



# THE SYDNEY PAPERS

Autumn 2002

Volume 14

Number 2

## Contributors

Michael Ondaatje

William Deane

Clare Martin

Tom Keneally

Judith Keene

Ian Hancock

Robert Sutter

Susan Boyd

Kenneth DeWoskin

Joel Shin

Tahmeena Faryal

Michael Sexton

Ainsley Gotto

Neil McDonald

Mike Richards

Anna Funder

Brendan Nelson

Nicola Roxon

Christopher Pyne

Gina Lennox

Lord McAlpine

Registered by Australia Post - Print Post No. PP 225920/00012



***The Sydney  
Institute***

*Executive Director*  
**DR GERARD HENDERSON**

*Deputy Director*  
**MS ANNE HENDERSON**

*Personal Assistant to  
the Executive Director*  
**MS LALITA MATHIAS**

*Subscriptions Managers*  
**MS ASTRID CAMPBELL**  
**MS NEETA NORONHA**

*Editorial Office:*  
41 Phillip Street, Sydney, NSW 2000  
Australia.  
Phone: (02) 9252 3366  
Fax: (02) 9252 3360.  
Email: [mail@sydneyins.org.au](mailto:mail@sydneyins.org.au)  
Website: [www.sydneyins.org.au](http://www.sydneyins.org.au)

***Board of  
Governors***

*Chairman*  
**MS MEREDITH HELLICAR**

*Deputy Chairman*  
**MR ROBERT FERGUSON**

*Hon Treasurer*  
**MR FRANK CONROY**

**MR RODNEY ADLER AM**  
**MR PETER CHARLTON**  
**PROF PETER DRYSDALE AM**  
**MS CATHERINE LIVINGSTONE**  
**DR JANE MUNRO**  
**MR PAUL MURNANE**  
**MR ROSS WILSON**  
**MR JASON YAT-SEN LI**

*The Sydney Papers* is a quarterly journal published by  
The Sydney Institute, A.C.N. 003 732 929.

41 Phillip Street, Sydney, Australia. Annual Subscription to  
*The Sydney Papers* is \$33.00 (inc. GST) or available inclusive  
with Associate or Full Subscriber membership of The Sydney  
Institute. The views expressed in *The Sydney Papers* are those  
of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of The  
Sydney Institute or of its Governors.

*Copyright 2001 by:*  
The Sydney Institute. ISSN 1035-7068. All rights reserved.

Layout & Typesetting by: CMC, Unit 1 "The Berkeley", 25 Market Street  
(corner Kent Street), Sydney, NSW 2000 Australia. Phone: (02) 9261 0700  
Fax: (02) 9264 9547.

Printed by: Lindwall and Ward Printing, 8 Sloane Street,  
Marrickville, NSW 2204 Australia. Phone: (02) 9519 3000.

Cover & inside front cover design by: DT Graphics, 202A Lyons Road,  
Drumoyne NSW 2047. Phone: (02) 9719 1424 Fax: (02) 9719 1415.

---

**THE SYDNEY PAPERS**

**Vol. 14 No. 2.**

**Autumn 2002**

---

Published by The Sydney Institute Publications Pty. Limited

# The Sydney Papers

**Editor:** Anne Henderson

**Production Assistants:** Astrid Campbell  
Lalita Mathias

Boral  
is delighted  
to help build  
the Sydney  
Institute.

(Not to mention the rest of Australia.)



---

**CONTENTS**

---

**Kenneth DeWoskin***The New China in Asia and the World* 1**Michael Ondaatje & Tom Keneally with Andrea Stretton***Running in the Family – Novels, Film and Nations* 9**Sir William Deane & Anne Henderson***Biography and Memory – The Killing of Sister McCormack* 25**Mike Richards***Ronald Ryan & Ned Kelly* 31**Ian Hancock & Ainsley Gotto***John Gorton – His Way* 43**Tahmeena Faryal***Human Rights and the Women of Afghanistan* 55**Anna Funder***Stasiland: Writing a World Gone Wrong* 61**Brendan Nelson***The Vision of Education – Higher Education Reform* 73**Nicola Roxon & Christopher Pyne***Politics and The Young* 83**Neil McDonald***Getting It Right – Damien Parer, Osmar White  
& Chester Wilmot on The Kokoda Track* 97**Clare Martin***Northern Gateway – NT Finds the Future* 111**Susan Boyd***Fiji – Social and Political Upheaval* 119**Judith Keene***Fighting For Franco – In The Spanish Civil War* 131**Gina Lennox***Fire Snow and Honey – Voices from Kurdistan* 141**Lord McAlpine***On The Road With Lord McAlpine* 157**Joel Shin, Michael Sexton & Robert Sutter***Australia-US Relations: From Vietnam to George W Bush* 163



Photo – David Karonidis

*Kenneth DeWoskin*

Kenneth DeWoskin is Partner in Charge of Strategy and Business Development for PricewaterhouseCoopers in China. He has lived and worked for several years in both China and Japan – his experience of China goes back to 1977. He served with former US Ambassador to China Leonard Woodcock as Executive Director of the Michigan Governor’s Commission on China and more recently has done research into China’s WTO accession. Kenneth DeWoskin spoke for The Sydney Institute on Wednesday 6 March 2002. The article which follows is an edited transcript of that address.

# THE NEW CHINA IN

## *ASIA AND THE WORLD*

**Kenneth DeWoskin**

I started working on China in the mid 1960s, when I was a college student. To the horror of my parents I actually went on to college to be an industrial engineer which I didn't like. Through a series of bizarre accidents, I took advantage of a summer scholarship that was offered on the Chinese language. The US government was interested at the time in supporting some people to study Chinese, Japanese and Russian. This started me on a long, fascinating journey dealing with China. I had no foresight into what I'd be doing. I knew nothing about China at the time, except that if I dug deep enough in my backyard, I might find it.

I next did a Ph D at Colombia University and my first job was at the University of Michigan as an assistant professor of archaeology and cultural history. My speciality is essentially pre modern China. Until the late 1970s and early 1980s, I would always respectfully say that anything that happened in China after the Second Century AD was just journalism.

I began travelling to Beijing and Shanghai and other places in China in the late 1970s, just as the Cultural Revolution was ending and shortly before Deng Xiaoping took the throne and began the process of economic reform.

These days I partly consult and partly work as a partner in PricewaterhouseCoopers. Many peculiarities make China so interesting. China struggles now with the very fundamental question about its own economy. It's own organisation. The question is – what is a socialist market economy? If we are going to build a socialist market economy, what is it? And the point is made even more powerful when we realise there's never been one in the world before. It's like a fiery water situation. A kind of paradox, a yin yang framework.

This is not a new question for China, but it remains one of the most pressing. It was first debated as far as we know in 87 BC, when the high emperor Wu Ti, who was one of the most powerful emperors, convened a set of debates called the debates on salt and iron.

The substance of these debates was recorded in a extremely thick book with an enormous amount of detail. They discussed whether it was better to have a centrally planned economy where the State owned the major capital assets or whether they would have a market economy. The Confucians took one side and the legalists another. With astonishing sophistication, they were able, in the course of discussions, to figure out all the problems of both of those models. In the State-owned economy – the inefficiency, corruption, the lack of market discipline, poor service levels, lack of innovation that was inevitable in that kind of model. And in the market economy – the eventual abuses of monopolists and manipulation of prices, the potential that major capital employers in the economy would work solely for their own benefit and not the society at large. All these issues were discussed in incredible length.

It's important for us to realise that this is the debate that goes on today in China. And the point of debate, which is at the very core of China joining the WTO, is now 2100 years old and there's nothing clearly resolved. Throughout the dynasties there's been the ongoing process of different dynastic cycles. Different emperors and different dynastic families have tried different approaches but they have always been within the range of this original debate.

It was easier for me to go into companies like Ford Motor Company and talk about the Han dynasty. They were first quite astonished but it turned out to be quite a useful discipline for their business partners because their business partners were confronting, in a sense, the legacy. They have State enterprise and central planners and they know the Chinese regulators. They knew about the people, many of whom were reading history. I also came from a business family. Commerce was not foreign to me when I was at university.

China has had a persistent, and continues to have, what I call a middle-ness of self perception. As you probably know China is the Middle Kingdom. It's definition of itself is that it is a country which has largely been introspective and introverted over the years. It's not an outward-looking country. China fancies itself as defensive not offensive in its foreign affairs and interested, mostly, in protecting its heartland. It is a country of sedentary, agricultural people surrounded by mobile, agrarian and belligerent people in some respects. The Chinese people typically characterise such as barbarians, including us. They appreciate the continuity in traditions, the continuity of their own world in much the same way we do.

Mao spent much more time in his early years, mid years and late years studying Chinese history including dynastic history as well as imperialist, Chinese strategy, Chinese administrative technology than any of the art law. He also read Marx and Lenin, former fathers of Chinese communism. In spite of the Cultural Revolution, Mao was a

devoted calligrapher. I was in London last week and went to an exhibit at the British Gallery on modern Chinese calligraphy. Some of the finest pieces, the most remarkable pieces, the pieces that were most enduring with a sense of history and a sense of tradition were those of Mao. It's quite astonishing. You can go to China today and see an amazing modern city like Beijing or Shanghai with incredible architecture, in the centre of tremendous economic vitality. It rests on a very deep bedrock of a long continuous tradition.

This is an important moment in China's history, because China has joined the WTO and it has been in the WTO now for nearly one business quarter or three months, beginning at the middle of December 2001 to the middle of March 2002. This is kind of a watershed because it brings to an end a very disruptive and unstable chapter in China's history that probably began in the middle of the eighteenth century.

I'll take a minute to take you back to the middle of the eighteenth century. China was not prepared for the appearance of sea travelling traders from Europe – a kind of maritime trade that was driving Europe's economic development and which was in a sense a forerunner of colonialisation of most of South Asia and South-east Asia. China was strong enough to resist the occurrence, not so much militarily but institutionally and culturally. By that time, China was already a very seasoned, very stable and very resilient political, cultural, social system. Even though the Ching dynasty, the prevailing dynasty at the time, was beginning to show wear in its youthful and established energy, nonetheless the emperor took very strong positions against China becoming involved in world trade.

An amazingly interesting event is the delegation of Lord McCartney, in 1792, when British King George III sent a delegation to the Chinese Imperial Court in an effort to get China to agree to be a trading partner with Britain. And indeed agree to let the British open a trade delegation office in Beijing. That was a famous trip. It was a great moment in history. McCartney's group came in a large number of ships which was designed to both flatter the Chinese emperor and to buy his interest. It was also done to demonstrate the advanced state of British technology. So, among the things that were brought were elaborate British clockworks, British machinery, and so on. The clockworks themselves and other time keeping devices were actually a bit behind China's own, but the British didn't know that.

The Chinese made McCartney land in Canton because the way of managing foreigners was to keep them as far away from the imperial centre as possible. The imperial centre was Beijing at that time. So they landed in Canton and they had to make a long and arduous journey scuttling along the coast which took about three months. It was also very expensive. Chinese hotels and hostels along the way were very costly so most of the money the British came with was gone by the time

they arrived in Beijing. The Imperial strategy was well worked out. What they couldn't work out was how exactly McCartney would kowtow to the emperor. McCartney would only go down onto his knee for King George III. The Chinese insisted that the proper protocol was for him to bang his head on the floor to the chairman emperor. And McCartney refused to do that. He would not salute another sovereign. The internal documents that the Chinese created around this event have only been recently discovered. It's quite amazing because the Chinese finally gave up on the debate and told themselves that obviously these foreigners were so dumb, are so uncultured, they were like barbarians. They didn't know how to salute so they decided to ignore the lack of respect by McCartney.

The chairman emperor wrote one of the most abusive memos I've ever seen in the history of imperial rules to the effect that, it was nice of the British to come to China and the Chinese accepted their gifts, but as to trade the Chinese had everything they needed. In the Chinese view, they hadn't seen anything they couldn't produce themselves. On the other hand, the Chinese were quite happy, they said, for the foreigners to buy what they wanted from China and take it back. The British, as it happened, became addicted to tea from China. The Chinese tea trade became so significant that it was a one way trade with no return. The British then shipped to China silver reserves in exchange for tea. They also ritualised their taking of tea and began to buy the apparatus or paraphernalia that went with tea drinking – this was subsequently called China. So very elaborate, elegant tea sets and tea apparatus were bought, along with the tea, in this one-sided trade. It became a fairly profound threat to the British treasury. And it was only with the discovery of opium, which the British were able to source in India and ship to China, that they began to reverse this trade. Of course it was reversed with what you would describe as a vengeance in the Opium Wars in 1842.

Why these events are important goes to what has happened recently. The handing back of Hong Kong to China is rooted in the Opium War. The territorial concessions, the long treaty, the rental of any new territories and leasing of new territories that were due to expire triggered the hand back. All these things originate in that earlier century. They are events which restored sovereignty over territorial loss.

There had been a century and a half of what you might call a diplomacy of resentment. It is still very much alive today and accounts for a kind of frugality of leadership on issues of China's sovereignty, issues of Taiwan, issues of the one country-two systems arrangement with Hong Kong, even the relationship of the People's Republic of China to the 60 million Chinese who live outside of China. All these things are pre conditioned by China's history.

The WTO, in many ways, closes that chapter. And one of the most interesting things about it, from the standpoint of Chinese society and China's politics – not just the Chinese economy and Chinese trade – is that many people believe that this actually closes the chapter on a century and a half of humiliation and the diplomacy of resentment. In many ways, as well, it eases the rather persistent and counterproductive sense in China that they remain the Middle Kingdom, besieged by a hostile world of barbarians. Hopefully we're coming to an end of that.

