships which, quite frankly, on a need to know basis, we don't. We hear the rumours about her health, which aren't true - rumours usually aren't.

Then there's that line, "more sizzle than sausage". The same one that keeps coming up. Like a signature from a terrorist on his plastic explosive, it's always the one phrase that gives the briefer away. And then the tour de force. "She made herself a natural target for interest in her personal life, given her looks, profile, age, single status,..". That's right, it's her fault. Natasha is the victim, but it's her fault. Why? She looks good, she's got a high profile, she's young, and she's single. But here's the kicker. Here's the officially sanctioned word from the Democrat elders: "But the party elders believe Stott Despoja's media sensitivity does show that she is too inexperienced, especially compared with rock solid Lees, to become leader."

Media sensitivity! You'd have to be a slab of beef not to allow all this from your own team to get to you. As for rock solid, I can't recall Meg Lees subjected to anything approximating this. One doubts she could cope given her performance to date. Come to think of it, I don't recall any member of parliament that isn't up on criminal charges subjected to anything like this before.

HAPPY FAMILIES

Family life is under siege from all sides. Family breakdown, single parents, divorce, multidimensional relationships, personal freedom and independence are now all features of what used to be the safe haven of the happy family that never broke up. To explain some of what's happening and how to deal with the instability in our family relationships, writer Susan Varga will address The Sydney Institute fresh from her new work *Happy Families*.

Susan Varga was born in Hungary and came to Australia as a child. She has an MA in English Literature and a law degree. Her first book *Heddy and Me* won the 1994 FAW Christina Stead Award for biography.

SPEAKER : Susan Varga (Author, *Happy Families* [1999] and *Heddy and Me*)

TOPIC : *Families - Fact and Fiction*

DATE : Wednesday 11 August 1999

TIME : 5.30 for 6.00pm
Light refreshments

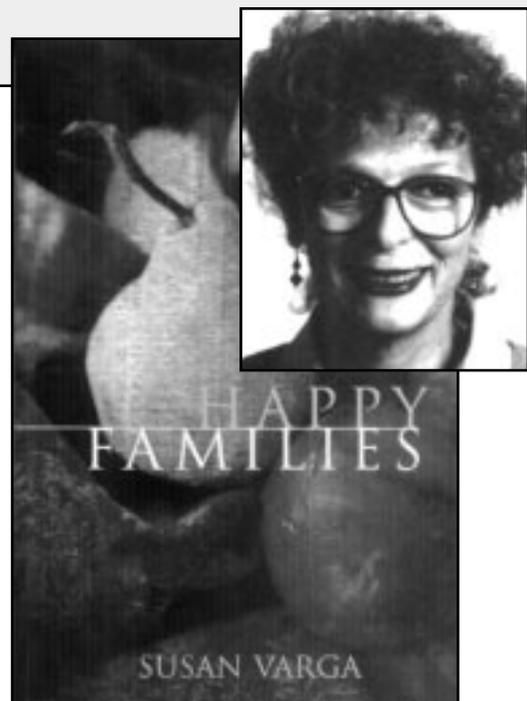
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By Sunday 6 April Natasha really had spat the dummy. To a chorus of Democrat elders whispering "I told you so", Natasha hit out at elements she believed were destabilising her. "I'm sick of people trying to white ant me or undermine my position, and I'm not standing for it. It's no coincidence that the campaign is being waged against me...when I have a different position from that of some of my colleagues in relation to the GST," Despoja tells a press conference in Adelaide. Which is more or less what Howard and Peacock said about each other for ten years. It's what Hawke said about Keating during the worst of their leadership tussle. But Natasha's outburst is portrayed in the national media as a baby spitting the dummy.

It gets worse. There are four words missing from a badly mangled transcript of Natasha's press conference that her office has released. In response to questions about her relationship with Meg Lees, Despoja said, "I'm concerned about unsourced reports *out of her office* that somehow I can't handle the case, that I'm leaving politics." The words in italics were omitted from the final transcript. Natasha is accused of deliberately distorting the transcript, of being paranoid, of white anting herself. There are at least a dozen errors in the transcript. It's a bad transcript. It happens to all politicians at some time. Want to hear the rest of the press conference a self righteous media don't tell you about?

Journalist: How is the relationship with your partner at the moment?

Despoja: Oh, I'm not going to answer that.

Journalist: Do you want babies?

But Natasha is complaining about white anting from the leader's office. This is a good story. Yet almost every journalist misses the point. Natasha is complaining about a sustained lack of loyalty from her leader. What kind of leader allows this type of leaking and undermining of her deputy to continue unabated for several months? If Lees didn't sanction it, then it's coming from pretty high up. Why didn't she stop it? Did she tacitly approve?

The only other alternative is that Meg Lees has no idea about what's going on in either her office or her parliamentary party. That seems to be the suggestion in Lees' response. She was puzzled by Natasha's comments and then decided she found them to be "extraordinary". Well it's not as if Despoja is hallucinating. The press gallery confirm that they have received calls from "senior Democrats". Damaging quotes are attributed to "Democrat party elders". The negative briefing against Natasha is orchestrated to accelerate into overdrive at strategic

times - like just when Meg Lees' GST deal looks set to be overshadowed by Natasha's refusal to support the deal in the Senate.

So why is Lees so puzzled? Is the woman packaged as the sharp, in control, new corporate Democrat of the 1990s truly ignorant of what is happening around her? Or is she in fact worse than the bastards she is meant to keep honest?

Natasha is unfortunately now just where Democrat elders would like her to be. Her halo image is damaged. She's seen to be self indulgent, treacherous, and immature. By mid week, *The Australian*, who has been literally falling over themselves in support of the GST, launch a stinging editorial attacking Despoja. "Politics, the truism says, is a tough business - as Australian Democrats deputy leader Natasha Stott Despoja is finding out. Not for the first time has Senator Stott Despoja shown that she has a thin skin." That's a little rich. But the editorial spills into the surreal when it suggests that Despoja's crime is that she will vote on the GST as a matter of conscience "It would of course have been better if she had said this before the federal election as the Democrats campaigned for a GST (with some exemptions) and for tax reform". Because Natasha won't play along she shows "a naivety about the political process that is surprising".

How we forget. Wasn't it Meg Lees that signed her name to full-page newspaper advertisements declaring that a tax on books was abhorrent? Wasn't that Meg Lees who gave those unequivocal pre election commitments that the Democrats would never support a GST on books? But alas that was last week's policy.

Which brings us to Natasha's recent appearance on the ABC's *Four Corners*. And finally we hear Natasha explaining that she would be breaking an election promise if she voted for a tax on books. "That's a promise I made and it's not one that I'm going to break. But it's fundamentally important, and are we so cynical? I mean, everyone in the media who has chastised me for being petulant or self indulgent in the last week has done so primarily because they think I don't understand what compromise is all about, what real politics is about. What's wrong with not wanting to break a promise that, personally, I made?"

So let's see. If you break a political promise you're usually in the dog house. Meg Lees broke a core promise on books and GST - now the *Bulletin* lauds her as the "Real Leader of the Opposition". Natasha tries to keep her commitment to a core promise - she's immature and doesn't understand real politics. "Stott Despoja has well and truly earned boos from her

fellow Democrats. Spotlight withdrawal pains look to be a key reason for her refusing to go along with the GST deal," writes Frank Devine in *The Australian*.

The last figure in this slightly melodramatic Democrat power play is the indefatigable John Schumann. Meg Lees' press secretary, Schumann who haunts the parliamentary press gallery has been the subject of much finger pointing as the source of many rumours damaging to Despoja.

Schumann, you may recall, is that galah who screeched on to our TV screens in the middle of the count for the last federal election. Amongst much self-indulgent bravado we had to listen whilst he championed himself as the great dragon slayer who was set to knock off Alexander Downer from his seat of Mayo. As it happened, Schumann did no such thing, which is why he is back trailing behind Lees. Prior to his most recent incarnation as a Democrat apparatchik, Schumann was the lead singer in that Australian protest band RedGum. More Red than gum, Schumann would whine on with torrid tales of multinational colonisation of our land - although a division of CBS America released his albums.

Schumann denies emphatically the suggestion that he has planted stories about Despoja. All of which brings to mind Mandy Rice Davis of Profumo Affair fame. Whilst being cross examined at the Old Bailey, Davis was asked how she accounted for the fact that Lord Astor had denied her accounts of sex romps at his home, "Clivedon". "Well he would, wouldn't he," she replied. That brought that house down too.

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BOOK REVIEWS

John McConnell

BARRY HUMPHRIES' FLASHBACKS.
Text written by Roger McDonald, adapted from the television series written by Barry Humphries and David Mitchell and produced by John McLean.
Harper Collins Publishers,
pb, 1999, rrp \$34.95
ISBN O 7322 5825 I

A quick quiz. Who do you think spoke about their contribution to history in the following words? "I'm drawn like a moth to the flame of events - a blowfly to the bull's bum of history. And I was at that airport when that poor old commo sheila, Mrs. Petrov, was dragged off by the K.B.GEES. And like Prince Charming, I grabbed hold of her shoe. I did! And I've still got it, readers. It's a commo sheila's shoe. It's red, and it's been under the bed. Are you with me? I thought I'd hang on to it all these years in case I fell in love with a sheila with one leg".

Yes, it is none other than Sir Les Patterson. Maybe it's just plain Les these days.

Let's try one more. "Hello possums!" No this is unrelated to Hansard. A further clue? OK.