The WTO means that China is now a member of an organisation of equals. In fact more than equals. In the last three months we have gained insights into exactly how China behaves as a member of this organisation. It is clear they intend to take a position of leadership among lesser developed nations of the world. To renounce what they believe has been a lack of balance in the WTO itself, China has made very good use of its membership in the United Nations and the United Nations Security Council. For that reason they are looking forward to playing a significant role in shaping the world in future negotiations and future rounds of the World Trade Organisation.

China now has opened its doors further than ever to the foreign business community. Since the forums began in 1978 and 1979, China has of course had its ups and downs. These are now visible in ways never visible before to the rest of the world – most especially the Tiananmen Square incident on 4 June 1989, televised because of the presence of foreign press in China. They had come into China to film to historic visit of Gorbachev to Beijing. The very smart and PR savvy students organising the protest of Tiananmen knew this was an opportunity to present themselves, their cause and their interest in accelerating political reform to the rest of the world, uncensored. China's authorities were not fully aware of the power of media technology, the power of global news organisations coming into China and setting up direct satellite links over which they had absolutely no control.

Many foreign investors, interested in China, were lured there by the promise of an enormous market. The very same promise that brought Lord McCartney to China in 1792. His group took that very long trip from Canton to Beijing, and as they travelled they gave away small swatches of British woollens. I am amused at the thought of the reaction of the average boatman from the Yangtze River when some foreigner gave him a small square of woollen swatch. But it was part of the original dream – the notion that the population was so large, and China has always had a large population. In the Opium War years, around 1842, China had a population of about 300 million. Britain was some 13 million at that time. There was no other country in the world with a population of that size. The population of China and its potential consumer market is what brought business into China in the

1980s. Those were difficult years. A few joint ventures were established. Consumer finance companies entered the market place. The Chinese began to get exposure in the outside world for some of their products and ideas moved in as they hadn't for some 30 years. Some media was open, some foreign films were brought in and translated. Chinese students began to go abroad, some came back. There was a general opening up which was very broadening. But Tiennamen Square, in 1989, was a significant setback.

Those are the events and movements that pushed China's WTO entry; they created the setting from which we move forward today. These give the leaders their ability to manage and govern China despite all the tumultuous new inputs and significant deep reaching changes. It has given the leadership the courage to pursue the WTO. By 1998, they were thirteen years into the negotiations, they settled their internal debate and decided they would go forward with it. They had confidence they could manage the thing. And, as a result of that final three year push from 1998, China has undertaken very extensive reforms with domestic enterprises. At the lower levels of the political structure it has attempted to create stronger institutions than it has had in the past. China is now less reliant on personal relationships, that sort of (branchwork) network that people talk about in connection to China. In joining the WTO, China has surrendered for the first time in its history, an element of its sovereignty, an element of its own self determination, by submitting to an arbitration and litigation process that is external to itself. This is the first time that China has undertaken that.

And it shows a level of confidence in leadership that it's not had in the past. It shows a commitment to reversing that very long, two millennium history of isolation.

# REFUGEES AND MANDATORY DETENTION WHAT AUSTRALIANS DON'T KNOW

Life in a detention centre, international comparisons, refugee rights, legal battles, people smuggling, border protection - all this and more has taken over the headlines. Just what do we really know about one of the most troubling issues of our time – people movement, resettlement and the consequences?

**FRANK BRENNAN -**

Director, Uniya - the Jesuit Social Justice Centre

**PARIS ARISTOTLE -**

Immigration Detention Advisory Group

**LINDA JAIVIN -**

Author & translator, latest work - *The Monkey and the Dragon*  
(Text Pty Ltd)

**DATE:** Wednesday 16 October 2002

**TIME:** 5.00 for 5.30 pm

**VENUE:** Museum of Sydney Theatre, Corner of Bridge  
and Phillip Street, Sydney

**RSVP:** (02) 9252 3366





Photo – David Karonidis

*Thomas Keneally, Michael Ondaatje & Andrea Stretton – in conversation*

On 8 March 2002, The Sydney Institute, in co-operation with the High Commission of Canada in Australia and the Association for Canadian Studies in Australia and New Zealand, held a discussion between Canadian writer Michael Ondaatje, author of *Anil's Ghost*, *Handwriting*, *Running in The Family* and *The English Patient*, and Australian author Thomas Keneally whose works include *Schindler's Ark*, *The Chant of Jimmy Blacksmith*, *The Great Shame* and most recently *American Scoundrel*. Arts presenter Andrea Stretton was the moderator.

# RUNNING IN THE

## *FAMILY – NOVELS, FILMS AND NATIONS*

**Michael Ondaatje, Tom Keneally, Andrea Stretton**

**ANDREA STRETTON:** Michael Ondaatje and Tom Keneally have much in common including giving us great gifts of their story telling over so many years.

Our take today is the wonderful theme of *Running in the Family* which is the title of Michael Ondaatje's earlier work. He wrote it when he went back to Sri Lanka where he had been born. It's a kind of memoir of his family, so it's a good title for today's theme. Michael Ondaatje has not only published his most recent novel, *Anil's Ghost*, but also a parallel book which is his poetry on similar themes about Sri Lanka, called *Handwriting*. From my experience, Michael Ondaatje is one of the few poets in the world who reads his work beautifully. Please welcome Michael Ondaatje.

**MICHAEL ONDAATJE:** My family was mongrel from the word go. I think all families are. No matter what airs of heritage we tend to put on sometimes. When the Dutch governor asked my uncle what his background was, he said, "God only knows your excellency." And perhaps for that reason I have always been preoccupied in my writing, with international bastards. I think they are our future. They are the hope for the future.

I've written about Sri Lanka, my family and the place there in three books – *Running in the Family*, *Handwriting* and *Anil's Ghost*. And though I've written about the same place, each book has altered its point of view of that place and people. I hope all are equally valid still. No one is more correct, or more perceptive, than the other. I'm going to read a brief passage from each of them. This is from *Running in the Family*:

It seems that most of my relatives at some time were attracted to somebody they shouldn't have been. Love affairs rainbowed over marriages and lasted forever – so that it often seemed that marriage was the greater infidelity. From the twenties until the war nobody really had to grow up. They remained wild and spoiled. It was only during that second half of my parents' generation that they suddenly turned to the real world. ... But earlier, during their flaming youth, this energy formed complex

relationships and I still cannot break the code of how “interested in”, or “attracted” they were to each other. Truth disappears with history and gossip tells us in the end nothing of personal relationships. There are stories of elopement, unrequited love, family feuds, and exhausting vendettas, which everyone was drawn into, had to be involved with. But nothing is said of the closeness between two people: how they grew to shape each other’s presence. No one speaks of that exchange of gift and character – the way a person took on and recognised in himself the smile of a lover. Individuals are seen only in the context of these swirling social tides. It was almost impossible for a couple to do anything without rumour leaving their shoulders like a flock of messenger pigeons.

Where is the intimate and truthful in all of this? Teenager and Uncle. Husband and lover. A lost father in his solace. And why do I want to know of this privacy? After the cups of tea, coffee, public conversations ... I want to sit down with someone and talk with utter directness, want to talk to all about history, like that deserving lover.

The history of my family was only to be found in stories told by uncles and aunts at the dinner table. There was nothing written. It was part of our culture – not writing memoirs and family histories or keeping diaries. There was very little of that and so when I wrote that book I really had to ignore libraries and archives and spend my time having thousands of cups of tea and coffee with these relatives. It was obsessively focused on my family. A family that I had lost in Sri Lanka when I was eleven and was coming back to when I was thirty-five.

Later in the book *Handwriting* I found a form which enlarged the family:

The last Sinhala word I lost  
was *vatura*.  
The word for water.  
Forest water.  
The water in a kiss.  
The tears I gave to my ayah Rosalin on leaving  
the first home of my life.

More water for her than any other  
That fled my eyes again  
This year, remembering her,  
A lost almost-mother in those years  
of thirsty love.

No photograph of her, no meeting  
since the age of eleven,  
not even knowledge of her grave.

Who abandoned who, I wonder now.

When I began to write *Anil’s Ghost* a few years ago, I went back to Sri Lanka and almost had to escape my family to write it. I had to go outside their world view or their family view of what was going on. I recall a few years before that someone had contacted me and said, “Do you want to run away from the family?” This book did involve stuff from the archival civil rights section in Colombo, and from Amnesty (a

lot of stuff had disappeared). But again it was a sort of oral history that I depended on. I went and spent time with doctors, I spent time with people in other professions to collect the stories of what had happened. This is one section from the book, from an archaeologist who is talking to Anil who is investigating the story:

“I’ll tell you a thing I saw.” ... but he looked around. “I was in the south. It was almost evening, the markets closed. Two men, insurgents I suppose, has caught a man. I don’t know what he had done. Maybe he had betrayed them, maybe he had killed someone, or disobeyed an order, or not agreed quickly enough. In those days the justice of death came in at any level. I don’t know if he was to be executed, or harassed and lectured at, or in the most unlikely scenario, forgiven. He was wearing a sarong, white shirt, long sleeves rolled up. His shirt hung outside the sarong. He had no shoes on. And he was blindfolded. They propped him up, made him sit awkwardly on the crossbar of a bicycle. One of his captors sat on the saddle, the one with the rifle by his side. When I saw them they were about to leave. The man could see nothing that was going on around him, or where he would be going.

“When they took off, the blindfolded man had to somehow hang on. One hand on the handlebars, but the other he had to put around the neck of his captor. It was this necessary intimacy that was disturbing. They wobbled off, the man with the rifle following on another bike.

“It would have been easier if they had all walked. But this felt in an odd way ceremonial. Perhaps a bike was a form of status for them and they wished to use it. Why transport a blindfold victim on a bicycle? It made all life seem precarious. It made all of them more equal. Like drunk university students. The blindfolded man had to balance his body in tune with his possible killer. They cycled off and at the far end of the street, beyond the market buildings, they turned and disappeared. Of course the reason they did it that way was so none of us would forget it.”

All my books have begun with non-fiction somewhere in search of fiction. Fiction is what holds non-fiction together. It’s not an alternative, it is a shape. As a story is a shape to incidents we hear or witness or the weather in February or all the incidents I have brought together. My books begin sometimes in one form and turn into another, into a mongrel form, prose and poetry together, a fictional memoir, a fictional biography. John Pilger said, “Never again will a single story be told as though it were the only one.” And I think in our generation, in our time, it is almost immoral to write from only one point of view. You have to represent other sides, other witnesses. He is a touchstone for me in some ways; he writes about art, love, refugees, ghosts, genres that never stay still. It is the clarity of what you do. And so I write books from that intimate gesture and the secrets of families, to be wed to the other families inside us. That is what my mission is.

**AS:** Now Tom Keneally, whose most recent work, *American Scoundrel*, has just been released, will speak on the subject “Running in the Family”.

**THOMAS KENEALLY:** It is wonderful to welcome Michael Ondaatje, a writer who in Canada has extended so much kindness to

Australian writers visiting his country, here in Australia, even though a plane will bear him away this afternoon.

“Running in the family” raises in me the thought of myths which are so persistent, and in some cases, so readily provoked into existence in our national family, and in the human family in general. One of these myths is that the past was simply better. I am certainly not foremost in claiming that perhaps the present prime minister of our wonderful Commonwealth is in pursuit of a past that did not exist, in favour of a present which certainly exists in its own full-blown, urgent way.

In a way, my book *American Scoundrel* is not the best book to be discussing in this context. Sure, there is a connection to Australia via Thomas Francis Meagher who was a remarkable political prisoner in the nineteenth century. Sent to Tasmania, he escaped to America where he became – if you count the number of statues to him – a major American. But he had a friend named Dan Sickles, who committed murder in front of the White House just as the nation was falling apart. I wrote the book because I thought that Sickles was too complex and fascinating a story to pass up.

And *American Scoundrel* does challenge that most wasteful of ideas we play with in the human family – that there was once an ideal of political and human innocence to which we are required to return if we’re to have a hope of sanity. This undefined era of human innocence is summed up in the term “traditional values”. *American Scoundrel* is a tale of traditional values – it tries to define what those values are – from all the unsupervised venality of institutions (without CNN on the front lawn of the White House), to ownership of women, to childhood prostitution, tuberculosis without benefit of antibiotics and (authoritative commentators tell us) as much as 50 per cent of the male population having, at one time or another, suffering from an episode of sexually transmitted disease. In this valley of tears, there were it is true a vast number of observant Christians. The fact that Abraham Lincoln was a doubtful Calvinist, with no church affiliation, was a big issue in the election of 1860. Perhaps it is merely the tradition of religious observance which some commentators hanker for.

The past was also, of course, a world of copious infant deaths, and Mrs. Lincoln and many poorer and less famous people in America, Australia and Canada found that their sole comfort in the face of the mortality of their children was to attend séances. In Mrs Lincoln’s case, the American scoundrel himself, Dan Sickles, was her escort to many a riotous séance within and without the White House. And who would want this kind of world to return – a world of séances, child loss, tuberculosis and venality?

And other myths! It is only recently that we celebrated, a little mutedly in my opinion, the success of the hugely gifted Peter Carey in *The True History of The Kelly Gang*. Despite his great triumph, both at

Booker and bookstall, Carey would not be the sole novelist to find that 11 September, by outdoing fiction in terms of its grand savagery, political irony and height of tragedy, has cast a challenging light on the task of writing fiction.

There were times in our innocent Commonwealth, in our innocent dominion, when fiction and myth-making was, above all, a task performed by novelists and poets: by Henry Lawson, Banjo Paterson, Judith Wright and that wonderful poet and journalist Kenneth Slessor, by singers like Slim Dusty and John Williamson. These images, these fictions, cast light over our souls, so we are all at some level Clancy of the Overflow. This was a myth too, but perhaps a kindlier one than others. Now, in spite of Peter Carey's superb craftsmanship, Ned Kelly and company no longer cast that good old pre-Tampa, pre-11 September innocent light on us.

The panache and daring of Ned Kelly's raid, his holding hostages, while a Sunday night crept its way to bank-opening and bank-robbing time, seems suddenly as remote as an Arthurian legend. There are no benign hostages anymore, and hostages to politics – the asylum-seekers – are not having a riotous time Ned Kelly-wise, at the Ruddock-gang detention centre party. The fictions of the government, as distinct from the fictions of the country's writers, have so thoroughly possessed the community's imagination now that I am tempted to hand out prizes as a response.

There is a universal right available to the human race under international covenants to seek political asylum. This challenges Philip Ruddock's successful alternate fiction by which asylum-seekers have been rendered in the communal imagination, into illegals and queue jumpers. There is a queue in some terms, but it is as fictional as C.S. Lewis' Narnia-story wardrobe, and to be encountered beyond the looking glass. It's too mystical a thing to have a start or finish, but in the space of the foreground of our brains, this queue definitely exists. It justifies the proposition that people deserve detention for years behind razor wire for violating this venerable line, of whose existence, in fleeing tyranny, they themselves were unaware.

It's all very well to joke. But these are the fictions which dominate the imagination of our community now. Even in Australia some nasty habits are running in the family.

A few closing thoughts. Michael Ondaatje and I are rare amongst novelists. We pretty much approve of the films that were made of our books. I like films, but they make me wonder if they moderate and have an impact upon the way we court, have quarrels, extend affection. I wonder how much of our dialogue comes from this source. When Dan Sickles shot his wife's lover dead, he said in explanation, "He has violated my bed." That was the line lifted directly from the dramas of the day. Thus I hope we are all very careful not merely to reproduce

film-talk. In each instant, we should try to achieve our own language. And for distinctive English, read novelists like Ondaatje!

**AS:** I would like to go back to a literary question to both of you. Tom, your latest book *American Scoundrel* is a highly fantasised biography. It employs some of the qualities of fiction. But it isn't fiction. You could have written it as a novel. And Michael, your book is set in the Sri Lankan civil war in the late 1980s–early 1990s. You could have written an essay about this for all the study you must have had to imbue the book with. So how do you go about choosing? Is it still a difficult question or is it just something you followed by instinct?

**TK:** I felt that there was too much time and too much going on in Dan Sickles' life. He lived from 1819 till 1914. He was a Civil War general, an intimate of the Lincolns, a killer, a one-legged lover (he lost his leg at Gettysburg but was able to satisfy the lusty Queen Isabella II of Spain) – too much for a novel. And also the sort of imagination that goes into a novel, I wanted to apply to Australian material, above all. I really wanted to write a book, a novel, about 1942, because although Dan and his wife *are* in the family, they're not in the family in the way 1942 is for me, and the experiences and terrors of that year.

**MO:** I begin with non-fiction and then try to discover what it is like to be in the situation. In that sense I have to have fiction. I have to have a different kind of empathy and idealism, possibly attainable in non-fiction. But, you cannot question what the story is or discover when the story is going wrong and I can only do that in fiction. In non-fiction if you've got a political situation that is so complicated and various, that changes every few minutes and every few weeks, it's difficult to hold this material, and make it last a bit longer. So writing it as fiction allows a slice of a certain time or period. It allows you to understand moments as opposed to talking about the generalisations.

**AS:** It seems that many of your best known books, both of you, actually do have war or its aftermath as the setting – this great turbulence of emotion and setting. Tom, you've written books that centre on the First World War, the Second World War, that centre on wars in Borneo, Vietnam and the French Civil War and American Civil War, as well as Sudan and Eritrea. This is an extraordinary number of occasions in which you have had war in the centre. And for you Michael, *The English Patient* and now Sri Lanka. Is there any deliberation in this choice for essential subject matter?

**MO:** We were surrounded by war. I guess I wrote some in reaction to the portrait of the Second World War. I had grown up with the mythology of it. And I grew up in England in the 1950s with writings and films about the war. But the war seemed very white. The films were English and American and other races or other allies didn't feature particularly at all. I was interested in a very different kind of war, not a formal war, but a war of disappearances and organisations –

much more terrifying and pathological and a question of who is right and who is wrong.

**TK:** It's probably a character flaw, Andrea, but like Michael I remember World War II very clearly. My father was away and women would come into our house with telegrams and the telegrams would say that their husbands had been captured in Singapore or, earlier on, in Crete, and people were always losing relatives in the Western Deserts and then in New Guinea. So at an early age for me, my father was removed by war, yet would send back nifty war items through the mail – SS stripes and Afrika Korps caps, holsters and a pistol with a swastika on it. It all evoked the war as it was portrayed in the Saturday afternoon movies.

But I think war attracts us all also, simply because it is so incomprehensible when you live in a stable society. The question of why we do it? Do we enjoy it? Who is it for? I've got to say that the only conflict I've had first-hand experience of was that of Eritrea, in a situation which raises all the ironies that Michael's book *Anil's Ghost* raises. One wonders why some people live in tranquillity in Sydney and can get up on a rostrum and run down and satirise the Prime Minister with impunity while, on the other hand, there are places where death squads will get you for that.

**AS:** Actually I would like to ask you, given that what you ask about war is inevitably political in some fashion or another, whether the idea that art can change anything means much as to you both as writers, in the year 2002, as it once did?

**MO:** Sadly, I'd say, artists can't change anything. One of the things I do want to know, and am writing about in *Anil's Ghost*, is to try and make it about civilians as opposed to the military. If you write about the military it somehow counts for war. It just does. If you mention the machine gun, people start looking at the make as if it was a Porsche. I wanted to keep a civilian situation as opposed to a formal military one.

**TK:** I take very seriously W. H. Auden's statement about poetry, that it changes nothing, "it exists in the valley of its own saying". That seems sadly to be the case. As I said earlier, the movies probably define our behaviour in certain ways. But when we look at historical injustice, sometimes films skew that. When they don't, the injustice that they portray remains a specific historical injustice. People don't really come forth and then put to use that image of what happened on the screen as a means of judging their behaviour towards others. And so film, too, may exist in the valley of its own saying. But it seems to be a wider valley than the valley of poetry and fiction. And there seem to be many more people in it, and heavily influenced by it in terms of behaviour, but not in terms of much recurrent viciousness that runs in our souls, mine as much as anybody's.

**AS:** Now to film. Tom, you have had *The Chant of Jimmy Blacksmith* made into film in the late 1970s and, of course, *Schindler's Ark* which

became *Schindler's List* as a film in the mid 1990s. And Michael with you *The English Patient* became a much admired film. Sebastian Faulks spoke recently of how delighted he was with the film of his war novel *Charlotte Gray* because he felt that the film was trying to be a film and not a book. This suggests to me that he must have let go of his ownership. Do you think that is important in watching your book made into a movie?

**MO:** In some odd way the writer is less protective of his or her book than the reader is. I didn't mind what they did with *The English Patient*. I was very lucky. I was only too happy to give it to Anthony Minghella to write the screen play and direct it as film. The more they changed it the happier I was. At the same time one has to discuss what film can do that books cannot do and vice versa. My example for that is that the *The English Patient* ends with Hiroshima and what happens as a result of that to those characters. In the film they shot that scene and it didn't work at all and they bustled around and tried to fix it – to change the plot in some way. Now this was in some ways a sort of betrayal of the book. On another level, it would have been complete betrayal of the film to put in something that wasn't working.

One thing a film cannot do, that a book can do, is leap to another point of view, to another story, to another parallel story and concentrate on another part of the world. Whereas in a film this isn't so. And I think that this is a serious limitation of film.

**TK:** Yes, it is funny that the film can't be a kind of comic of the novel. One reason is the result would be too long. Steven Spielberg's director's cut of *Schindler*, that is the cut before the cut, was six and a quarter hours long. So you can't put in a lot of the subtext and there does not exist a lot of the elbow room for sub-plots of the kind the written word has leisure to deal with. The difference is that film people have their elbow room in the limo, and we have our elbow room in our books. And I'd rather have our elbow room than theirs.

But I found that you should accept that the other person, the director, is going to make the book his own. I've had a lot of experience of that with the great Australian director Fred Schepisi, who has now made another film on the Booker Prize winning novel of Graham Swift named *Last Orders*. Fred Schepisi told me very definitely with *Jimmy Blacksmith* that it was going to be his story; he was using the text as a launching pad. What you hope will happen is that the text will be treated with integrity. I had a third film made, a film for television by Grenada, of *Gossip from the Forest*, which is about the peace process at the end of World War I. That too was well-made. So it's a bit like a wedding, where you see your delicate daughter in the hands of some stranger, and you just hope he'll treat her with integrity. That's all you can ask. Besides, they give you the devil's candy, the big pay day if you like, so that you will go away. It was refreshing to see the way the producers of *The English Patient* involved Michael Ondaatje. And I was

delighted – I’ve got to say – with the way Spielberg involved me as a courtesy. Because you are a bit like the mother-in-law at the honeymoon

**Q:** Are there any subjects about which you would choose not to write?

**MO:** I think 11 September would be on top of my list. I find the obsession with it in America absolutely bizarre, although valid I suppose. Almost as if they haven’t been part of the world for the past hundred years. People can’t talk about anything else.

**TK:** I would probably avoid, for similar reasons, 11 September. It’s so potent in its own right. One other thing I have thought of writing about is a novelist who is under a fatwa. It would be indecent to write that book because it’s something that a living writer has had to live through. I did once momentarily think of it as a subject, and backed away. It would be an easy way to lose the friendship of Salman Rushdie to begin with. Yet in a way it cries out to be a novel. So there are subjects that cry out to be a novel and you can’t write them. Another subject fraught with peril is to write directly about your family, and writing about your own personal life, which Australian males of my generation hate doing. Instead we set the book somewhere else, and we give away just as much about ourselves anyhow. In a sense, you’re always writing about your own family wherever and whatever you are writing about.

**Q:** How do you write about family in a sensitive way, especially those who are still alive?

**MO:** Perhaps you should deal with it as if everyone you write about is dead. I think a role model for how you write about other people is James Agee’s novel *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*. It’s one of the great works of prose. He went to the South and spent time with share croppers and he wrote about himself as well. But when you write about other people and remain invisible yourself – that’s the problem.

**TK:** There’s a kind of authorial compassion which may leave your family less concerned. But the brand of first novel called “The mummy and daddy screwed me up” novel, while often full of talent, leaves the dice loaded against the parents. In case you don’t know how wounded and emotionally exploited the writer is, you are told in dismissive ways what the parents choose to wear; about their recreations and so on. But if you enter the arena of family in a way that everyone has an inherent reason for being the way they are, and you write with authorial compassion, you might find that people aren’t as offended as they could have been. And you can try to distance yourself from the family, by giving your father red hair instead of blonde hair. That’s a compass deviation which is very small, but at the end of a hundred thousand words it means that the character you’ve written of is a long way from the island your father was.

But don’t be inhibited. If it’s necessary, you’ve got to be ruthless I suppose. I remember approaching a screenwriter in New York, a playwright who had put a close friend of his in a scene in a film called

*Moonstruck*. And it is a scene in which the friend is ditched by a younger woman and then tries to pick up an older one – it's not a flattering scene at all. I asked the writer about why he had done that, and he said, "Oh, I think every writer owes his friends his contempt." I thought that was a bit tough. It's not the full answer. And you can be compassionate in careful ways. I wrote a little book called *Homebush Boy*, describing the relationship between myself and my father. It was very difficult, but I approached it with a love of him and it worked. He didn't disinherit me from his war pension.

**AS:** We have a question about whether the resistance to writing about 11 September is because of the close proximity in time and the intimacy of the event and whether it might be different in ten years.

**MO:** It's already historical. It's already mythologised. For me as a writer the last thing I want to write about is historical people, with a big "H". I'm always interested in unhistorical people. People who are not in the newspapers. Events like the World Trade Centre, or the Titanic, catastrophic events. They'll make news out of these for the next 3000 years. But this doesn't interest me because it's already such a public matter. I'd rather write about somebody who lived next door.

**TK:** That's very much the difference between fiction and non-fiction. And this is a sweeping statement but there is a lot of truth to it. Fiction is always dealing with the margin. It often takes on people who live on the fault line between cultures, and who might be connected to someone famous but aren't famous themselves. They might fleetingly see the King pass by, but they are not the King. And that's why novelists, although their personal morality is no better and often worse than other people's, are so stroppy about human rights. They spend their lives imagining they are someone on the margin. In the case of Michael's novel it's a familiar territory: a displaced Sri Lankan going home. But 11 September is in a way too massive an event, and too – as it were – pre-mythologised to attract fiction.

This does not mean there will be no gold rush of people writing about 11 September. I bet within five years there is a best-selling movie with Meg Ryan and Tom Hanks. They are going to meet for coffee on top of the World Trade Centre and they don't make it. But that sort of film is going to be made. In a way, we'll all be writing about it. But it's going to be hard to write about it well.

**AS:** I'm going to steal a quick question here. There is a debate that surfaces, for example with the Booker Prize. For many years now a vast majority of those books shortlisted, including last year's winner Peter Carey's *Ned Kelly*, are set in the past. If you look at your two bodies of work that would have to be the case. Is there any particular resistance to setting a book right here, right now, in Toronto or in Sydney, is there a resistance that you don't find this so interesting?

**MO:** I think I'm working my way up. My first novel was set in New Orleans in 1910. Then I worked through the twenties and thirties to

*The English Patient* to now where I'm left with science fiction. For me there is very little to write about in the present. But having said that, all novels are historical. *Anil's Ghost* takes place in contemporary times but it feels like an historical novel. You're looking back in some ways. But to evoke and catch the present is a very difficult thing to do. What stays, what goes, what is peripheral.