The gladdie is a very complex flower. It's not as simple and adorable as it seems. I had a moment in my life when

I was disappointed in gladdies...I found out just by accident...that the gladiolus is a bisexual hermaphrodite. Well, that didn't worry me at the time, because I didn't know what those things meant. But I looked them up in a spooky old book, and I was not pleased with what I read...And to this day, I can't have them in the bedroom, unless the light is on. You never know what they're going to get up to in a vase.

Correct again. The speaker is Edna Everage, known previously as Dame Edna.

Now we could proceed on to Sandy Stone and a host of other characters - to the diversity of voices and personalities that is Barry Humphries. Many observations of Barry Humphries, Edna Everage, Les Patterson and Sandy Stone together with a few lesser-known types are available in *barry humphries' flashbacks*.

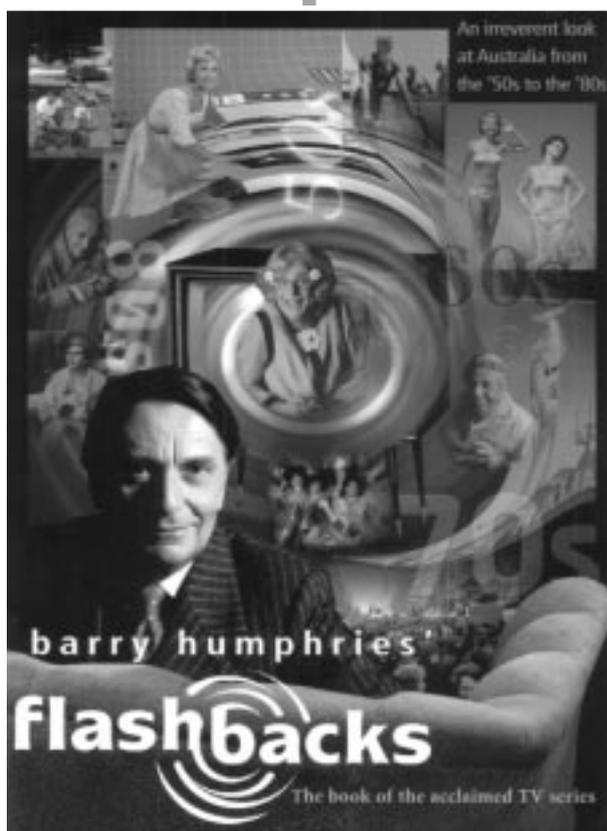
Their assorted comments are interspersed among photographs and Roger McDonald's text. These three elements are assembled within four different decades from the 50s to the 80s, decades that coincided with Barry Humphries' remarkable career and collection of "Australian types". There is a delightful assortment of their observations spread throughout the 200 pages of *barry humphries' flashbacks*. There is a set of magnificent photographs too - almost as many as there are pages, both colour and black and white. There are photographs of Robert Menzies,

suburbia, advertisements, topless bathers and beach inspectors, barbecues, the Bee Gees and the Beatles, Harold Holt and LBJ, Holden cars and Moratorium days. A fascinating tour of Barry Humphries and friends and the Australia they inhabited awaits readers of *flashbacks*.

Roger McDonald provides the back-ground commentary to the respective decades. McDonald has an unenviable task. He faces very intense competition for the reader's attention, even if he relies on the lively assistance of Clive James and Kathy Lette at times. Along the way, Roger McDonald passes severe judgement on John Kerr. He suggests that the dismissal was predictable. Predictable? To whom? And he appears to underestimate Communist Party tactical effectiveness by referring to "the pitifully

few card-carrying communists" in this country a few decades back. *Flashbacks*, apparently, has been shown on ABC TV. The book states that it is available from "all good video stores". That's a strike against my local shop. They do not stock the *flashbacks* video set.

The book contains a list of the selected works of Barry Humphries - theatre shows, books, recordings, television shows, films and art exhibitions. There is an interesting forward penned by Humphries. It



includes some observations about Australians and Australian society. Barry Humphries may not readily accept the label of amateur sociologist. He may prefer the titles of comic artist and entertainer. But he has provided Australians with powerful and humorous self-glimpses over a significant period of time. He notes that his characters were not intended to be exemplars, but that they made people laugh. And they will make readers of *barry humphries' flashbacks* laugh too.

**FUTURE TENSE:
AUSTRALIA BEYOND
ELECTION 1998**
The Australian, with
Paul Kelly and the
national affairs team.
Edited by
Murray Waldren
Allen & Unwin,
pb 1999,
rrp \$24.95.
ISBN I 86508 034 9

Why is it that last year's federal election seems so long ago? Perhaps it just seems that way to me. I remember it as a campaign where the spotlight shone briefly and narrowly on a limited number of political issues. Much was ignored. Certainly, no one unveiled a unifying national vision. Remember when Paul Keating had a vision? Keating's concept embraced a multicultural republic, comfortable in its Asia-Pacific location, reconciled with its indigenous people. For various reasons, Keating did not launch his vision successfully. Since then, John Howard has failed dismally at substituting a replacement script. Meanwhile, Kim Beazley has retreated some distance from Paul Keating's policies and slipped into opposition mode.

Future Tense: Australia beyond election 1998 reflects disenchantment with our most recent federal election. Eighteen national affairs writers of *The Australian* newspaper examine opportunities missed or perhaps dodged during the campaign. The early chapters set the scene for more specialised excursions. The initial chapter by Paul Kelly addresses "the paradox of pessimism". This is an Australia characterised by uncertainty and apprehension amidst growing wealth and opportunities. We are, Paul Kelly argues, a confused and insecure collection of people. We embrace modern technology enthusiastically but encounter "deepening lines of drug addicts, youth suicide

victims and broken families". We are practical, energetic and adaptive, and yet a lengthy unemployment queue persists alongside rising inequalities and social divisions.

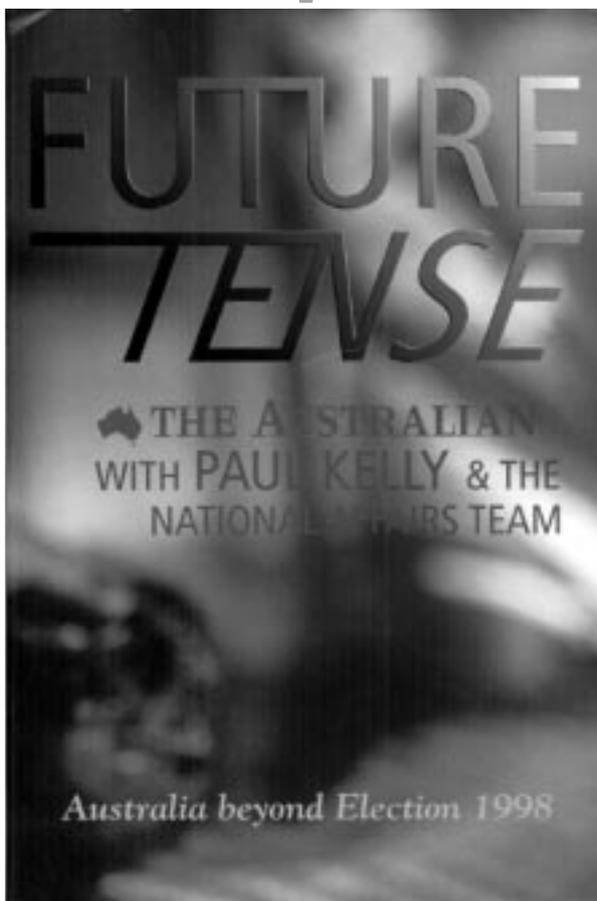
We delight in celebrating national sporting success but elsewhere slice tall poppies down to size. We value egalitarianism but to the point where we accept mediocrity. Insofar as our common values are eroding, is it any wonder we are losing confidence in our leaders and institutions?

Paul Kelly identifies three important approaching opportunities for national self-realisation (the republic and constitutional preamble, the Olympic games and commemoration of our centenary as a nation). But he warns that we need to confront our greatest limitation - our psychological pessimism.

This national pessimism prospers in spite of many national strengths and assets. Add a number of (deceptive) myths to this mix. The most significant, according to Kelly, is the notion that economic efficiency is incompatible with a more caring and tolerant society. He makes several suggestions so that globalisation may assist

people more. He calls for a reevaluation of the respective roles of individuals and governments. Ultimately, as Paul Kelly points out, our national plight transcends politics; it goes to our spirit or inner life.

Then Nicholas Rothwell reveals knowledge and insight gained through the newspaper's Reportage series. Interviews conducted around Australia revealed a deep longing for national direction. In its absence, Rothwell points out, the media and academic elite generally opposes the government's cultural credentials. What is surprising, he notes, is not how much but rather how little cultural resentment there is among ordinary Australians. He concludes that Australia requires "a leader of cultural openness, with an assured step and a willing heart". Will the real Mr. or Ms. "Leader" please stand up? Dennis Shanahan contributes two chapters on the theme of leadership and on why the 1998 federal election represents a watershed - for political parties, policies, rhetoric and the electoral pendulum.



Thereafter, the chapters delve into specialised discussions. Mike Steketee pens two chapters - on health and welfare, and the republic. Ian Henderson surveys the unemployment problem and possible policy approaches. Catherine Armitage focuses on (public) education. Michelle Gunn discusses families. Richard McGregor looks at immigration. Stuart Rintoul examines reconciliation. Asa Wahlquist presents a powerful picture of rural plight. Alan Wood considers federalism while Shelley Gare focuses on the babyboomers.

Mark Westfield addresses business leadership in the Australian political process. Robert Garran evaluates the Asian economic crisis. Patrick Walters refers to implications arising from the information revolution in military affairs. Greg Sheridan dismisses the third way as "complete baloney" while stressing the importance of globalisation and Asianising Australia.

George Megalogenis writes colourfully on the GST, briefly turning the gaze on the Canberra Press Gallery. John Howard's history-making tax reform, he argues, is equivalent to renovating only two floors of a ten-storey apartment. Nation building it is not. Besides, the GST "is prehistoric when judged in cybereyears". Beware - for it will fall prey to the internet, he warns.

Meanwhile, Kate Legge in a chapter subtitled "Removing the oxymoron from Australian intellectualism" points out the important role played by a few key individuals. Most of us, she argues, are information-rich but time-poor. We skim across the surface of public debate. We need individuals who "can provide us with a moral compass through careful judgments based on solid research, a sense of history and extensive reading".

While contributors justifiably point to John Howard's delayed and disappointing response to One Nation, they do not analyse the media's role in this same context. Nor is there any serious assessment of the media's role in partisan political debate or in adding to difficulties associated with necessary structural change.

Future Tense highlights the inadequacies of politicians. But only George Megalogenis points to the limitations of the media, and then only briefly. But the crew of *The Australian* have done a fine job of pointing out a range of problems and how the country is crying out for direction, one that will sustain Australians in a time of rapid change, globalisation and dislocation. Meanwhile, many parliamentarians continue to dabble in point-scoring and point-missing. How pointless!

(John McConnell is the co-author of several senior text books)



REVIEW OF THE REVIEWERS

Stephen Matchett

The unhappy glare of Hansonism is fast disappearing but its passing has left a curious shadow. Where once the opinion makers ignored the sorts of Australians who are not particularly well read or educated and who don't have much interest in public policy, now there is a rush to claim them for one's own.

It is a curious phenomenon, but one that was probably inevitable once the electorate turned against Labor and flirted with the Hansonite terror.

Now ideologues with quite different intellectual interests are being joined at the polemical hip by their desperate desire to demonstrate that they, and not the old opinion elites in the media and established political parties, really know what the workers believe and want.

And of course what the workers want just happens to coincide with what the ideologues, staking out their turf on the post-Keating left, happen to think.

Two new books, McKenzie Wark's *Celebrities, Culture and Cyberspace: The Light on the Hill in the Postmodern World* (Pluto Press) and Catharine Lumby's *Gotcha! Life in a Tabloid World* (Allen and Unwin) marginalise the significance of stodgy old issues like structural economic reform and replace it with a mass political culture given meaning by media studies.

For Wark and Lumby it's not the policy debate that matters but the means by which ideas are transmitted, and for them that means mass media and the culture of celebrity reigns supreme.

Lumby provides a less than convincing stroll through the foothills of media studies to argue that mass media is at the heart of Australian life and that to ignore it is to deny the preferred means of expression used by ordinary Australians.

In contrast, Wark poses as the high theorist slumming for the benefit of the theory proles; but among all the jargon there is at least an attempt to engage with the challenges that face Labor, his party of choice. Coalition supporters are clearly so irretrievably beyond the pale they don't get much of a mention. But the Hansonites do, because they - poor misguided devils - have been fed "bad information". What is worse, the stodgy old baby boomer talking heads who dominate policy debate in the press have not bothered to reject Hanson's arguments in terms the

workers can understand.

Wark's book is cumbersome, inelegantly written with worthy if commonplace ideas bulked up by the cloak of jargon. The fact that Wark respectfully discusses the writings of Mark Latham in depth may lead some less charitable readers to compare their prose styles.

Lumby reads like *Who Weekly* edited by a media theorist on secondment from a cultural studies faculty. Wark is interesting as marginalia in the debate over what is to fill the intellectual vacuum created by the electoral demise of the Keating agenda. It's this role as footnotes to the broad left debate on the future of Labor which makes these two texts interesting.

The fact that the Keating coalition of advocates for social justice and economic reform is showing signs of strain in the third year of Coalition government is probably not all that surprising. The economically literate who supported deregulation and accepted the reality of the global economy had very little in common with the arts and multicultural lobbies and none of them spoke to the hearts of the remnants of the old Labor power base in the industrial and white collar public service unions.

The fact that this unlikely coalition survived for so long is testament to the political incompetence of a generation of Liberals, the inescapable facts of a changing economy and the ability of P J Keating to mesmerise newspaper editors, film directors, merchant bankers and the occasional union leader alike.

But most of all it was a testament to Labor's capacity to occupy the intellectual high ground and to convince enough of the electorate that rapid economic change accompanied by social reform was, if not good for them, at least would be good for their kids in the decades to come.

It had to end, in part because the Labor government was tired, in part because the electorate decided that thirteen years was probably too long to leave any party in power and in some part because working

class caucasian Australia decided that the smarty pants intellectuals and multiculturalists and social engineers had got too big for their boots.

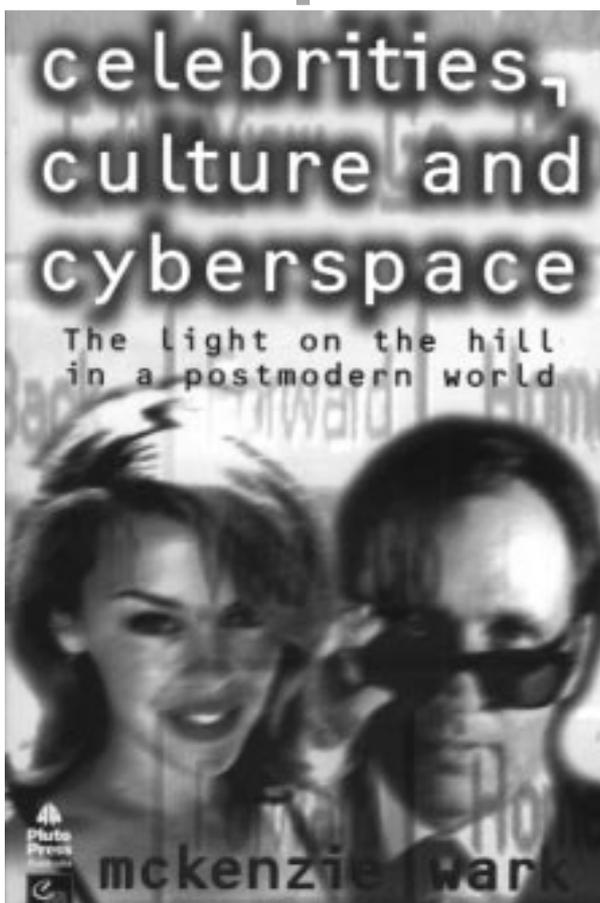
The problem for the Keating coalition, from APL apparatchiks through the left leaning environmental and welfare lobbies to organised labor, is that without the patronage that comes with the treasury benches there is little to hold them together. The last election demonstrated that Labor had discovered nothing to replace the Keating vision and that without a coherent philosophy of why Labor should be in government the electorate had no inclination to put it there.

The meaning of two election results are manifest: ordinary Australians appear to have rejected the Keating reform agenda and the challenge now is to either win them back or to come up with a credible and intellectually saleable alternative to the Coalition. For mainstream Labor thinkers this is no easy task in an environment where the old conjunction between class, job description and social liberalism has eroded.

Labor thinkers like Mark Latham and Lindsay Tanner are struggling to establish a role for the state to deliver social justice in a global economy. Tanner and Latham in particular understand that the ALP does not have a monopoly on the allegiances of ordinary Australians and has to win back their trust.

But this challenge is nothing compared to that faced by intellectuals like Wark and Lumby who purport to speak for ordinary Australians but do not share conventional Labor's unsurprising and over-riding concern with the primacy of economic policy.

Throughout the Labor years the left leaning intelligentsia could ride on the party's coat tails but now without the cover of a friendly government they stand intellectually naked on a very darkling plain. For the broad cultural left, which was never happy with Keating's emphasis on the primacy of economics, the challenge now is to demonstrate that the rejection of federal Labor in 1996 and 1998 was not a rejection of their agenda be it multiculturalist, environmentalism or, in some of the loopier



examples in Wark and Lumby, the linking of social justice to an interest in the wares of the mass media.

The result is a shouting match as various ideologues who are united only by not being Liberal-National supporters claim that they alone are keepers of reform and that only they express the aspirations of ordinary Australians, which just happen to coincide with what they think is important. Thus Lumby argues that the reason the mass of Australians do not engage with the policy focused media is not because they are uninterested in what she illuminatingly refers to as "serious issues". Of course they are, says Lumby, they just want them expressed in the populist framework of celebrity and entertainment - focused tabloid print and television they consume of choice.

Nor is this the result of the intellectual enslavement of the masses by the sinister forces that control the media. Far from it; according to Lumby, the people who read the celebrity mags and get what passes for news from commercial television and decide how to vote on the basis of the pronouncements of the claudillos of talkback radio, critically analyse what they read, see and watch. What is surprising is that Lumby argues that for political information the tabloid media is as valid as the policy press:

...the contemporary media sphere constitutes a highly diverse and inclusive forum in which a host of important social issues once deemed apolitical, trivial or personal are now being aired. These new voices often speak in a language which is foreign to the rational, educated discourse we associate with the traditional quality media. But then rational, educated conversations between experts are not the only meaningful kind of speech. (p xiii)

And just in case anybody missed the point, Lumby makes it again:

But if we really want to understand why talk shows, radio talkback and tabloid current affairs have become so popular then we need to accent that reasoned, educated speech isn't the only kind of language which is meaningful. (p 202)

The trouble is that the language of *Funniest Home Videos* is not the best form of speech for debates on funding health and education, and generating jobs, which shape all our lives and which we must understand if we are to play our role as citizens.