**TK:** Everything in the past is interpreted for us by historians, or rendered in memoirs of the time, and in a way that's easier. The present is not as well interpreted. It's too chaotic. And it's easy to find models of the present in the past. As with *The Chant of Jimmy Blacksmith*. I thought *The Chant of Jimmy Blacksmith* was a perfect story to tell because at the time I was reckless enough to write it there was another war – not the Boer War of the novel, but Vietnam. And we were in the years immediately after this referendum. So I stayed in the past a lot because it was easier to understand. You could read expert commentary on it. But I'm working my way up too. It's funny, I think of my book on 1942 as a contemporary book, as *Bettany's Book* was in part. But that's only because I was around in 1942, and the child you were never leaves you. You are always that child. That's what my wife tells me anyhow.

In *Bettany's Book* I had a bet each way. I had contemporary Sydney and the Sudan combined with nineteenth Australia. It's easier, however, explicitly to point out the similarities between past and present in a non-fiction book and that's what I try to do with Sickles. But again, I'm dealing with quite a famous man in his age. And non-fiction tends to be about quite well-known men and women and quite talented men and women. Not necessarily the person on the margin. Say in the case of Ulster, the Paddy girl who falls in love with an SAS paratrooper. Fiction favours that sort of intimate personal thing.

**Q:** It has been said that books write themselves and the author simply puts it down. What do you say?

**MO:** Well it takes me seven years to write it down. But I'm glad somebody else is working on it.

**TK:** People often say that the characters take over, but they don't. It's yourself taking over. It's that part of yourself where you know things you don't know you know. It's the subconscious – it's the part of the brain beyond the border where all the gods and the drowned maidens and sailors and demi-gods and ancestor heroes dwell. And they can contribute hugely to the solution. So you need the front of the brain, the explicit part of the brain, the laboriously working part of the brain to contribute to the novel. But the way the characters develop often comes from the subconscious part of the brain, which has the effect that you feel as if the characters are taking over like wilful children.

**Q:** Both of you write about beliefs and ideas. I wondered if you had ever arrived at the view that, ultimately, all beliefs are false are

consequently most of them end up being an excuse for a profession and thus work.

**MO:** I have tended to avoid beliefs and ideas most of my life actually. When I write that's the last thing on my mind. I don't have a theme or a plan when I write a book. I begin and see where it goes and just tell it as a story as it happens and set the characters and then get somehow to the end. Certainly with that kind of approach there are debates or arguments, differing opinions about things. *Anil's Ghost* is a continual discussion between two sides, about truth and what you do in such a situation, how you cope.

**AS:** Can I just ask you something before Tom answers. That brought to mind one of the lines you quote from the Canadian poet in *Anil's Ghost*. When the character says if I look for one law of the universe which people actually believe in it would be fear.

**MO:** Yes, that's so. It seemed so apt for the people, and the country I was writing about in *Anil's Ghost*. Fear.

**TK:** The novel of its nature tends to work against great beliefs – or great beliefs as an excuse for murder. That's certainly characteristic of Michael's novel. "*Anil's Ghost*," says the *Independent* "has come as close to a holy book as a novel ever should." It is obvious that religion has formed the cultural colours of many oppressed peoples. Yet most conflicts are based on previous grievances mainly to do with territory and equality of opportunity. In wars, even wars of religion, you've got to look for the real estate. Even for wars and conflicts, some as close as Indonesia, where Christians are being wiped out by Muslim extremists. By the way, Muslim and extremists are not the same word. But on both sides, the victims and the tyrants, the colours often seem to be religious. In culture and in religion there is a Satanic temptation to exclude the world view of others. I was raised in the One True Faith. And that delayed me in my progress towards meeting a lot of good-looking heretics – Presbyterians, Methodists, and so on. There is a satanic temptation in religion to claim the one true view, and thus a temptation to either downgrade, dispossess or murder those who don't share it.

**GERARD HENDERSON:** Could I just go back to your comment about 11 September, the fact that many books will be written on this but you've written a book *American Scoundrel* on the Civil War. I think at the last count, essentially non-fiction work, but something like 60,000 books have been written on the American Civil War. So obviously there is a huge hunger in the United States and North America for discussion about the American Civil War. And to Michael Ondaatje, you've written a book about the Sri Lankan Civil War. When you go back there is that a dangerous topic still to have pursued it the way you have pursued it here.

**MO:** I think in terms of background sources it is not the same writing about war and not living there as it is if you did live there. There hasn't

been that kind of attack on anyone for writing a book about the civil war in Sri Lanka. You know this is not a literary moment in Sri Lanka. They're not worried about books. So I don't feel that. I'm sure there are some people who don't like the book and others who do. But I don't feel any fear.

**TK:** *American Scoundrel* is about a man and woman, the scale of their sins and the way society allows the murderer to be redeemed and how it destroys the woman. This woman, Teresa Sickles, whose letters I read, is a charming woman. She is not neurotic, she is even ingenuous for a woman as worldly as she is. She is a stoic in dealing with her situation. She dies too young, of course, in the tradition of nineteenth century good women. But Sickles lives forever and redeems himself through the Civil War. So the Civil War is his redemptive mechanism rather than something I wanted to study in itself. If he'd stayed in politics somehow and not fought the war I still would have written the book. But it is true that through returning to a study of the Civil War through *The Great Shame*, and Thomas Francis Meagher's extraordinary campaigns with his 5000 heroic and demented Irishmen on the Union side, I did get a taste for the ironies and extraordinary nature of that conflict. So I wasn't desolated that I had to write about the war again, but I would have written about these two people no matter where Sickles went after his murder.

**Q:** As it is International Woman's Day, I would like to ask you both how you go about writing a woman's point of view?

**MO:** Well I always try to write something that I cannot write, and try and enter a world that I don't really know. It was important that the hero of *Anil's Ghost* was a woman. Those I met in civil rights groups across the world were women. See I'm interested in people who work in that field. Secondly I am interested in people who come to the West, study there and become professionals and return to a country where they are suddenly forced back into how they had been at eighteen years old. That would have worked as well if Anil was a man. But most of all it allowed me to expand who I was. As Tom just said, you discover what you don't know. As a man it would have been much more familiar. So "Anil" allowed me an extra arm to understand things.

**TK:** It took me a long time to stop being a total sexist brute, but having daughters and a wife, to whom I was very close in various ways and still am, gave me an interest in the woman's perspective. I became convinced, the older I got, that my wife was a better man than I am. She is also a very accomplished woman. There was a time where we were in Eritrea together and she was just better at all that. She was better eating grains and drinking out of craters and dealing with injury, injuries suffered by Eritreans, that is, than I was. When we did the obligatory trip to the front line, I got heat sickness and she didn't. So I've always been fascinated by that in us that makes us feminine, and that in us that makes us masculine. Now if you are a male born in my

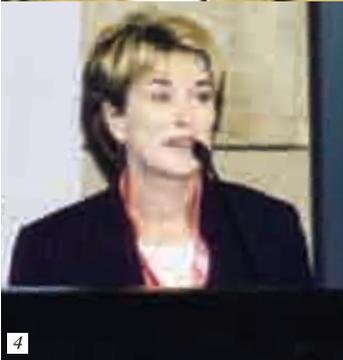
Australia that side of you, that equipment that you have in your subconscious to be a woman, is cemented over in childhood. Yet I've got the idea that all the equipment you need to be a mother is laid down in you, and everything you need to be a male warrior is laid down in you, and then your sex is determined after. Now this may not be scientifically true, but that's the way I've come to think of it.

I first came to write from a woman's point of view in the book called *Woman of the Inner Sea*. It was a book never condemned by any woman critic as being terribly insensitive. Since then, attempting to write from a woman's point of view has become my mainstay.

**AS:** I'll sneak in one last question here. We do have such a strong Canadian umbrella at this event today. One of the books I always recall enjoying immensely was Margaret Atwood's *Survival*. It gave Canadian writing a melancholic quality. At the time many Australian writers and readers identified with this, as Australians identify with many things Canadian. I would love to ask you both whether you think over that twenty year period that this is still the case or whether this may have changed?

**MO:** I'm not quite sure how close a parallel that is. I don't know both countries well enough. Emotionally, writers and artists in Canada and Australia are very much in the same situation – essentially at war with United States of America. What we've got is a culture that having spread its radar so much that one is always having to deal with being alternative. And you get something like this with France as well. With Hollywood and so on. It's not, though, that writers recognise these things at the time but its one of those patterns we look back on and see later. What is more, young Canadian writers today grow up with a variety of cultural inspirations. With the availability of translation we have now, they can be influenced by some obscure writer in Italy rather than a big name in our own country.

**TK:** You could have said that about Australia. We had a great writer, Patrick White, a Nobel Prize winner, a brilliant writer alienated from Australian society. He was alienated from modern society in general as well. And this double alienation that Patrick had did impress us young writers with our duty to be similarly doubly alienated. But in Australia and Canada young writers now rise above those questions. Today there does not exist, for example, what existed here when I was a young writer, that sense of exile. No young Canadian writer, no young Australian writer feels that particular cultural anxiety anymore. No young Australian film maker feels it. They want to get an American deal on their film which might have an ensuing effect on the way the final product emerges. But the days of melancholy, and a sense of being misplaced Europeans are gone. New Zealand is the same. That sense of exile was profound – a melancholy you would need an icebreaker to get through. But it's gone now.



1. Thomas Kenecally, HE Jean Fournier, Andrea Stretton, Michael Ondaatje.
2. Thomas Kenecally at the podium.
3. Audience in the Australian Stock Exchange theatrette.
4. Andrea Stretton.
5. Michael Ondaatje at the podium.

Photographer – David Karonidis

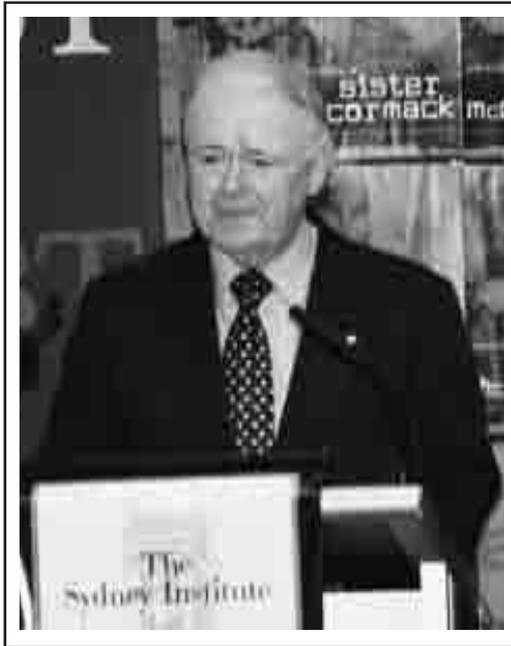


Photo – David Karonidis

*Sir William Deane*

Australians have been generous in their contribution to third world countries as aid workers and missionaries. Sister Irene McCormack, an Australian nun, was one of these Australians. After more than twenty years as a teacher in secondary schools, in 1987 she began to learn Spanish and became part of the small team of Sisters of St Joseph working with the poor of Peru. Her death in 1991, at the hands of Shining Path guerrillas in the Andes, shocked Australians and Peruvians. Anne Henderson's *The Killing of Sister McCormack* (HarperCollins 2002) records the life and death of Irene McCormack. The book was launched at The Sydney Institute by former Governor General Sir William Deane on Tuesday 12 March 2002.

# BIOGRAPHY AND

## *MEMORY – THE KILLING OF SISTER McCORMACK*

William Deane

At the outset, I acknowledge the traditional custodians on whose ancestral land we are privileged to be.

G.K. Chesterton's friend, Edmund Clerihew Bentley, once wrote that:

The art of biography  
Is different from geography.  
Geography is about maps.  
Biography is about chaps.

Overall accuracy requires that the word "chaps" in that "Clerihew" be understood in the way some of our contemporary young people use the word "guys", namely as a familiar word inclusive of both sexes since, even among "Eminent Victorians", the world of biography has never been exclusively populated by male subjects.

That having been said, the verse does help make a valid point. It is that the overall worth of a biography inevitably depends as much, or almost as much, on the "chap" who is its subject – famous, infamous or previously unknown – as on the literary abilities of the author.

As its name indicates, *The Killing of Sister McCormack* tells the story of a death – the execution by shooting on 21 May 1991 of a physically small 52 year old Australian nun by young Sandero or Shining Path guerrillas in the town square of the little village of Huasahuasi, high in the Peruvian Andes. Nonetheless, the book is a true biography in that it is the story of a life. But it is the nature and circumstances of the death which make the life a subject of extraordinary interest and importance – a truly significant part of our Australian story. Consequently, it is the death which underlies not only the book's early pages which recount it but all the pages which follow.

Irene McCormack was but one of five people murdered on that day. The other four were locals, all men, killed by reason of some perceived support of the Peruvian Government or military. They can properly be seen as local victims of local terrorism. Irene's death had other dimensions. The facts of her killing and of the sham trial which preceded it leave no room for doubt that she was killed because she was

in Huasahuasi as a nun working to minister to, to teach, and to feed, the disadvantaged members of an impoverished community – work of the kind identified by St. Matthew in Chapter 25 of his Gospel as the ultimate test of our worth as human beings.

In that work and in her life, Irene McCormack was but one of the thousands of remarkable women who have devoted their lives to the service of others as part of the Congregation which Blessed Mary MacKillop – Mother Mary of the Cross – founded in Australia more than 130 years ago.

But the nature and circumstances of Sister Irene's death set her apart from every other Sister of St. Joseph and every other Australian Catholic Religious. Fittingly, her name was included among the Christian martyrs and witnesses to the Christian Faith who were honoured at the Ecumenical Ceremony in the Roman Colosseum on 7 May 2000. It is relevant to mention the Pope's plea on that occasion: "They must not be forgotten, rather they must be remembered and their lives documented".