The problem for Lumby is that, in her rush to celebrate media diversity and her fascination with popular media as electronic anthropology, she celebrates the intellectual disenfranchisement of people who are denied or reject the opportunity to

make an informed choice on the issues that shape their lives. Micro economic reform, the Constitutional convention and tax policy are never going to make the cover of *Who Weekly* precisely because they can't be understood in the superficial language and concerns of fashion and celebrity Lumby believes are so important.

Lumby is far too clever to argue that the boring old ideas which shape the national economy and social policy aren't important. It's just that she thinks popular cultures, as presented in the mass media, are equally significant. In fact she argues that, given the universal fascination with celebrity, it's increasingly hard to tell the difference between tabloid and quality media, as all readers of the *Financial Review's* microscopic coverage of Kylie Minogue will attest.

It's a form of intellectual relativism which people who value abstract thought may find uncomfortable but Lumby makes the point that the mass media survives because it appeals to its audiences and that they take from it that which is relevant to their lives.

It's a counter intuitive argument for people bored senseless by most media, who would rather read a book than a magazine and don't rely on infotainment television for a sense of what matters in their lives. But Lumby has a far more overtly partisan purpose than merely to celebrate mass entertainment.

For a book which argues that Princess Diana is an icon for the age, long after when even the traditional women's magazines are losing interest, it is a subtle argument. In essence Lumby sees all the causes, except the boring ones concerned with how to foster equality of economic opportunity, not only vindicated but also fostered by popular culture:

...the rapid growth of the electronic mass media since the late '60s has coincided with the politicisation of many issues which were once regarded as purely personal matters. The '70s and '80s saw the rise of feminism, environmentalism, gay and lesbian rights, indigenous rights and a host of allied movements. ... These new political movements didn't spring fully formed from traditional institutions such as the academy or established political parties, they were publicised, and, in many ways, shaped by the mass media. (p 2)

That is as long as your idea of the mass media is Geraldine Doogue on *Radio National* and Rosemary Neill in *The Australian* and not Alan Jones on 2UE and Ray Chesterton in the *Telegraph*.

But even with this courageous argument Lumby is having a bob each way. If the consumers of the

popular media do not embrace her causes of choice it must be because the issues that matter are not being presented in a way that suits the mass market:

We may live in a global village but we frequently choose to filter information in a parochial manner. One conclusion that can be drawn from this behavior is that we need to make people care about serious issues and turn them away from trivial, personality driven scandals. But perhaps the opposite is true. Perhaps the popularity of scandals should alert us to the need to make information and images about pressing social issues palatable to people. Rather than demanding that popular media consumers adjust to a diet of dry, abstract issues, perhaps the highbrow media practitioners and public intellectuals need to rethink the way they organise their menu of ideas. (p218)

So the mass media interacts with its audience to lead the way on all that is good and true, except when it doesn't, and then it's because things aren't explained in ways the masses will understand. Lumby condemns media critics of left and right for sneering at the popular print and electronic media, which makes this flirtation with a celebration of ignorance a curious but useful claim.

Given Lumby's apparent position on the broad green-environmentalist-cultural studies-gender-rights left, the Hansonite phenomena should be just a tad depressing. After all, Pauline Hanson's intellectually barren and plain mean spirited interpretation of the Australian experience appealed directly to ordinary Australians and it was the popular media that allowed her one shrill voice to reach millions.

In fact it's an issue that Lumby does not duck, because in this postmodern world there are many truths and lots of ways to understand society. Trying to refute Hanson with what Lumby dismisses as "rational argument, facts and figures" will not wash. Hanson speaks the language of the uninformed and she must be confronted at the same level:

Hanson stands for the politics of feeling – on one level she's the political face of talkback radio, American talk shows and tabloid TV. Her appeal lies in her rawness, her hyperbole, and her ability to tap into visceral instincts and primal fears. When bearded sociologists attack her with logic, or clever-dick reporters start quoting figures at her, they simply confirm, her allure. (240)

PETER BEATTIE FROM QUEENSLAND

Peter Beattie is the new face of Queensland having won power in 1998 from the National Liberal government of Rob Borbridge. In a visit to Sydney, he will address the Sydney Institute in July, not only to report on the progress of his government, the opportunities for investment north of the Tweed, but also with some comment on current Federal - State relations.

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The fact that the sheer complexity of a global economy may be beyond simple and simply expressed solutions is of no consequence, because "rational, educated discourse doesn't speak to everyone in a contemporary democracy" (p240). It's a curious argument; ordinary Australians have, through their interaction with the media, taken on board the virtue of environmental activism and the rights of minorities. However through their consumption of the same media forms many of them have embraced exactly the opposite through the ravings of the Hansonites.

But in the case of those who have embraced the Hansonite line the fault lies not with them but with the "bearded sociologists" advocating "rational discourse" who use arguments which are irrelevant to ordinary people. How fortunate that we ordinary Australians have Lumby to explain what talkback shows we should listen to and what values are the right ones.

McKenzie Wark provides a superior version of the same argument in a collection of essays on the state of media culture tricked out as political comment. While the political tragi-comics fascinated by Labor's attempts to form a new line of battle which will unite all its tribes have read most of it before, Wark's discussion of the challenges the party faces is cogent and clearly written. That is apart from prognostications like:

...it is through globalisation that new sources of wealth creation will produce the pudding to be shared out to Labor's traditional base. The paradox is that the only way for Labor to honour its traditional commitments is a leap into a modern, perhaps even postmodern future.(292)

Now why didn't Gary Gray think of that for last year's campaign?

But Wark, as his subtitle gives away, is not content to merely speculate on politics. Rather he connects his concern with practical politics to the far more important issues of how all our lives are shaped by media culture.

Like Lumby, Wark believes that ordinary people find expressions of the "fair go" in the way they consume media, which is why analysing the tabloids is politically important. This is presumably why he churns out page after page on singers and celebrities who have about much political influence or impact on policy debate as McKenzie Wark.

What Wark is doing is little more than staking his claim for popular cultural practitioners, or at least his pals, as the true opinion leaders. Thus he describes (pp 138-141) a party of black dressed - vodka drinking - ever-so hip writers, performers and brilliant media

studies theorists whom he finds fascinating and presumably thinks the rest of us should too. The problem is that the established opinion media elite is too old and too "suburban" (his word) to recognise that media culture has created a new aristocracy of hip. To demonstrate how popular culture is the Rosetta stone of ordinary Australia's values he praises Paul Kelly, the songwriter, whose work:

...proposes a simple template with which a cross section of people can shape their own particular fears, hopes and identities. The complexity lies in what people do with the template. Different people can sue the same songs to shape different feelings and yet feel like they all belong to something larger than themselves. Popular art is the heart and soul of any viable culture. (p 122)

In contrast Paul Kelly, the editor, is bucketed for failing to accept that popular culture is what best expresses the correct wants and needs of the Australian people, at least as defined by the coolly correct Wark:

Nowhere did he acknowledge the possibility of combining an acceptance of reforming the economy with a radical platform on cultural change, social justice and pluralism. ... Kelly's economic modernism combined with cultural conservatism was an incoherent doctrine. (p125)

In part Wark is fudging the trail blazed out last year in Mark Davis' *Ganglands* which complained that middle aged opinion leaders would not make way for the author's far more interesting and talented peers who were being denied their right to media stardom.

But Wark is also doing something more than whingeing that the old lions will not make way. As well as claiming the commanding heights of opinion leadership he is clambering on to a soapbox as spokesperson for the masses. Thus he attacks the usual suspects of the left such as Michael Pusey, Eva Cox, and Bob Ellis, not for their capacity to deny reality but for their refusal to sell their visions of a just society in terms ordinary people can understand:

Each of these distinguished talking heads offered a critique of the limits of economic and political imagination. ... There were good proposals among them, and a stimulating dialogue to be had discussing them. But whose dialogue? It ends up being a conversation of talking heads. ... What intellectual talking heads needed was not only concepts about the fair go in

general but concepts about how the general can be expressed in the images and stories of the particular. (p137)

And of course McKenzie and his pals can do precisely what the old farts can't; speak to young people's passion for justice and the fair go in terms they will understand:

Out in community radio, zine publishing, web sites, listservers, self-organised campus reading groups and at performance nights at the local pub – people are doing it for themselves. People are working through the cultural issues and experiences that the mainstream put in the too hard basket.(p228)

Older readers who have heard it all before may want to brace themselves for a chorus of *The Who's My Generation*.

Wark has a grander vision than Lumby. Where she argues that the truth is out there, probably in the pages of *TV Hits* magazine, he claims that popular culture is politics and that those who use the media to talk about politics in terms people understand will be Labor's salvation.

As for the Hansonites, they are not so bad as just ill informed. The economic losers of the 1980s are not media literate and are trapped in a suburban mindset, which prevents them adjusting to the new global economy. Their poverty is inextricably linked to their isolation from fanzines and www sites and all the things that McKenzie knows are important. They are info-proles and it's not surprising they embraced bigotry because the established opinion elite told them big fibs about "postmodernism" and "political correctness" what Wark calls "bad information".

The info-proles know that their enemy is the middle aged wealthy media elite, so when the opinion elite denounces Hansonism the cyber serfs embrace her, presumably because they assume that their enemy's enemy is their friend:

Hanson's quavering voice and outer suburban style connected the lunar right to a widespread questioning of the legitimacy of political culture. The mainstream pundits pointed out with increasing exasperation that her policies were racist and discriminatory and made no economic sense. All of which was true but missed the point. Populism is never about policies and politics, it's about culture and celebrity. Hanson's talent was in using the media to create an image that articulated the feelings of people who no

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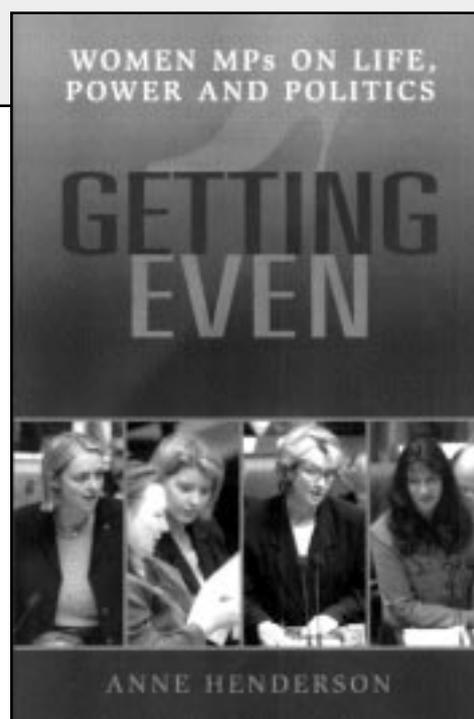
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longer believed the polices of the Labor, Liberal or National parties. (p 21)

Poor devils those info-proles, they're not media literate like McKenzie and his pals and certainly do not get invited to interesting parties like he does. Once it is all explained to them that their real enemies are the media elites and not migrants and single mothers and environmentalists and indigenous Australians and so on, all will be well.

Wark does not claim to know how to accomplish this but suggests that if the info-proles can hook up to the www they will be able make their own decisions independent of the opinion elites of the alleged quality media. The proles will certainly reject "bad information". For Labor the future is in cyber-space.

Wark's book is a very academic take on the practical problems of a disengaged electorate, a loss of community faith in the power of government to deliver and the coalescing of class lines around information access. For people variously interested in public policy, who have the energy to engage in political marginalia and the patience to persevere with the jargon, it is a useful footnote to the broad left debate on the future of social democratic politics and values.

But at the heart of Wark's book, as with Lumby's, is the arrogance of the proselytizer. McKenzie knows best and the info-proles will renounce Hansonism and embrace his values once they escape from the misery of suburban values and reject the false prophets of the middle aged media elite - the "burlers". McKenzie's nostrums for social justice through media studies and inner city chic certainly makes a change from all those economists and politicians banging on about tax, welfare and education reform.

The reviewers were not particularly taken with either Wark or Lumby, but then again prophets are often without honour, particularly in media forms controlled by old fogies. Despite being named as one of the "out of touch" burlers by Wark, Eva Cox provided the most sympathetic treatment in her

tangential review of his book (*Australian's Review of Books*, June).

Cox did not focus on Wark's study, using it among others as source material for a long review essay on individual identity and citizenship in a world where the state is becoming less relevant. As such there was no judgement beyond speculating whether his celebration of diversity, "so groups can negotiate and, if necessary, push hard for their needs to be met" might lead to conflict between "claimant groups".

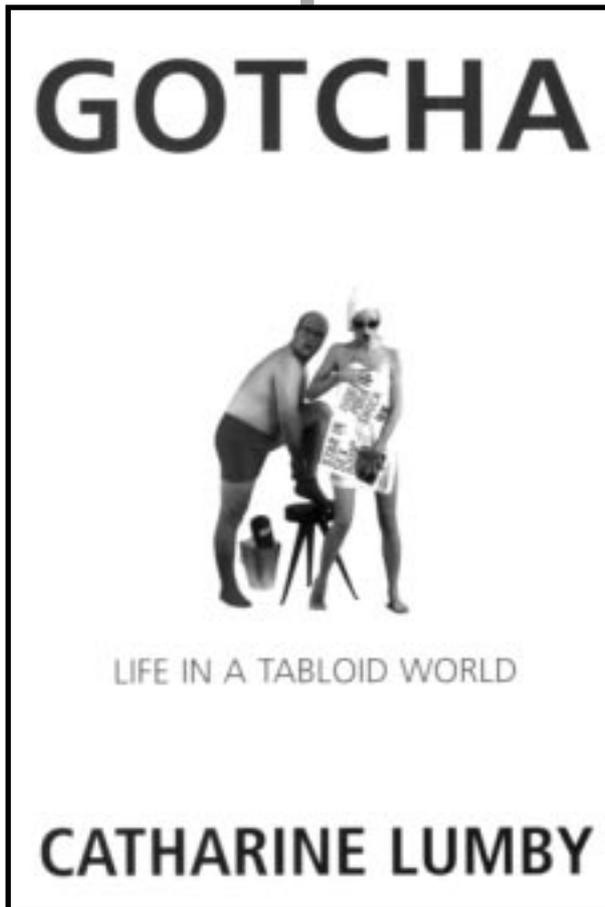
Rather making Wark's point about the entrenched media performers being out of touch, Cox concluded her piece with a quote from Virginia Woolf on the irrelevance of the nation state to women.

Peter Craven, (*Australian*, 16 June) paid far more attention to Lumby's thesis; that the values of the tabloid now shape the media in response to consumer demand. Sadly his rambling treatment was more summary than analysis and focused on the moral values rather than the quality of argument Lumby presents. It's as if Craven would rather decry the world according to Lumby than debate her premise:

...(she) is somewhat inclined to suggest that no extrinsic value can be brought to bear on the logic of media

commercialism that doesn't smack of patronage, patriarchy and elitism. So what we get is an argument about tabloid TV as a form of democratisation that can sometimes pay the legal bills or redress a grievance.

Similarly he was uncomfortable with Lumby's fascination with "the mechanics of fame" and argued that she is an apologist rather than analyst of the tabloid world. Craven declined to extend himself and discuss whether the fundamental premise of Lumby's book, that the values expressed in the mass media now shape our world rather than just provide escapist entertainment.



Daphne Guinness (*Sydney Morning Herald*, 3 July) produced a working journalist's negative review of both books. It was an idiosyncratic exercise that sadly supported the Wark-Lumby case that the media elite is out of touch with ordinary Australians.

Thus Guinness summarised Lumby as arguing that "serious ink-slingers with reactionary debating ways can't compete with radio talk, weekly women's magazines and commercial TV current affairs when ordinary people speak out" and responded, "why would they want to compete with trash?" Just who or what is Guinness calling trash?

There was more of the same. Guinness suggested that the book's claims that the media is out of touch, that the tabloids and broadsheets are indistinguishable and that the media lacks ethics are either wrong or not proved. Guinness was even more dismissive of Wark, mainly because his book demonstrated that he is "smitten with Lumby" but beyond this there was no analysis of Wark's argument.

Elizabeth Wynhausen (*Australian*, 26 June) produced a superior version of the same argument in her review of *Gotcha*. As a working broadsheet journalist she took great affront at the argument that all media is now tabloid: "Lumby fails to breathe a word about the content that continues to set broadsheets and tabloids apart." It was the dominant theme of Wynhausen's long review; Lumby's whole argument was dismissed because it fails to distinguish between quality and mass media:

In her determination to claim that the lines between "quality" and "tabloid" media have blurred (as undoubtedly they have), she very deliberately blurs them herself, a sleight of hand that typifies a curiously careless book.

But what really annoyed Wynhausen is what she saw as the way Lumby built an argument to run a theoretical line:

Lumby ... is intent on popularising the work of the post modern theorists who elevate aspects of popular culture as objects of serious study. In fact *Gotcha!* is wrapped in a kind of post-modern aura. Inclined to proceed by assertion rather than argument, its author seems to be staking out her territory rather than wrestling with the issues involved.

It was left to Wayne Sanderson (*Courier Mail*, 19 June) to bell the post-modernist cat in a comprehensive and entirely credible joint review of Lumby and Wark. It was a balanced, closely argued piece which treated both books with respect and took

their arguments seriously. Sanderson certainly understood what both authors are up to in seeking to justify a tabloid world which gives license to populism and argued that "the common source of inspiration for both books is Pauline Hanson".

Nor did he accept that the mass media did much of a job in representing the real-life interests of most Australians:

A case of too much tele and not enough vision perhaps? Certainly both books are notable for their lack of a broad social and historical context, and a failure to access fields of thought beyond media and politics.

And he certainly was not frightened to state the bleeding obvious, that what matters is not the content of the media but the people who create and consume it:

Seeking to understand ourselves and our "demented society" purely in terms of the sorts of messages available to us and the technology that carries them is to engage in a discourse that is circular and going fast.

But ultimately there was nothing in the review to concern Wark and Lumby. Thus, it ended with a suggestion that might bother Sanderson but would probably strike the tabloid twins as a statement of the anodyne obvious:

The most important message in these books may be an unintended one. That there is a growing social mass of people for whom television and the popular culture is their dominant point of personal reference.

Which can only mean a stellar future for these two stars of media studies as they interpret the political meaning of *Video Hits* for the rest of us.

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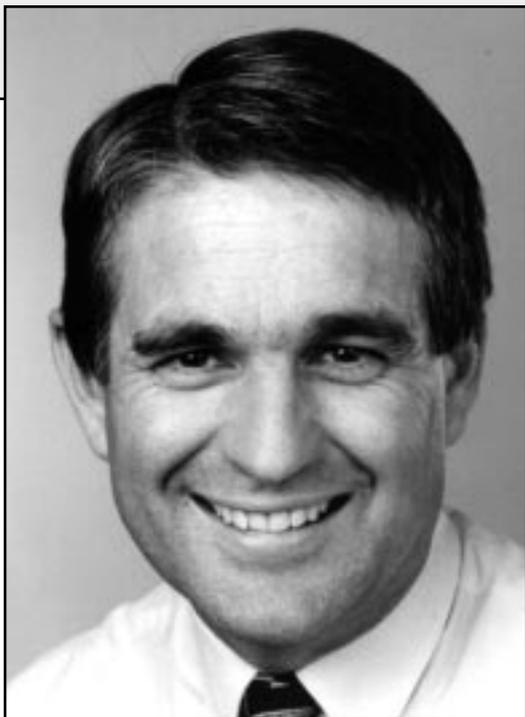
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GERARD HENDERSON'S **MEDIA WATCH**

GREAT U-TURNS OF OUR TIME

• Kerry Jones Dumps Mrs King (sort of)

Flashback to August 1996. John Howard is reported to have said that it would be acceptable for the Prime Minister to open the 2000 Olympic Games.