That is not, of course, to suggest that *The Killing of Sister McCormack* is a two-dimensional hagiography. It is not. Through the combination of the author's words with the words of Irene and the words and memories of people who knew her, a picture of a vibrant human being emerges.

That picture has a variety of aspects. A personality which some people sometimes saw as over-bullient but which reflected the love of life and people which underlines the magnitude of her death. Inevitably, some doubts and uncertainties and a few insignificant human weaknesses.

But, overwhelmingly, Sister Irene's strengths: her love, her abilities, her enthusiasm, her loyalty to family, her courage, her faith, her essential goodness, her sacrifice ... and, through the book's photographs, her smile. Only comparatively few Australians were privileged to know Irene McCormack during her life. A decade after her death she is increasingly coming to be known throughout our land. She will, I believe, in time become an inspiration to Australian Christians generally.

In his comments at the Ecumenical Ceremony in May 2000, the Pope was at pains to stress the importance of modern martyrs and witnesses to the faith to *the whole* of the modern Universal Christian Church. Having referred to some modern martyrs from Christian communities other than his own, the Holy Father said:

The presence of representatives of other Churches and Ecclesial Communities ... shows that the example of the heroic witnesses to the faith is truly precious for all Christians. In the twentieth century, almost all the Churches and Ecclesial Communities have known persecution, uniting

Christians in their places of suffering and making their shared sacrifice a sign of hope for times yet to come.

Like any biography of a modern dynamic life, the book invites controversy in relation to some factual or other matters. In that regard, I understand that members of Irene McCormack's family in Perth strongly object to some aspects of the work. Past experience leads me to make the cautionary comment that my launching of the book does not necessarily indicate my endorsement of any particular view in relation to any of those matters of possible controversy.

But I see no need for such caution as regards the essential message of Irene McCormack's life and death. That message encompasses a simple truth and a basic fact. The simple truth is that the critical test of our worth as individuals and as a nation is how we treat the most vulnerable and disadvantaged of our fellow human beings.

The basic – and inconvenient – fact is that, for the purposes of that test, our fellow human beings are not confined to our fellow Australians. That simple truth and that basic fact are as important to our country now as they have ever been. If we ignore them, we will surely lose our way.

And now with great pleasure, and if Anne will come and join me, I officially launch Anne Henderson's *The Killing of Sister McCormack*.

### **Anne Henderson responds**

Thank you Sir William for launching *The Killing of Sister McCormack* before such a great audience. And thank you all, so much, for coming.

The BT Financial Group training room in Sydney is indeed a long way from the Andean town of Huasahuasi in Peru where Irene McCormack is buried. That we are celebrating her memory today is in itself a wonder. And it says something about the power of collective memory. That someone who appeared to be such an average Australian to her friends and colleagues, can stand head and shoulders in our midst here and in Peru.

Some have questioned the title of this book as if it is too shocking, too violent for such a peace loving woman. I see it differently. We wouldn't be here except for the fact that Irene McCormack was brutally murdered by terrorists in Peru in 1991.

Her death, which she faced with enormous courage, along with four men from the town, was in a sense her resurrection. It made possible the telling of the story of her life. It will forever focus attention on the suffering of the people of Peru in their time of civil war and terror between 1980 and the mid 1990s.

More than that, the telling of Irene McCormack's story also focuses attention on the work of so many in affluent Australia, those who go beyond the relaxed and comfortable to help the desperate and

dispossessed. For as I listened to the accounts of my interviewees, who remembered Irene as a colleague or friend, I was reminded of how many Australians have given their days and weeks and years to poorly paid work, here and overseas, helping the less fortunate.

One of the most rewarding moments for me after the book was published, was to receive a phone call from Sister Clare Ahern, the provincial elect for Western Australia, Irene McCormack's home state.

The call came mid week, at what would have been around 7.30am WA time. Sister Clare had received her copy of the book the night before and around 7pm had started reading it. She hadn't put it down until the early hours of the next morning when she had finished it. On the phone she sounded exhausted but very positive.

Sister Clare's message was one of endorsement. But more than that – it's *my* story, she told me. The story of the modern nun. And she seemed completely astonished that in the telling of one nun's life, the stories of so many others have been told.

Reconstructing a life is not easy. There are a lot of experiences recorded in *The Killing of Sister McCormack*. In the end I have put together events and character from the many perspectives of those who knew Irene McCormack. And since I didn't ever know her, I had to approach my material carefully, to try to sift the rumour from the genuine recollection.

Some of my interviewees are quoted in the book, some are not. At times I was given privileged information "not for publication" so to speak. Some of these explanations would come only after it was evident that I knew something anyway. Only then would my second or third source confirm that I was on the right track and then, thankfully for me, add a few more details.

Because some recollections were "classified", to coin a phrase, I couldn't use all the information I now have. But for every quote from someone on the record, the same story or explanation has been given to me from others who are not quoted. So in this way I was able to back up my material, to extract assertion from a true memory.

Already there are widely differing interpretations of *The Killing of Sister McCormack*. One reviewer thinks I'm writing for the "devout" and trying to have Sister Irene canonised; another has interpreted the book as demonstrating the real person behind the two dimensional picture of hagiography or lives of the saints style of writing – a woman who was no saint in the technical sense – someone who loved a party and erred on the side of pleasure.

As I say in the book, I came to think of Irene as a human Tigger from *Winnie The Pooh* – very lovable, energetic and loving but at times capable of unintended turbulence.

As to the reviewers' very differing interpretations – so far so good. Obviously the finished product out of many recollections leaves the reader room to make his or her own judgement.

One of the phrases I kept coming upon when talking with Irene's friends and colleagues was that she was "just an ordinary person". I puzzled over this for quite a while. What is ordinary about taking vows of poverty, celibacy and obedience, or having a mid life crisis in your late thirties about God and the meaning of commitment, or going half way round the world to live alongside the poor and terrorised in a country where you barely speak the language?

It seems to me that we all suffer from a tendency to undervalue the good that so called ordinary people can do. Sister Irene McCormack was not ordinary, she was universal.

Whether martyr, saint, ordinary person or something in between, Irene McCormack is now a national hero, partly for her courageous death, but more importantly for what she symbolised in that death. What she stood for was the life she lived – its fun, its generosity, its mistakes, its pleasures and its sacrifices.

Thank you again Sir William Deane for your words today. And also for your support over the years for the work of so many ordinary people in Australia who, like Sister Irene, do so many extraordinary good things.



Photo – David Karonidis

*Mike Richards*

Author Mike Richards first became involved in the case of Ronald Ryan as leader of the student protests against Ryan's execution. Ronald Ryan was hanged in Pentridge Prison, Melbourne, on 3 February 1967 for the shooting murder of a warder during a daring escape from maximum security. Mike Richards has now written an account of the execution and life of Ronald Ryan, *The Hanged Man* (Scribe 2002) and on Wednesday 20 March, he addressed The Sydney Institute to capture some of the drama surrounding the events of the Ryan hanging, as well as some of his own reassessments of the guilty verdict.

# RONALD RYAN AND

---

*NED KELLY*

**Mike Richards**

Before talking about some of the parallels between Ryan and Kelly, I thought I might start by saying something about what makes the Ryan story interesting. There are several key elements: first, Ryan, the man, is interesting and unusual in a number of ways; second, the capital case involving Ryan took some extraordinary twists that distinguish it from others; and, third, the politics surrounding the case mark it as an important turning point in Australian social and political history.

Before doing that, however, I should set the Ryan case in the context of the death penalty in Australia, and briefly outline the circumstances of the Ryan case itself.

## **Historical context**

Capital punishment is inextricably linked to Australian settlement. That is because transportation was frequently the alternative to hanging offenders. In a real sense the death penalty came to Australia with the First Fleet. Public executions took place in all the colonies, and hanging was the only form of execution. In the early years of colonial New South Wales and Tasmania, capital punishment was so frequent that the use of the death penalty exceeded that of England at that time, in terms of rates of execution, and even rivalled its use in absolute terms.

The twentieth century saw a steady decline in the use of the death penalty in Australia. In the almost 85 year period from Federation in 1901 to 1984 (when Western Australia – the last state to do so – abolished capital punishment) there were 113 executions in Australia. In the 35 years from 1950 to 1984, however, there were only sixteen executions in Australia – and, of course, none since 1967, which of course makes Ryan the last man hanged in Australia. In Victoria, the last state to end active use of the death penalty, there were 186 executions in the 125-year period from the first executions in 1842 to the last in 1967, but there were only 21 executions in the twentieth century, and only two of those were offences other than murder.

According to researchers, colonial Victoria possessed “one of the most luxuriant collections of capital offences in the English speaking world”: piracy, arson on the docks, carnal knowledge, kidnapping, rape, murder, treason, wounding with intent, and robbery with violence. These were all offences carrying the death penalty in Victoria in the first 50 years of the colony, and several people were executed for some of these offences. It was not until 1949 that the death penalty was abolished in Victoria for all offences except murder and treason.

Through the latter part of the twentieth century, state governments moved away from the death penalty – prior to Ryan in 1967, Victoria’s last execution was that of Lee, Clayton and Andrews in 1951, although the Liberal Government of Sir Henry Bolte had sought to hang Robert Peter Tait in 1962. Victoria finally abolished the death penalty in 1975. New South Wales had, of course, abolished the death penalty for murder in 1955, although there had been no executions in NSW since 1940.

## **Overview of the Ryan case**

The Ryan case has its beginnings on 19 December 1965. On that day, Ryan, then aged 40, a prisoner serving an eight-year sentence for safe-blowing and stealing, and Peter John Walker, a convicted armed robber and car thief, then aged 24, broke out of Pentridge, Victoria’s maximum security gaol. During that escape, it was alleged, a prison officer pursuing the escapee, George Henry Hodson, was shot and killed by Ryan outside the gaol. Ryan and Walker successfully eluded their prison officer pursuers and later police, and were at large for seventeen days before they were recaptured.

Prior to their recapture, however, public unease and fear grew when Ryan and Walker staged an armed bank robbery in suburban Melbourne, and later Walker shot and killed a man who he suspected was about to betray them. With extensive media coverage of the escape and subsequent killing, public anxiety and clamour for their capture intensified. Newspapers reported that attendances after dark at Melbourne entertainment venues dramatically fell away as fearful people stayed at home. This period was later described by a Victorian Cabinet Minister as exhibiting a “reign of terror”, in which “the venter of law and order in our ... community is not very thick”. Ryan and Walker initially eluded the intensive police efforts to find them, efforts described as one of the greatest manhunts Victoria had ever seen, and they were not recaptured until more than two weeks later in Sydney at the Concord hospital.

The escapees were subsequently tried in the Victorian Supreme Court in March 1966 where, after a trial lasting three weeks, Ryan was found guilty of the murder of the prison officer Hodson, and Walker was found not guilty of murder but guilty of manslaughter. A lengthy

appeals procedure was carried through the Court of Criminal Appeal and right up to the High Court of Australia, but all appeals failed.

The death sentence passed on Ryan was considered by the Victorian Cabinet on 12 December 1966. Led by the Liberal Party Premier, Sir Henry Bolte, the Cabinet departed from what had become the routine practice in commutation cases over more than a decade, and resolved that Ryan's execution by hanging should go ahead in January 1967. The decision sparked the most serious political division in Victoria in 50 years and was a defining moment for subsequent political protest movements. Opinion in the community about whether Ryan should be hanged was polarised. The protest movement mobilised in opposition to the hanging argued the case for the commutation of Ryan's death sentence.

That campaign was in many significant ways activated and sustained by the Melbourne daily press, traditionally and importantly allies of the Bolte Government, and brought into coalition an uncommon assortment of intellectual, political and labour organisations and individuals. Despite the political campaign of opposition to the hanging, and further legal appeals – including an appeal to the Privy Council sitting in London – that saw the execution temporarily stayed, the twice delayed Cabinet decision was carried into effect on 3 February 1967.

I turn now to what makes the Ryan story interesting: first, Ryan, the man.

### **Ryan, the man**

The striking thing about Ryan is that – superficially, at least – he looked to have been a highly unlikely criminal to find himself executed for murder. I started research for my book in 1968, and about 10 years after that, I interviewed Ian Grindlay, the former governor of Pentridge prison, who had stood next to Ryan on the gallows when he was executed.

Grindlay earlier had been the governor of Bendigo Training Prison, where Ryan had served his first sentence of imprisonment in 1960, and I asked Grindlay about Ryan. Grindlay outlined Ryan's exemplary prison record and his educational achievements in Bendigo, which he described as "outstanding". After listening to Grindlay extol Ryan's achievements in prison I asked him whether he considered Ryan a model prisoner. "No, not *a* model prisoner", Grindlay answered in measured tones. "In my 30 years of prison service, Ryan was *the* model prisoner." So this was a surprise to me and it raised an urgent question: 'How could a man described as *the* model prisoner in 30 years undertake a daring and ambitious break-out from the state's maximum security prison, shoot a warder in the course of the escape, and end up being executed for murder?'

Well, of course, the answer is that Ryan was a complex character, who – while he was an outstanding achiever in prison in his early years – had embarked upon a quest to become Australia’s leading criminal. In essence, Ryan had a criminal personality that is best characterised as self-destructive: whenever he would begin to succeed, his unconscious need for punishment would precipitate new criminal acts and the cycle of crime, punishment, and rehabilitation would begin again. Thus he was *both* model prisoner and ambitious criminal.

The nature of Ryan’s criminal record has not been well understood. There were two things said about Ryan in the lead up to his execution: first, that he had not committed an offence until the age of 31; and second, that he had no history of violent crime. My researches have shown both propositions to be untrue. Ryan was a recidivist offender beginning with juvenile offences from a young age, including petty thefts at age 11 for which he was made a ward of state. More seriously, he had been involved in criminal acts since his 20s: an attempted bank robbery at age 20; an arson at age 28; forgeries at age 31; shop and store-breakings at age 33; and armed robberies in New South Wales at 39. He was never charged with these latter offences, although he confessed to them to NSW police.