STEP FORWARD KERRY JONES – executive director of Australians for a Constitutional Monarchy. The voice of Down Under's very own "Land of Hope and Glory" set condemns the very concept that Australia's prime minister should declare open the Sydney Olympics. In a full-on "it's not cucumber sandwiches" tone, Ms Jones declares:

It should be the Governor General as our active constitutional head of state. The PM [John Howard] should in no way usurp that role (Sunday Telegraph, 1 September 1996).

Flashback to April 1999. The Sydney Olympic Games Organising Committee (SOGOC) announces that it will invite the Prime Minister to open the Sydney Olympics. John Howard welcomes the decision.

STEP FORWARD KERRY JONES – executive director of Australians for a Constitutional Monarchy. The voice of Down Under's very own "Land of Hope and Glory" set welcomes the decision that Australia's Prime Minister should declare open the 2000 Olympics. In a frightfully jolly tone, Ms Jones comments:

The Prime Minister [John Howard] is the head of government and makes these decisions and has made the decision to represent Australia world-wide in opening the Games. It will be a great example of how our system works and show-off that the Prime Minister is head of Australian government - legally and constitutionally independent. That is our argument. (Kerry Jones interviewed by Mike Carlton, Radio 2UE, 22 April 1999).

So there you have it. Or not. Kerry Jones reckons (circa August 1996) that the Governor-General – not the Prime Minister - should open the Sydney Olympics. Then Kerry Jones maintains (circa April 1999) that the Prime Minister – not the Governor General – should open the Sydney Olympics. Get it?

GREAT U-TURNS OF OUR TIME (CONTINUED)

• Bob Ellis – Large Writ

- "I will not sue. I do not believe in it." (Bob Ellis, Letter to the Editor, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 24 March 1999).

- "I urge you to think to your own income for the next 30 years...I'll go you [i.e. sue you] individually" (Bob Ellis, reported by journalist Kate McClymont, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 1 May 1999. Mr Ellis was threatening taking defamation action against both the *SMH* and Ms McClymont.)

CHRISTOPHER PEARSON – ON HERDS – AND WIDE OPEN SPACES

While on the subject of inconsistency, consider the case of *Australian Financial Review* columnist – and *Adelaide Review* editor – Christopher Pearson.

On 31 May 1999 readers of Mr Pearson's weekly column were confronted with the headline: "Freedom of speech feels brunt of the herd instinct". As it turned out, CP's weekly epistle was on freedom of speech. The columnist referred to the Federal Government's decision "not to issue a visa to Dr [sic] David Irving, the Holocaust-denying historian". In fact this decision was first made by the Keating government and confirmed by the Howard administration.

This was not a promising start. David Irving does not have a doctorate or any other university degree for that matter. No problem here. Except that columnists writing on matters Irving should know this.

C.P. then went on to recall a "memorable exchange" which had occurred on the ABC Radio National breakfast program. The implication was that this was a recent occurrence – in fact it took place on 2 October 1996. C.P. recalled that the ABC presenter and his Australian guest commentator "were both of the opinion that Irving's exclusion was a responsible decision that would avoid unseemly incidents and offending the sensitivities of the Jewish community, with no serious implications for freedom of speech". C.P. continued:

Incredulous, the American journalist leapt into the fray, saying they plainly had no idea of what free speech was and explaining why his countrymen wouldn't stand for that kind of nanny-state intervention. ...It was a reminder of how easily the liberties of troublemakers, liberties we all take for granted ourselves, can be eroded. Unlike the Americans, our freedom of speech is not buttressed by a First Amendment. We tend to disdain – even if we cannot silence – people with troublesome or inconvenient opinions rather than taking the long view and prizing them as evidence of a healthy democracy. It may make a difference if we go back to teaching civics and history in schools, but I suspect that only solves part of the problem. Perhaps it's the fact that vast numbers of our forebears were for so long engaged in pastoral pursuits. Perhaps it's a fear of wide, open spaces. Whatever the explanation, the herd instinct is one of the more pronounced features of the Australian cultural landscape – most notably among journalists and academics. Rugged individualism, particularly the outspoken kind, unsettles us.

Oh yeah.

The American concerned was Nat Hentoff who appeared in his capacity as editor of the *Village Voice*.

The idea that United States citizens do not “stand for...nanny-state intervention” on immigration is just pure bunk. Even a decade after the end of the Cold War, it is difficult for present or former Communist Party members to obtain US visas. Moreover Nazi war criminals are banned from entry to – and, occasionally, deported from – the United States. In other words, Australia is more tolerant to former communists and retired Nazi war criminals than the United States.

The US is a fine democracy. But it is pure mythology to suggest – as Christopher Pearson does – that the US advances “the liberties of troublemakers” while “rugged individualism...unsettles” Australians. This is cultural stereotyping of the worst kind.

And while on the subject of the herd instinct, consider the case of C.P. himself. In his chapter in Peter Coleman (ed) *Double Take: Six Incorrect Essays* (Mandarin, 1996), Christopher Pearson recounted the leftist mood at Adelaide University when Phnom Penh fell to Pol Pot's Khmer Rouge in April 1975.

The most memorable moment in the [Politics] course was when we learned at a tutorial that the Khmer Rouge had taken Phnom Penh. We adjourned to the Staff Club and toasted them in Great Western Champagne. Marxism and marxisant views were by that stage endemic in universities, but that is not much of a defence.

No, it certainly was not. Christopher Pearson was close to 24 years old at the time. So he can hardly plead youthful indiscretion as a reason for his manifestation of the herd instinct in following the leftist pro Khmer Rouge at Adelaide University circa 1975. Perhaps C.P. was just exhibiting what he was later to describe as “a fear of wide, open spaces” due to the engagement of his forebears in “pastoral pursuits”. Or something like that.

MIRANDA DEVINE'S SHORT MEMORY

• Tuesday 7 June 1999

The Sydney *Daily Telegraph* breaks the story that “a man celebrating his 27th birthday was beaten to death yesterday in front of a large crowd which clapped and cheered during a fight on a busy inner-city street”. The heading was unambiguous: “Cheers for a killer: Crowd watches man kicked to death on birthday.”

The victim is named as Scott Colin Gilroy. He died at around 6 am after an altercation in Oxford Street, Darlinghurst.

• Wednesday 8 June 1999

The *Daily Telegraph* continues the story by interviewing Colin Gilroy, the victim's father. In the process the story in the paper of the previous day is presented as fact:

Scott [Gilroy] and a friend became involved in an altercation which escalated into a fight outside McDonald's on Oxford Street. A group of people crowded around the men clapped and cheered as they fought. Scott was knocked to the ground and repeatedly kicked. The two men fled and Scott was taken to St Vincent's Hospital where he died about 7am.

• Thursday 9 June 1999

The story escalates. Or does it?

The *Daily Telegraph* publishes a specially commissioned article by John Howard concerning the death on Oxford Street. The Prime Minister comments, inter alia:

I have the concerns of any parent of young adult children who go out at night to enjoy themselves. It's the ultimate nightmare that any parent would have: that their child could meet that kind of end. You ask: What is our society coming to? There is no easy answer.

Further down the paper the editorial agreed with John Howard. The *Daily Telegraph* opined:

Prime Minister John Howard is right to be concerned about our society if Australians have stooped to the level of cheering on assailants as they fought with a young man who then died on a main street of Sydney. Mr Howard in a joint party meeting yesterday told MPs "his blood ran cold" when he read accounts of the death of Scott Gilroy in Oxford St early on Sunday morning. Witness accounts of the incident told of cheers and applause from onlookers as Mr Gilroy fought with two others, although police say evidence suggests the cause of death was not from the bashing.

What's that again? Turn back up the page and, in particular, the heading: "Fight man 'not kicked to death'." There the *Daily Telegraph* reported that a post mortem examination revealed that Mr Gilroy was not bashed to death and that no marks (apart from knuckle grazes) were found on his body. Moreover police were reported as denying (i) that Mr Gilroy was repeatedly kicked as he lay on the ground and (ii) refuting the claim that his head was rammed into a car door. Inspector Col Parsons was quoted as saying that Scott Gilroy's body contained "no injuries in relation to his cause of death". There followed a comment from an anonymous police source:

There is no evidence he was on the ground bleeding, being bludgeoned by a boot. It was a five-minute fight and he was not repeatedly kicked, you'd be lucky if he was kicked once.

According to the *Daily Telegraph*, police had advised that the fight was not a "chance meeting in the street" and were enquiring as to whether the late Mr Gilroy had been a steroid user.

This was a late breaking story. The editorialist managed to add a qualification. But, clearly, John Howard's comments went to print before he was aware of the police report or of the circumstances surrounding Scott Gilroy's death.

● **Thursday 10 June 1999**

It seems that Simon Longstaff (executive director of the St James Ethics Centre) does not read the *Daily Telegraph*. In an emotive piece in *The Australian* (10 June 1999), headed "Evil lurks where no one bats an eye", Dr Longstaff referred to William Golding's novel *Lord of the Flies*. He continued:

The shocking force of the novel lies in its suggestion that the veneer of innocence and civilisation is wafer thin, that the ravaging breast lurks just below the surface in us all. This is a powerful and contentious suggestion that many of us would prefer to reject. Yet how can we do so in the light of events that unfolded on Sydney's Oxford Street during the early hours of Sunday morning? As the sky lightened up in the east, a crowd of up to 100 people, some of whom cheered and applauded, stood as two men beat a third.

The only problem turned on the fact that – when the sky darkened in the west on the previous evening – there was no evidence to support Simon Longstaff's claims concerning Scott Gilroy's death. Not so much *Lord of the Flies*. More like *Death by Misadventure*.

● **Thursday 15 June 1999**

For a while, all was quiet. Then *Daily Telegraph* columnist Miranda Devine weighed in with a timely article entitled: "Danger of jumping to conclusions". She described the initial stories about Scott Gilby's death as bogus. And she declared that the story had been seized by "catastrophists" – namely "the finger-waving moralists who seem always so quick to see the worst in people:

Here, at last, was a story to prove what they have believed for so long: that our society is coming apart at the seams, civilisation is on the verge of collapse, the apocalypse is nigh. Selfish parents, video violence, city living were all to blame for the death of 27 year old Scott Gilroy...

Amanda Devine wrote that there had been "unconfirmed reports...that Scott may have consumed ecstasy before his death" and referred to an eye-witness accounts which denied reports that spectators at the scene cheered when the late Mr Gilby collapsed.

Ms Devine then proceeded to criticise the responses to the Scott Gilroy death made by, inter alia, John Howard, NSW Police Commissioner Peter Ryan, Dr Simon Longstaff and *Sydney Morning Herald*

journalist Tony Stephens. But she made no criticism whatsoever of the *Daily Telegraph's* role in running this story in the first place – or of her very own papers's "Violence cannot be condoned" editorial. Fancy that. So it seems that there is a danger in "jumping to conclusions" – except when it is the *Daily Telegraph* which makes the initial jump.

EXAGGERATION CORNER

• John Pilger's Very Latest Pilgerisms

Guess who reckoned that the communist-cum-nationalist Slobodan Milosevic got a bad deal at the hands of NATO and, in particular, the United States? John Pilger, of course. In a series of newspaper columns Pilger drew heavily on his left-wing memory box to refer to "NATO's attack on Serbia" and "the American attack on Yugoslavia". He also alleged that in the Balkans circa mid 1980 "there are striking parallels with the American assault on Vietnam". Really? For the record, the US lost some 60,000 dead in Vietnam – compared with none at all in combat in the latest Balkan war.

But Mr Pilger really excelled when he linked NATO's action to stop President Milosevic's attack on the Kosovars (in 1999) with Adolf Hitler's decision to invade Czechoslovakia in 1938. Wrote Comrade Pilger:

...NATO's aim was the occupation not only of Kosovo, but effectively all of Yugoslavia. Nothing like this ultimatum has been put to a modern, sovereign European state. Of all the Hitler and Nazi analogies that have peppered the West's propaganda, one is never mentioned – Hitler's proposal to Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain in 1938 that he occupy Czechoslovakia because ethnic Germans there had been "tortured", "forced to flee the country" and "prevented from realising the right of nations to self-determination". As a cover for German expansion, Hitler was laying the basis for a "humanitarian intervention", whose fraudulence was no greater than that planned by NATO 61 years later as a cover for its own expansion as the American-led military wing of "globalisation". (SMH, 14 May 1999)

So there you have it. According to John Pilger, Nazi Germany's "fraudulence" re Czechoslovakia circa 1938 was "no greater" than that of NATO re Yugoslavia circa 1999. When it was all over, and Serbian troops had retreated from Kosovo, John Pilger returned to the scene of his hyperbole. He

accused NATO of an arrogant assertion of dominance and power. Moreover he alleged that "NATO provoked a wave of Serbian atrocities and expulsions, giving Milosovic the catastrophe he wanted...".

Get it? According to this particular Pilgerism, it was all NATO's fault. He passed over the fact that Serbian forces were driving Kosovars out of their homes and businesses before the NATO air attacks commenced. And he ended up by claiming that it was "quite possible" that the United States would launch a nuclear bomb at "rogue states". There was no naming names or timing of times. Perhaps we should resort to Nostradamus.

• Barry D. Bags Nicole Et Al

On 4 March 1999 Barry Dickins, from his days in Melbourne's Flemington, chose to write to *The Sydney Morning Herald*. The *SMH* Letters editor obviously can see a good dash of hyperbole when it presents itself. So the Melbourne playwright's letter was published on 6 March 1999. The last two paragraphs reflected Dickins's world view:

Most Australian actors try to act; they find it hard, are full of envy and nerves. Or they are Bryan Brown. Most of our actors shout too much, but not much at the pub, I've found to my poverty and embarrassment. Australian actors are always stingy as buggery. And never any good. And never funny. I wonder, at times, why this is, exactly? No doubt it has to do with a lack of imagination, or lack of good scripts to peruse whilst in their own reading womb.

So there you have it. Nicole Kidman, Geoffrey Rush, Kate Blanchett. All of them. Plus all the others. None of them any good. Except Bryan Brown.

There is a way to block Barry Dickins' outburst. Perhaps the Media, Entertainment and Arts Alliance could pass the hat around. Collected funds should be used to buy your man Dickins a pint. Plus ?

NOW YOU HAVE IT/NOW YOU DON'T

• Monday 7 June 1999

The Age's lead story is unequivocal: "Voters falls in behind GST deal."

From Canberra Tony Wright had the story – based on the AC Nielsen *Age/Sydney Morning Herald* poll:

GST deal on food between the Howard Government and the Australian

Democrats has won wide community support, with two thirds of voters supporting the exclusion of basic food from the 10 per cent tax. But the latest AC Nielsen AgePoll shows the Government still faces significant opposition to the GST itself, despite a softening in the anti-GST mood in the past three weeks.

● Tuesday 8 June 1999

The Australian's lead story is unequivocal: "Voters go sour on GST deal."

From Canberra, Denis Shanahan had the story – based on *The Australian's* NewsPoll:

Support has slumped for a goods and services tax that exempts food, with only one in three voters backing the Government-Democrat deal. Amid claims of chaos over classifying cooked chooks and nightmares of implementation, voters are 2-to-1 against the Democrat compromise that exempts some food.

Only one in three voters supports the Government-Democrat deal, compared with majority support two weeks ago for a GST that excluded food. The latest Newspan survey, taken last weekend, shows only 33 per cent supported "a GST as agreed to recently between the Government and the Australian Democrats" and 58 per cent as against. Indeed, 42 per cent registered as being "strongly against", more than the total support in favour.

So there you have. Or not.

LES MURRAY'S POETIC LICENSE

While on the subject of inconsistency, consider the case of Les Murray. In 1992 Les Murray announced literary grants paid out (per taxpayers funds) by the Australia Council. The story was told by Frank Robson in his profile on Australia's award winning poet in the *Good Weekend* (12 June 1999). Wrote Robson:

Until now, Murray has stuck by his claim – "part politeness, part irony" – that he gave up grants in order to give other writers a better chance of being funded. The real reason, he says, was his discovery that he was being called the Literature Board's "token fascist". He hasn't identified friends who told him the term was a "common joke" within the board in case they were punished, "but one was the poet

John Forbes [now dead] and they can't punish him". To his embarrassment, Murray realised that the fascist tag accurately described his perceived role within the funding body. "Suddenly, it all fell into place: they were using me as a cover for what they were really doing, which was steering most of their funding towards the reliable, politically correct writers...I had thought government support of literature could be as natural a thing as [universal scholarships], but I came to see that the system was fraught with politics."

Your man Les went on to describe the Australia Council as "part of a politically correct 'government' that exists no matter what [political] party is in power".

According to this (conspiracy) theory, Les Murray was kept on the taxpayer funded subsidy drip for two whole decades, just so the Australia Council could fund individuals it regarded as "politically correct". A cunning stunt when you think about it. Set out below is the full list of Les Murray's subsidies from the Australia Council. The figures are in "raw" terms – i.e. they have not been adjusted for inflation:

| Year of Annual Report | Purpose | Amount |
|-----------------------|------------------------------------------|---------------------|
| Direct Support | | |
| 73-74 | Writers Fellowship) | estimate 7,000 |
| 74-75 | " ") 3 years | 7,184 |
| 75-76 | " ") | 7,000 |
| 76-77 | Senior Fellowship) | 8,500 |
| 77-78 | " ") 3 years | 7,750 |
| 78-79 | " ") | 11,000 |
| 79-80 | " ") | 11,125 |
| 80-81 | " ") | 8,125 |
| 81-82 | " ") | 8,622 |
| 82-83 | Writers Fellowship) | 8,998 |
| 83-84 | " ") | 19,375 |
| 84-85 | " ") | 22,500 |
| 85-86 | " ") | 12,500 |
| 86-87 | " ") | 31,250 |
| 87-88 | Category A Fellowship) | 23,250 |
| 88-89 | " ") | 12,000 |
| 89-90 | Australian Artists Creative Fellowship*) | 50,000 |
| 90-91 | " " " ") 3 years | 53,520 |
| 91-92 | " " " ") | 56,865 |
| 92-93 | " " " ") | 58,713 |
| | | sub total \$425,277 |

Direct Beneficiary

| | | |
|-------|-------------------------------------------------------|-------|
| 77-78 | Residency - University of New England | 2,080 |
| 79-80 | Reading - Poetry Festival (New York) (1/3rd total) | 2,300 |
| 80-81 | Promotion - Scotland/Australia literary exchange (UK) | 2,424 |
| 81-82 | Residency - University of Newcastle | 3,210 |
| 82-83 | Residency - University of New South Wales | 2,000 |
| 83-84 | Reading - University of Sydney | 50 |
| 84-85 | Residency - University of Sydney | 2,000 |
| 84-85 | Reading - Darwin Community College (1/2 total) | 1,900 |
| 84-85 | Reading/promotion - Wattle Park Teachers Centre | 1,300 |
| 84-85 | Canada/Australia Literary Award (Canada) | 635 |
| 85-86 | “ “ “ | 184 |
| 85-86 | Reading/workshop - Adelaide Review | 1,000 |
| 85-86 | Reading/workshop - SA English Teachers Assoc | 400 |
| 86-87 | Promotion - Aust. National Folk Festival (1/2 total) | 500 |
| 87-88 | Promotion - (overseas) | 1,000 |
| 91-92 | Reading - Harbourfront (Canada) | 2,250 |
| | sub-total \$ 23,233 | |
| | TOTAL \$448,510 | |

* Funded by Federal Government, administered by Australia Council

- Estimated proportion of a grant of a number of writers

The List (compiled from the Australia Council’s published annual reports) indicates that, during his final four years of subsidies, Les Murray received four Australian Artists Creative Fellowships. In the trade these were commonly known as “Keatings” – after the former Australian Prime Minister Paul Keating who initiated them.