More seriously still, I have uncovered a crime for which Ryan was never charged involving violence in the early 1960s. This was an offence in which Ryan went to a finance company in Melbourne to arrange a loan but, finding the elderly owner alone on the premises, Ryan hit him over the head with a cosh and cleaned out the safe. Ryan believed that he had killed the old man and was haunted by the thought. In fact, although hospitalised overnight, the old man was not seriously injured. Ryan was never questioned about this offence.

## **Ryan, the capital case**

The second issue I want to talk about is the Ryan case itself: what makes it different from other capital cases. That primarily turns upon the issue that has dogged the case since 1967: was Ryan guilty of shooting prison officer Hodson? There was controversy at the time and since that Ryan might have been innocent of the killing of Hodson. This is based upon the angle of the bullet and a theory about a shot supposedly fired by a warder on the prison wall

My own conclusion is that Ryan *was* guilty. There are several reasons for that conclusion. First, 11 witnesses testified to seeing Ryan aim the rifle towards Hodson and hearing a shot as Hodson fell. Despite discrepancies in the details of their evidence, their testimony was strong. Second, having heard all the evidence over three weeks, the jury was in no doubt about Ryan’s guilt. Third, the trial judge, John Starke, believed the jury was entitled to convict Ryan of murder. This is important, bearing in mind that Starke was a life-long abolitionist,

who had represented the defendants in two other notable capital cases in Australia – Rupert Max Stuart in South Australia in 1958 and Robert Peter Tait in Victoria in 1961. Fourth, although he pleaded “Not guilty” at his trial, Ryan several times made admissions about the shooting – to police, accomplices, a nun, and family members. The night before the execution, Ryan admitted to Pentridge governor, Ian Grindlay that he had fired the fatal shot.

And, finally, in the last letter he wrote the night before he was hanged, Ryan said only: “I am innocent of intent.” By that he meant that while he had fired the shot that killed Hodson, he had not intended to kill him, only to stop him from apprehending his co-escapee Walker.

### **The politic significance of the Ryan case**

Media accounts at the time of the case, and since, have asserted that there were between four and seven Cabinet Ministers opposed to the hanging. In fact, while four Ministers did speak against capital punishment, *per se*, or the need for consistency in the exercise of executive clemency, *none* argued there were mitigating factors in Ryan’s case that would warrant clemency and a commutation of his sentence. Bear in mind, the *Crimes Act* required Cabinet to advise the Governor in Executive Council where the prerogative of mercy might be exercised for a prisoner under sentence of death. There were *no* Ministers prepared to do that. Cabinet solidarity – the doctrine of Cabinet collective responsibility – meant that they all defended the decision in public. The course open to Ministers who opposed the decision and were not prepared to defend it in public was resignation. No Minister took that course.

The key point about the political significance of the Ryan case is that it marked the passing of the old political order. The 1960s were a time of great social change. The political balance of forces was different then, and the way politics was played out was very different: the political accountabilities we take for granted these days were absent, and governments thought they could take decisions without regard to community opinion. In short, the old political order was passing and a new generation of people were coming to political consciousness. When he launched my book in February, the Victorian Labor premier, Steve Bracks, said that he marks his own political awakening as beginning with the Ryan case. As a 12 year-old he remembers arguing with his father about the hanging. Tasmanian premier Jim Bacon also sent a message to the launch, which made a similar point: that as a 17 year-old living in Victoria, as he then was, Bacon had been affected by the approaching hanging. Like Bracks, he marks his first political consciousness from the Ryan case.

And so it was for a large number of people over the age of about 15. The Ryan execution is one of those rare political events that etch themselves indelibly in people's memory. Most people over the age of about 45 or 50 today can tell you exactly what they were doing at 8 am on 3 February 1967.

The key political significance of the Ryan case is that although the protest campaign against his execution did not succeed in saving Ryan, it did demonstrate to state governments around the country that public attitudes had changed and that the death penalty was no longer viable politically. One by one, those state governments that still had the death penalty on the books, moved to abolish capital punishment for murder. Queensland had already abolished it in 1922, New South Wales had done so in 1955 (although no executions had occurred since 1940), but after Ryan other state governments followed suit: Tasmania in 1969, South Australia in 1970, Victoria in 1975 and Western Australia in 1984. Ronald Ryan's death on the gallows ensured that no person ever again in Australia would be put to death by the state.

With the signing by the Commonwealth of Australia in 1992 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the Keating Government committed itself to a protocol providing that no jurisdiction in Australia would resort to capital punishment.

### **Ryan as the modern Ned Kelly?**

I turn finally to the question of Ryan as the modern Ned Kelly. There are a number of parallels between Kelly and Ryan. There is, of course, the most obvious parallel between them as Irish-Australian outlaws on the run. But other parallels are more striking: Kelly and Ryan both articulated a social justice agenda. They were responsible for sustained literary attacks on the Victoria police. They were preoccupied with their mothers, whom they saw as having been brought down by an unjust social system. For all that, they were serious criminals who committed acts of violence.

We are all familiar with Kelly's Jerilderie letter of February 1879. In a vituperative letter of defence and defiance, Kelly had written of "the brutal and cowardly conduct of a parcel of big ugly fat-necked wombat-headed big-bellied magpie-legged narrow-hipped splay-footed sons of Irish bailiffs or English landlords, known as 'officers of justice' or Victoria Police."

While he was at large, Ryan wrote two extraordinary letters to a popular tabloid Melbourne weekly newspaper, *Truth*, that are strongly reminiscent of Kelly's Jerilderie letter. Of course, given its easy access in a number of published works about Kelly (Frank Clune's popular history, for example), it is quite possible, of course, that Ryan had himself read the historic Kelly letter. Nevertheless the parallels between the common elements of narcissistic grandiosity and passionate rage

against injustice are quite striking. The first letter to *Truth* was dated 23 December 1965 and began:

To Whom It May Concern

We, the Pentridge escapees, are the van of a new era in Victoria – a role which we are loathe to adopt! The present state of affairs and its explosive potential have been forced upon us by a combination of factors. The partial corruptness of the Victorian Police Department, injustice at their hands, ill-considered, harsh sentences by the judiciary; the practice of brutality and mental torture by the Gestapo-like prison warders in “HELL” Division at Pentridge.

I, Ronald Ryan, in my plea to the bench respectively [sic] requested that they “should not deny me Hope” by too harsh a sentence. My Associate – Peter Walker – (a fundamentally decent lad of potential) was also denied hope through his harsh sentence: 12½ years. Let me state, and most emphatically, that neither of us are at heart anti-social nor were we beyond rehabilitation. However, we refuse to accept the present social pattern and its inherent lack of fairness and chances of equality in the sense of just reward. The worker does not get a fair share of production and, consequently, is condemned, along with his family, to a life of glorified slavery. I, as the last of the Ryans, on the male side, intend to put a stop to this.

My children’s children will have scope to develop their endowment, enjoy and contribute to life and [sic] infinitum. (That’s assuming I survive our Police hatchet men.) Peter has like aspirations. So Beware those of you who have accumulated an unjust share of production. We are bent on redistribution. You, the public, can thank a Judge of foresight – Mr. Leckie – who could have placed another man in our desperate plight and endangered the lives and property of others. However, this chap really appreciated the chance extended to him and I am sure it will prove mutually beneficial. How we wish we could have been sentenced by such an enlightened man.

It would indeed open your eyes to see the way the young offenders are brutalised and embittered by their archaic treatment at the hand of their moronic Warders. In fairness I point out that there are some dedicated, considerate, humane men on the staff. Mr. Ian Grindlay – acting Governor – is conspicuous in this regard. The men are optimistic of a vast change for the better when this man of initiative and with the courage of his convictions becomes Governor. I was fortunate to benefit by his methods while he was in charge of Bendigo Training Prison. It’s unfortunate that his good work was negated.

We don’t want any maximum-security soul-destroying prisons; rather we need to attract a better type of man to the job of rehabilitation – hence higher salary. Men must not be denied hope and they must be given a chance to foster and protect their family ties – their best anchor-sheet and incentive. It is a false economy to underpay. It is regrettable that our families must suffer mental anguish. We are hopeful that they may in years to come see our actions in true perspective and that others may consider our sacrifice worthwhile. There are many more men out there who have been “denied hope”; they too may pluck up courage to remedy this. They will respond to kindness and consideration. Brutality and poor conditions will spark that imminent Riot. We have acted as a safety valve. Now what do you intend doing?

Ryan & Walker  
per R.R.

Despite the fact that the letters constitute a remarkable documentary record in their own right, they were ignored by the other Melbourne media at the time of the escape, presumably because they seemed so unlikely to be genuine. The letters were photographically reproduced in *Truth*, and there is no doubt from the letters' handwriting and the language they contain that Ryan was the author.

Here in this letter are many of the themes evident in Ryan's life so similar to Kelly: the emphasis on hope denied, the grandiose ambition of someone who believes he is special, and the rage against authority figures who have frustrated his potential to be a 'great'. His response is to threaten retribution in a grandiose plan of criminal endeavour ("a new era" of social redistribution). Like Kelly, Ryan is saying: "I am not bad, it is others who have denied my claim to be great. So, I'm claiming it for myself and my children."

The second Ryan letter to *Truth* was dated 29 December 1965 and, like the first, set out an ambitious criminal manifesto. The letter, *inter alia*, talks further about his ambitious plans

To Whom It May Concern

We, Ryan and Walker, are respected by our contemporaries and have been unanimously elected to highlight their case for a better deal

We advocate a greater share of production for all workers – a more even distribution of the country's wealth. Do we ever hear of unrest and dissatisfaction in such firms as "Fletcher Jones and Staff"? And is their product not of the highest quality? This more reasonable income will allow families self-respect. Children are very sensitive to having less than the neighbour, being deprived of the necessities of life. My own Father – a man's man – contracted Silicosis through working in the Gold Mines in poor conditions. When his health was gone, hence his value as a "slave", he was pensioned off on the princely sum of £10 a month. On this he must endeavour to support a wife and ~~three~~ four children. Can you imagine the mental anguish of a proud man as he saw his loved ones in sad plight. It is happening today! Are we going to sit mutely by and see it continue? We say No!!!

We implore you to support the dedicated men of the Trade Unions. We, ourselves, may not benefit materially; but our children, and their children, will have been bought from bondage and given their rightful chance to develop their endowment. Evolution will accelerate with the human being attaining his inherent God-like stature.

"Hatred of oppression makes Friends  
of Criminals and Law-abiding Citizens"!!!

Ryan-Walker  
& Associates,  
per R.J.R.

WARNING: Ryan and Walker are both excellent marksman [sic], having both earned their living as hunters, where the game had to be head-shot to protect the skin and carcase. *Do not provoke us. We wish harm to no-one*

These letters were written on the run, after Ryan and Walker had escaped, but even in prison, facing execution, Ryan returned to these themes. Several days after the Cabinet decision that his hanging would go ahead, Ryan wrote to his mother and sisters in the following terms:

It always upsets me to think that the average working family cannot achieve a greater measure of independence in at least one generation so that the children may be partially free from constant drudgery and the struggle for mere existence. I admire those parents who have had the patience to accept the present state of affairs and forego a reasonable share of material things so that their children, while not independent, had at least a better starting point for their turn at establishing the means for their own children. I consider it wrong that so many must forego the chance of developing their own dreamed of ideals and the chance through travel, study and leisure of developing their potential...

It is my considered opinion that we are still slaves – only the title has been altered to labourer, clerk, executive, with the carrot dangled just far enough in front to keep our eyes crossed to realities...

I was impatient and sought by means of unorthodox tactics to alter the material status of the Ryans with the present result. I would be content if there were something substantial to show for the sacrifice; but I must take consolation in the fact that I tried and was foolish enough to attempt the futile protest.... Seemingly, on the 9<sup>th</sup> Jan. [the then scheduled date for his execution] the world will be short of one more rebellious ‘slave’; but, as I couldn’t have life on reasonable terms, I refuse to accept those prevailing.

It is of interest, too, that Ryan and Kelly both served time in Pentridge, but perhaps the most intriguing parallel between them is that – unusually for condemned prisoners facing execution – they both faced the hangman with great courage and fortitude. Kelly was hanged on 11 November 1880 at the Old Melbourne Gaol in Russell Street, and he was buried there until 1929 when the gaol was closed and his remains were removed to Pentridge and re-buried in the small prison burial site there. His last words were: “Such is life”.

Ryan was executed on 3 February 1967 on the same scaffold beam used for Kelly. Ryan died well. The pressure on everyone associated with the hanging was immense, as it was on him. Unusually for a condemned prisoner on the gallows, he had conducted himself with courage and great strength: “He stood quite still and was cooperative with the executioner,” the prison doctor recorded.

And his last thoughts were for others. Outwardly, ever the tough guy, he had not exhibited remorse, but he had returned to the Catholic church, confessed his crime to God, and prayed for forgiveness. He had embraced death with renewed religious faith. Well might it be said: “Nothing in his life became him like the leaving it”.

The night before he was hanged, Ryan wrote a long letter to his wife and daughters on a long roll of toilet paper. This was the last letter he ever wrote, and when it is unrolled it measures almost three metres

in length. The letter was subsequently smuggled out of the gaol and delivered to *Truth*, which published it shortly after the execution.

Ryan's final comment in the letter – a final witty remark – is actually a salute to Ned Kelly's last words on the gallows, "Such is life". Ryan wrote, "Well, that's life, I guess, and having tried and failed one must accept the bumps – or should I say the ups and downs."

Finally, perhaps the most interesting feature of a discussion about Ryan and Kelly is that they are both buried in the small prison burial site at Pentridge, in fact within only a few metres of one another, with only nine other executed prisoners. Whether or not they come to be linked in Australian mythology, Ryan and Kelly are bound together by their common burial as Australia's two most notorious executed criminals.