The fact is that no Australian writer or poet received so much financial assistance over so many years. Now, according to Les Murray’s theory as told to Frank Robson, the Australia Council funded the anti-leftist Murray in order to fund leftists. How fortunate for our Les that, per chance, he was the lucky beneficiary of the Australia Council’s tactics as largesse for two decades.

By the way, Les Murray told the *Good Weekend* that his policies were a “weird mixture of the conservative and the intently socialist”. It is not clear whether our Les was in conservative or socialist mode when (writing in *The Australian*, 24 July 1996) he described the Howard Government’s gun laws as looking “like more of a last-ditch attack by PC Australia on its hated rural male enemies”.

Get it? In July 1996 Les Murray accused John Howard of being a practitioner of “political correctness” (that hoary cliché again). He also bagged the Prime Minister for wearing a safety vest

when he addressed a rally in Sale, Victoria. Your man Les made no reference whatsoever to the fact that Mr Howard was acting on security advice. He just weighed in – with full poetic license:

No sympathy was wasted on landowners and shooters deeply insulted by the insensitive cowardice of a Prime Minister who wore a flak jacket to address people who had probably voted overwhelmingly for him just weeks previously. (*The Australian*, 24 July 1996).

Les Murray is a fine poet. But his ventures into non-fiction as a social commentator have not been inspiring. Give the man (yet another) Keating. Or, if necessary, a Howard. And send him back to writing (taxpayer subsidised) poetry.

LEO SCHOFIELD JOINS THE TELE

Former *Sydney Morning Herald* (and sometimes *Age*) columnist Leo Schofield has joined the *Sunday Telegraph*. He was welcomed to Australia’s largest circulation newspaper by a Page 3 report headed: “Welcome home, Leo.” A number of prominent Sydney residents heralded the return of a weekly Leo Schofield column. The penultimate paragraph read as follows:

Schofield is a “wonderful voice for Sydney”, enthused restaurateur Lucio Galletto of Lucio’s in Paddington.

Leo Schofield’s column appeared on Page 5. The final section which included a reference to Leo Schofield’s preferred meal over the current week:

Best Tasting dish – the Bollito Miste with Salsa Verde at Lucio’s (where else?)

Where else indeed.

FAMOUS PREDICTIONS

...there are those [in the media] who believe Tim Fischer is ready, a bare six months into the Howard Government's second term, to pack his bags and depart, either from politics altogether or from the demands of his party's leadership... The press simply won't believe Fischer. No matter how many times he denies he plans to quit, either from politics or the leadership, there's always somebody who goes on asking the same threadbare question for the same threadbare response...

Alan Ramsey - *Sydney Morning Herald*, 19 June 1999.

Tim Fischer resigned as Deputy Prime Minister and National Party leader on 1 July 1999.

C O R R E S P O N D E N C E

AMY MCGRATH WRITES

Dear Editor

I refer to your critique in *The Sydney Institute Quarterly* (March 1999) of an article "Diamond Jim's Judas Kiss" by Paddy McGuinness (*Sydney Morning Herald*, 28 January 1999) which seems to cast my book *Forging of Votes* in a dubious light as lacking authority and evidence.

Insofar as the article suggests the assertions made in my book were not made during the lifetime of James McClelland, and deprived him of the opportunity of answering them, the suggestion is incorrect. What was asserted in my book, published in 1994 within the lifetime and proved by documentary evidence printed in that book, was the following:

(a) that neither McClelland, nor the firm of Courtney Boyland for whom he worked, in any way had anything to do with the conduct of the ballot case in the Federal Industrial Court which declared Laurie Short to have been properly elected in the 1949 election of the Federated Ironworkers Union.

(b) that McClelland and his firm, Courtney Boyland, improperly took out and filed the order setting out the decision in that case in the name of J.J. Carroll O'Dea and Co who conducted the case, without their permission and consent.

(c) that before this order was taken out, Short did not file a notice in the court that he had changed his solicitor from J. J. Carroll O'Dea and Co to Courtney Boyland.

(d) that both McClelland and Short on the day after the decision was made were photographed together under the caption L.Short and his solicitor, James McClelland, and all media conferences were held on Courtney Boyland's premises, leading to the myth that McClelland had in fact acted in, and conducted, the ballot case. This impression was never publicly corrected in a public celebration of the victory, to which those responsible for it were not invited; nor in the following years when it was reasserted many times during McClelland's life and after his death in obituaries, and in the Town Hall funeral service by Short, and in the eulogy by Kim Beazley, Leader of the Opposition, in the House of Representatives, later challenged by Alan Cadman MP.

As to the suggestion that my book is the only source questioning the myth, and one less reliable because I am declared a widow, I assure you I am not a widow. My husband, who took a central role is still alive and very much *compus mentis*. Moreover there are other sources also alive and well – two former members of O'Dea's firm quoted in my book and three key figures of NSW Industrial Groups, who fielded the army of foot-soldiers without whom Short may not have been re-elected. Further Jack Kane, leader of the Industrial Groups, declared them these people "unsung heroes" in his memoirs written before his death.

If you had consulted any of us in person or consulted my book, which I sent The Sydney Institute on publication, you would have found Paddy McGuinness was correct in saying McClelland's role had been "greatly exaggerated". Without the crucial victory in the 1949-50 ballot case, the wide support of industrial groups throughout Australia where neither Short nor McClelland had resources, they would not have had the success they later enjoyed.

(Dr) Amy McGrath

Sydney

May 28, 1999

GERARD HENDERSON REPLIES

First – a correction. And an apology. The article "Paddy and the Dead" (*The Sydney Institute Quarterly*, March 1999) incorrectly described Amy McGrath as Frank McGrath's widow. Frank McGrath is very much alive. Mea culpa.

For the record, the article "Paddy and the Dead" did not relate primarily to the defeat of the communist leadership in the Ironworkers Union some half a century ago. That occupied some 50 words of a 550 word critique of P.P. McGuinness's column on the late James McClelland (which was published in the *Sydney Morning Herald* on 28 January 1999).

Dr McGrath has taken exception to that section which commented on P.P. McGuinness's assessment of Jim McClelland's role in the Ironworkers Union circa 1950 viz:

...the columnist [P.P. McGuinness] alleged that McClelland's "role in helping to defeat the corrupt communist leadership of the Ironworkers' Union has been greatly exaggerated". According to McGuinness, "the real moving spirits were the Cecil O'Dea and Frank McGrath". The only source for this claim is *The Forging of Votes* written by Amy McGrath...

No reputable scholar disputes the fact that Frank McGrath (when a qualified solicitor employed by Carroll O'Dea) discovered the crucial evidence which implicated the communist leadership in the Ironworkers Union with ballot rigging. The facts are set out in Susannah Short's authoritative biography *Laurie Short: A Political Life* (Allen & Unwin, 1992) at pages 137-139.

However it is disingenuous for P.P. McGuinness – or Amy McGrath – to maintain that Cecil O'Dea and Frank McGrath (and the law firm Carroll O'Dea) were the moving spirits in the defeat of the Ironworkers Union's communist leadership. The fact is that only a union operative could have taken on and defeated the communist union leadership. In the early 1950s Cecil O'Dea and Frank McGrath were lawyers – as was Jim McClelland.

It is true that anti-communist Industrial Group members were the foot soldiers in the battle to defeat the communist union leadership by the ballot box. But without anti-communist operatives of Laurie Short's calibre, it was almost impossible to dislodge the entrenched communist union leadership, including Ernest Thornton in the Ironworkers Union.

The (at times complex) relationship between Laurie Short, Cecil O'Dea, Frank McGrath and Jim McClelland has been documented by Susannah Short. The fact is that Laurie Short used the solicitors J.J. Carroll O'Dea for a time. He subsequently switched to Courtney Boyland – and Jim McClelland. Clients are entitled to engage the solicitors of their choosing and to change them at will. The reasons for Laurie Short's decision concerning his choice of legal advice are explained in *Laurie Short: A Political Life* at pages 150-151.

There is no disputing that Laurie Short achieved a "crucial victory" in the Ironworkers ballot case of 1949-1950. However it is likely that, whatever the outcome of this case, Laurie Short would have prevailed over Ernest Thornton. Jim McClelland played a role in the anti-communist struggle in the Australian trade union movement. So did Cecil O'Dea and Frank McGrath. So did the Industrial Groups. But only Laurie Short was capable of taking on – and defeating – Ernest Thornton and his fellow Stalinists in the Ironworkers Union.