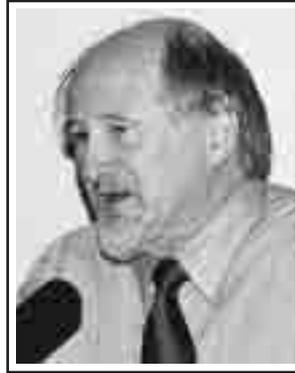
1. Stuart Grigg  
2. Deborah Mulhall  
3. Les Apolony  
4. Sheila Moore  
5. Penelope Rice

6. David Morrow & Jane Buckle  
7. Bernard Kezelman  
8. Lord McAlpine Function  
9. Harry Bhojo & Guest  
10. Guests at Tahmeena Faryal event.

11. Baron Alder  
12. Clive Kessler  
Photographer – David Karonidis



*Ainsley Gotto*



*Ian Hancock*

Photo – David Karonidis

John Gorton was a controversial figure as Australian Prime Minister from January 1968 to March 1971. Following the sudden loss at sea of Prime Minister Harold Holt, John Gorton was seen by the parliamentary Liberals of the time as the leader they needed. Then a Senator, John Gorton was quickly offered a House of Representatives seat and elected Liberal leader to take over the job of Prime Minister. Three years later, the party's confidence in John Gorton had gone and he lost the leadership to William McMahon. Ian Hancock, author and Visiting Fellow, Australian National University, has now written John Gorton's biography – *Sir John Gorton: He Did it His Way*, (Hodder 2002). In a lively night at The Sydney Institute on Monday 25 March, Ian Hancock and former Principal Private Secretary to Prime Minister John Gorton Ainsley Gotto reviewed the Gorton years. Sir John Gorton died on 19 May 2002.

# JOHN GORTON – HIS WAY

**Ian Hancock**

I should like to use this occasion to say what I tried to do in writing a biography of John Gorton, to outline some of the problems I encountered and to respond to a few of the published comments.

Soon after I began work I realised that I was actually undertaking three tasks. First, I was trying to recover a period of political history, the largely neglected years of 1968 to 1971 when Gorton was Prime Minister. Judging by the general histories, all that mattered was the political decline of the Coalition, the Vietnam war and the revival of the Labor Party. But this was also a critical period for the Liberal Party which was torn between its adherence to the values which had underpinned Menzies' long reign and the need to come to terms with new community attitudes and demands.

More importantly, the Gorton government registered significant achievements and departures. They included environmental protection; support for the arts, film and television; free health care for poorer families; and the expansion of social security and education services. Gorton helped to persuade Liberals – and Australians in general – that they did not need to defend their country by maintaining costly and permanent commitments abroad. He made it clear to the mandarins of the Public Service that they did not constitute the real government of Australia. He obliged the state governments to acknowledge Canberra's primacy in Commonwealth-State financial relations. Less tangibly, he tapped into a growing desire of Australians to express their independence and their separate national identity.

For those who think that modern Australian history began in December 1972 and that, in the words of Manning Clark, the coming of Gough marked the end of the years of "unleavened bread", Whitlam's own comment is salutary. He told Gorton in January 1973 that "I shall try to advance some of the causes which you were the first Australian Prime Minister to identify".

A second objective of this book was to give John Gorton a fairer hearing than the one he received during and after his prime

ministership. He was a more substantial, thoughtful and complex character than the “Jolly John” who still seems to obsess some former and present members of the Canberra Press Gallery. He was the first Australian Prime Minister to be the subject of a sustained campaign of media denigration and, notwithstanding appearances to the contrary, he was hurt by the slings and arrows. Gorton was also the victim of his own quirky sense of humour. When he asked the question – Who is this General Seato? – the word spread among the clever young journalists that the Prime Minister had dropped a terrible clanger. Fancy not knowing that SEATO was the acronym for the South-East Asia Treaty Organisation. Thirty years later a well-regarded broadsheet journalist repeated the story to me as evidence that “Jolly John” was really a bit of a joke. This was the same John Gorton who made an important speech in the Senate in the mid 1950s advocating the formation of SEATO. He had been one of the original members of the Joint Parliamentary Committee for Foreign Affairs, had chaired that committee, and been Acting Minister for External Affairs when Menzies, Barwick and Hasluck were overseas. He knew more about SEATO than most Australian journalists combined. His mistake was to assume that those who liked to poke fun could recognise when fun was being poked at them.

I should emphasise that my task was a re-assessment, not a rehabilitation. If the Liberal Party wants to continue celebrating Gorton’s return to the fold, just as it is now embarrassed or angered by Malcolm Fraser, then so be it. Perhaps, however, Liberals might note that John Gorton’s liberalism belongs to an era which has disappeared. Paradoxically, he shared with Gough Whitlam, and with Fraser, a view about the role of government which has little in common with that currently held by the Liberal Party

A third objective of this book was simply to tell the story of an extraordinary Australian. While his time at the Lodge is the justification for a biography, it is well to remember that, for 87 years of his life, John Gorton was not Prime Minister of Australia. The 56 he spent before winning the Liberal Party leadership were obviously important in explaining his outlook and behaviour in the highest office.

Basically he grew up as an only child, lost his mother before he was nine, and was delivered at the doorstep of two boarding schools. From his early days he developed a hard exterior, he was fiercely competitive, determined always to win, rarely backing down in an argument, and never backing away from a fight. His time at Oxford, a life on a struggling orchard and the war reinforced these characteristics. He found it hard to trust others, and learnt to place the highest priority on loyalty, and on the mateship he received from his wife Betty. He had a genuine sympathy for the disadvantaged, a compassion derived from his observation of how people had suffered in the Great Depression.

At the same time, his own capacity to overcome hardship, and his eagerness to grasp opportunities, convinced him that the meek should not, automatically, inherit the earth.

Perhaps the most important legacy of Gorton's early years was the compulsion to do it his way. He inherited something of the adventurism of his father, a buccaneer who often sailed close to the wind. But no one was there to offer the boy consistent comfort or guidance or discipline. By the time he left Geelong Grammar, what his headmaster had seen as "contrary" and "difficult" behaviour, was the disposition of a young man to follow his own instincts and not to be confined by convention or by the expectations of others.

As a Prime Minister he was just so very different. He was the larrikin who liked a drink and a party and who preferred the company of women. He was the fervent Australian nationalist, a knockabout bloke, yet of profoundly serious intent, who could charm anyone if he put his mind to it; informal, unconventional, inspirational and lovable to his followers and admirers; a dangerous centralist and a pseudo socialist to his enemies. Almost everything he did seemed to mark him as unique, and not least for voting himself out of the leadership on 10 March 1971. It was an action which saved the Coalition government without diminishing his contempt for Billy McMahon, who succeeded him, or his loathing of Malcolm Fraser, who cut him down from behind.

John Gorton has often been described as unpredictable but, if anyone had actually bothered to follow his career, they would not have been so surprised by the positions he adopted. For example, after ceasing to be Prime Minister, he puzzled some observers by holding remarkably progressive views on abortion, homosexuality and drug use while taking profoundly conservative positions on non-European immigration and land rights. Yet he had always managed to fuse a progressive liberalism with a passionate belief in a single and culturally homogeneous Australian community.

While I thoroughly enjoyed writing this book, I also found it a difficult enterprise. I wanted to write something of substance which remained readable, though it is hard to be engrossing about receipts duties or off-shore mining. I was conscious of writing to a deadline, and now wait in fear for the inevitable list of errors that I had no time to correct. One, so far, has escaped public attention. I managed to have the Japanese attacking Pearl Harbour on 8 rather than 7 December 1941. Mind you, I may have been a day out but George Bush senior once famously announced that Pearl Harbour occurred three months before it did.

I had to work very quickly because of Gorton's age, and because most of those I wanted to interview were themselves between 75 and 95. As it is, six of those I interviewed have since died, one died before I could meet him, I conducted one interview in an intensive care ward

and a number of others in retirement or nursing homes. There was so much to do in the allotted two years, and I could not have completed it without the assistance of Ainsley Gotto. Gorton's own papers are considerable, the official archives are substantial and so are the oral history records and other manuscript sources in the National Library. And then there was the press and the electronic media. I was also very conscious of the fact that I was being paid out of the public purse while on Gorton's staff, and that the critics would be looking for signs of sycophancy. While Gorton himself was scrupulous in not trying to influence my assessments of his political career, I was aware that my own desire not to cause harm or hurt competed with a degree of ambivalence I felt about the subject.

Which brings me to the point of whether I have been too lenient. Now, if the worst thing about writing a book is that it is not reviewed; the next worst thing must be that it is. There probably isn't an author anywhere who does not claim to have been misunderstood or misinterpreted. Academics have a tendency to tell you that you should have written an entirely different book, and one according to their specifications, and that they would have done a much better job anyway. I made it more difficult for myself by writing a book which attracts the attention of some of the journalists and former conservative politicians who knew Gorton as Prime Minister, believe that they have clear memories, have scores to settle or have anecdotal minds. They have a great advantage. They can review the book without actually reading too much of it, repeat and enlarge upon the old stories, simply ignore Gorton's time as navy and education minister, and concentrate on the pivotal role they themselves once played in Australian political life.

That said, it is a fair comment to say that my criticism of Gorton has been 'muted', though to claim, as one reviewer did, that I have written a "panegyric" is ludicrous. Perhaps the author of that review did not notice phrases such as "he could be rude, arrogant (and) occasionally vindictive" or "insensitive to others", or note how often unfavourable comments of colleagues and opponents were quoted, or observe the many explicit and implicit references to Gorton's political ineptitude.

Part of the problem may be my own failure to communicate. There are two things I know you should avoid. First, never attempt irony. I once wrote of White settlers in Rhodesia that they managed to live full lives; "that is when they were not doing the things expected of them like beating their servants". A former White cabinet minister quoted that sentence as evidence of my ultra left-wing tendencies. So I gave up on irony but, clearly, I have not heeded the second lesson; that is, never rely on merely telling a story to make a point. Instead you must be in the reader's face. So next time, if there is a next time, I will

begin some paragraphs with the words: "Dear Reader, please understand that what follows is meant to be read as criticism. When I recount stories of unattractive behaviour I want you to understand that in selecting and reproducing these accounts, I am registering my own disapproval." Those sentences, for instance, should have preceded the two paragraphs which repeated accounts about John Gorton's life at Lake Kangaroo. They explained, I thought, without my actually saying so, why many of the locals actively disliked him. Hearing that passage misinterpreted in a radio interview convinced me that anything less than the full frontal will not be grasped.

That said, it is important to take, and learn from, criticism. Besides, sometimes it can give you a perverse kind of pleasure. Years ago I wrote a piece about the role of ethnicity in Uganda politics. Subsequently, a Marxist writer, the high priest of orthodoxy, launched a scathing attack on a fellow Marxist who had adopted an heretical line in explaining Uganda's factional wars. The reviewer said that the book was so unbelievably bad that, by contrast, even bourgeois historians such as Hancock had, for once, something useful to say.

In the end, all I can hope is that this biography constitutes an addition to Australian political history and does justice to a flawed but great Australian.

# JOHN GORTON – HIS WAY

Ainsley Gotto

This will be the only public comment I propose to make on either the Gorton book or Gorton himself, or indeed myself. For those of you who don't know who I am, a brief background. From 1965 until January 1968, I was the Assistant to the Chief Government Whip at Parliament House in Canberra. From January 1968 until I left Australia in February 1972, I worked for Sir John. That period covered his Prime Ministership; the Cabinet portfolio of Defence while he was Deputy Leader of the Liberal Party; and the beginnings of his time on the backbench of the House of Representatives.

The position I held working for Sir John was that of Principal Private Secretary to the Prime Minister. I was the first woman to hold that position in Australia, and the only one until John Howard appointed Nicole Feeley a few years ago. I had a staff of 12 reporting to me. Although that change took place in 1968, it was one of the things Gorton did early on in his Prime Ministership that broke new ground or territory. It was indeed a pendulum swing from the traditional 55 year old male, generally knighted, to a 22 year old female. The equivalent of the title of Principal Private Secretary today is Chief of Staff. Undeniably this was controversial at the time and jealous people, unable to accept that times were changing, chose to misrepresent this in a most unfair but predictable way. I am sure I have shared this experience with many women “pioneers”, but it doesn't make it any more pleasant to live through, or less ridiculous.

Amongst my many other hats since then, I have spent most of the last three years working intermittently for Sir John. It has been an odd and sometimes emotional experience! And I thought tonight I would share some of that experience with you. John Hewson approached me privately in April 1999. He felt very strongly that Gorton deserved a proper biography which outlined his very real achievements as Prime Minister – which then had not been done. He asked me to persuade Gorton to co-operate – a task which anyone who has known John Gorton would appreciate was somewhat daunting. After some months, Gorton was persuaded. I “found” Ian Hancock and introduced him to Gorton over lunch on Melbourne Cup Day in 1999. We decided that

we could probably work together. The end result is Ian Hancock's excellent authorised biography – *He Did It His Way*.

It sounds simple! It wasn't. The best way to "manage" this project in terms of the concentrated research required, and the time constraints Hancock in particular was working under to "produce" the book, was for both Ian and me to be attached to Sir John's personal staff. He was entitled to two staff positions, neither of which he had used for over nine years. It didn't require any special permission, but a number of bureaucratic requirements had to be met. As a former member of the Communist Party at Melbourne Grammar School, Ian Hancock obtained his Top Secret security clearance many weeks before I did – and I'd had one before! This was a necessary step to reviewing Cabinet papers and submissions, and Top Secret, non-open government papers, apart from (we believed) about eight boxes of Gorton's private papers held in the National Library, but closed to the public. My task was to assist Ian in his research – which with the 8 boxes to be reviewed, would take about three months.

My first official foray back to Canberra was not without incident. I arrived in a taxi at the National Library, handed over my cab charge card to the driver, to be met with several puzzled looks and finally the query – "Are you *really* Ainsley Gotto?" I replied that I was and enquired if that was a problem. The driver's response was, "No, but I thought you were dead." I signed the chit anyway. I proceeded – somewhat bemused – into the library to be signed in and given a list of the contents of Gorton's papers. There weren't eight boxes (as we had been told), there were 38 – and they actually have 49. None had been archived by Gorton. On the top of the first box I chose to review at random, in the very first folder I extracted from the box on opening it, was the original of a Minute addressed to "Miss Gotto" from a senior PM's Department official. Talk about déjà vu!

My initial term of three months was, of necessity, extended to six months. Just prior to the end of that period, I discovered the original of a letter dated December 1994 from the Head of Archives addressed to Gorton, thanking him for the donation of his papers. Ian Hancock and I were unaware of this particular collection. That collection comprised 51 boxes, most of which are now open to the public at the Archives.

I had never been anyone's research assistant – except in a political sense. The following months were composed of a mixture of exhilaration on finding so many original and interesting papers (such as the five page handwritten note to the PM on Windsor Castle letterhead about a possible appointee as Australia's next Governor-General tucked into the back of a plastic folder containing a brief on the PM's Northern Development tour of 1968 – not exactly related subjects.) And to dismay at not being able to find some of the papers I knew had been there.

Nothing could be flipped through, or dismissed simply because I'd seen it before. Every folder had to be thoroughly and carefully read, and notes taken on its contents. They are now there for the public record in the future. Gorton had told both Ian and me that he'd burnt most of the papers he had stored in his garage in Narrabundah – which gave credence to the existence of only eight boxes. Both we and Australia are extremely lucky that whatever he did burn, did not include all the original documents, handwritten comments, handwritten speech notes, pointed, ascerbic handwritten comments particularly on Treasury Cabinet submissions and minutes and personal letters that are still there and assist in documenting both the long life of an unusual, questioning individual and his extraordinary service over so many years to Australia – perhaps his greatest love.

In addition to acting as a research assistant to Ian Hancock, because I am one of the few still alive from that period, I was able to hold my own in many arguments with Ian over the last couple of years – and there were many! They were about content, context and the relevance of particular information. It was like doing a complicated jigsaw puzzle and the sense of joy and achievement one gets when being able to fit the pieces together. He did manage to ignore most of my advice, but occasionally listened. We discovered almost an embarrassment of riches from Gorton's own papers and from Ian's interviews with many former Gorton colleagues, friends and enemies from the past. During this process I was taken back to those very exciting times.

There are many things that are not in this book – it is after all a book to inform readers of all of the events and characteristics of the John Gorton who was appointed as PM in 1968. I was an observer and part player in a couple of quite minor but important events, both prior to and during his Prime Ministership. Ian has outlined in his book the history of the VIP Affair (as it was known) and the importance of that to Gorton in widening his circle of political contacts outside the members of the Senate in 1967. There is one snippet that is not outlined in the book, and nor should it have been, but it is important for me to record here because it was the first real working contact I had with John Gorton. I was working for the Chief Government Whip Dudley Erwin as his assistant at the time of this particular crisis. The government, and Prime Minister Holt, were in deep trouble and it worsened, politically, every day, mainly over the issue of who could use the VIP aircraft and, more importantly, whether records of passengers travelling were kept.

On 25 October 1967, I received a phone call from my father, an Acting Group Captain in the Air Force. He apologised for bothering me, but felt I should know that the government was considered a laughing stock in the Department of Air and the Air Force, as they all knew that records of all VIP flights, their passenger names, etc., were

indeed kept and in fact under Air Force Regulations were kept for a period of twelve months after the flight. I immediately told Dudley Erwin. We discussed alternative courses of action – it was news to us – of a bombshell type. Minister for Air Peter Howson had left the weekend before for travel overseas; the PM's office seemed to be in denial, so Dudley Erwin arranged for us both to see John Gorton as Leader of the Senate who had carriage of the matter in that Chamber where a lot of the more pointed questioning was occurring. I repeated to Gorton what my father had told me. He then telephoned Tich McFarlane, Secretary of the Department of Air, who confirmed the information was accurate. The rest, as they say, is history as McFarlane brought the records over to Gorton, who that night tabled them in the Senate – and the crisis was over. Months later, when reviewing the result of the “audit” on the VIP files instigated by Gorton as a new PM, and even today, I still feel anger and disbelief that some of those who were supposed to serve their political masters well, did not, and behaved as they did while knowing the truth of the matter themselves. “Protecting” politicians is no excuse for not telling them the truth, (and doing so immediately). But I'm possibly naïve.

An interesting sequel involves Dudley Erwin's career, and mine. John Gorton appointed Dudley Erwin to the Ministry in February 1969. As with almost all appointments and ministerial changes, I was present at discussions concerning those appointments. It must be remembered that, in 1968, I had nearly three years experience in the Whip's Office and Gorton had come down from the Senate and did not have close experience of all lower house members. Often he would ask me the background and performance of a particular member. In addition, part of my responsibilities as PPS or Chief of Staff, was to advise on appointments when asked. But it would be foolish to suggest that I would have been the only influence or even a major one. All Prime Ministers consult widely. In fact had I been a forty-something man in a grey suit, no one would have queried my right, and responsibility, to advise the PM, or organise his appointments. It clearly was just too much for some to accept that a young woman would advise and organise a PM, and the resentment in some quarters was obviously the result of this. I doubt if it has changed much today.

However, in November 1969 Gorton sacked Dudley Erwin. Of all the ministerial changes, that was the only one not discussed in my presence. As I later learned this was because Gorton thought that Erwin and I were friends. Late that night at Canberra airport, Erwin was reported as saying his then famous phrase, which I will not repeat as it has dogged me all my adult life. It was something to do with wiggling, or the way I walked, or something. I can only say that I was somewhat comforted to learn, as a result of Ian Hancock's research, that before Erwin died, he apologised for his remarks.

The years after 1968 were an exciting time to be involved at the pinnacle of Australian politics, because of Gorton. Prime Minister John Howard has said that John Gorton was good on television. I think that is a discount on the great character of John Gorton. John Gorton was a most charismatic man and on television directly communicated that to the people. He did not set out, as Kennedy did and Nixon did not, to “use” television. That was not his way. But television allowed the real person to come across in the way newsreel footage of speeches on podiums did not. He was and is entirely unselfconscious.

Television has a way of picking out frauds and when Australians turned on their black and white sets, they saw a real Australian. But the Gorton Prime Ministership was about more than his charisma. It was the beginning of a modern Australian consciousness. If you can remember, the 1960s, like the 1950s and 1940s before them, were a time when people, if asked where they came from, invariably answered Melbourne or Sydney or Brisbane and so on. Never Australia. That Gorton tried to unify all Australians, as Australians, is to his eternal credit. And that he succeeded is not in doubt. There weren't many books about “being Australian” before then. There was Geoffrey Blainey's *The Tyranny of Distance*, of course. Gorton was the pioneer of Australian pride. He started to talk about us as an Australian people with a culture and identity and pursued, through the Australian film industry, the expression and embodiment of this. Australian history was in its infancy. It may seem extraordinary in 2002 to realise that a mere 40 years ago, most Australians would have said England was home (remember that in our passports, we were still listed as British subjects) and identified Australia only with their particular city, with almost no acknowledgement of the country they lived in. If anything, they had a self consciousness about being Australian, having Aussie accents, a self consciousness which even today lives on in some quarters. Remember that the ABC liked to have its news readers talk with English accents – unthinkable today. The cultural cringe is not quite dead – but John Gorton can claim the honour of being the first Australian leader to strike a blow against it.

One of the reasons why, as the Chief Government Whip's Assistant, I campaigned so hard with the lower house members to get John Gorton elected is that he represented to me, from contact in Canberra with him over a couple of years, a real break from the past. Here was someone who really was brimming with ideas, and who looked at “my” country in a different way. Working closely with him during his campaign for election as Leader of the Party, I came to be even more deeply committed. He, unlike some of his other colleagues, did not offer anyone a “promise” if they voted for him. The only “promise” he made was to me – that if elected, he wanted me to work with him in the PM's office. Although I think my appointment caused

him many political problems – and I did try to resign several times for that reason – the sense of excitement and challenge he represented didn't diminish over the time I worked with him. Frustrating as he could be! I still think it was a tragedy for Australia that he voted against himself in March 1971. But as Gorton himself has said, politicians serve at the will of others, it's a temporary job and must be understood as such.

But at the time it was particularly frustrating as Gorton had set up a very small, informal group of Ministers and public servants to embark on an exciting, but informal, phase of government. The brief was (as Paul Keating has later said) to “look outside the envelope”. It was 1971; forget the policies in place then; look at the country and determine what *should* be the policies for now and the future. In short – *active*, not reactive politics. New policies, new thinking – not ensconced or controlled by what was, but rather what could be.

John Gorton, to me, was the embodiment of the later phrase, “It's Time” – but his own party didn't want to acknowledge that, or contribute to it. Neither did his lack of patience. He was truly ahead of his time. Ian Hancock has listed many of John Gorton's policy achievements. Indeed, what Gorton himself sees as more important in some ways – is his achievements in the navy and particularly education – both of which he had a genuine interest in, and love for, and to which he contributed enormously. I have been lucky to have had the privilege of working with Ian Hancock as he researched and delved into the past. It was a roller coaster ride in many way, but one with great moments of achievement and pleasure, along with exhaustion. I am amazed that he has been able to produce a book of this quality and depth on such a complex person, in the timeframe he had. It will stand the test of time as the authoritative version of John Gorton's life. No subject could ask for more.

I have been asked over the years what John Gorton – the enigma – is really like, and what he was like to work for. My answer is simple: highly intelligent, intellectual, a quick and incisive thinker, impatient, intolerant of fools and yes-men (or women!), courageous, sensitive, proudly Australian and passionate about its future, charming, probably the first truly charismatic contemporary PM Australia has had, thoughtful, demanding, an excellent debater, very widely and well read, extraordinarily curious about all things and people (and still is!), occasionally stubborn, to the point of being pig-headed, visionary, strong minded, moral, complex, loyal, naïve, trusting.

No man or institution is perfect. But if they genuinely try to change things for the betterment of others, they deserve to be respected and lauded. One thing John Gorton tried to do was to create a truly *Australian* nation. I think he succeeded, and for that we all owe him a huge debt.



Photo - David Karomidis

*Tahmeena Faryal  
addresses The Sydney Institute*

Tahmeena Faryal was 10 years old when the Soviet invasion forced her family from Afghanistan to a Pakistani refugee camp. Her mother was an early member and her father a supporter of the Revolutionary Association of the Women of Afghanistan. Educated in RAWA schools in Pakistan, Faryal became committed to working for human rights and women's rights. Faryal cannot use her real name or be photographed as RAWA activists have become special targets of the Taliban and fundamentalists around the world. RAWA was formed in 1977 to promote women's rights through non-violent action. Based inside Afghanistan and in neighboring Pakistan, this underground organization evolved in defiance of the Taliban and other fundamentalists and at great risk to its members. On a visit to Australia, Tahmeena Faryal addressed The Sydney Institute on Wednesday 3 April 2002.

# **HUMAN RIGHTS AND**

---

## ***THE WOMEN OF AFGHANISTAN***

**Tahmeena Faryal**

On behalf of the Revolutionary Association of Women of Afghanistan (RAWA), I thank the Sydney Institute for the opportunity to bring the realities of my country to the attention of the Australian community.

As you are aware, for the past 23 years Afghanistan has languished in the grasp of the most despotic and cruelest of regimes. Yes, first our people suffered enormous pain in the Russians' coup d'état, and suffered even more when the Russians openly invaded our country in 1979. After the Russian invasion and a decade of resistance war, we thought that a nation and its women could not suffer more than this. An example of the pain our people bore is that in 1979 the people of Kabul, who were counting the seconds for the return of their loved ones, suddenly had to face a list of 13,000 prisoners who had been massacred by the puppet regime.

After the Russians left and their puppet regime collapsed in 1992, people thought that freedom would at last prevail and the darkness of the past ten years along with the brutalities and crimes would turn into a hopeful future. But contrary to our people's expectations, the vicious circle rolled on and on. The domination of the Jehadi fundamentalist (the present "polished" Northern Alliance) was the second incurable wound.

The Jehadi Islamic fundamentalist bands, which had been created, nurtured and equipped by Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Iran, US and its allies during the anti-Russian war, gave another meaning to crime, brutality and looting. They turned Afghanistan, especially Kabul, into a blood bath by committing unprecedented hair-raising crimes. Crimes which whitewashed the Russians and their puppets faces. They killed and raped thousands of girls, women and men. More importantly, they were the first who imposed numerous restrictions on women including wearing the veil. Even the UN Special Envoy, Mr Mehmoud Mestiri, rightly called them a batch of bandits. And after the failure of the Jihadis to fulfill the vicious plans of their masters, another force was unleashed in the battle ground for the Afghan pie.

In 1996, one of the most misogynist and brutal fundamentalist forces emerged on the surface of our planet, the Taliban. They surpassed their Jehadi brothers in their treatment of women.

For five years under the Taliban in the name of religion, massacres of non-Pashtun ethnics were carried out with extreme barbarity. New inhumane and sadistic techniques had been found for killing the people. Children were taught that the followers of every other religion are the enemies of Islam, that there can be no peace between Jews and Muslims, that democracy is against the tenets of the Qur'an, and that all thoughts and sayings that go against their decrees are evil.

Tragically the world was silent against all these happenings because there was not any loss of life in the western hemisphere of our globe until 11 September 2001. Tragically they didn't listen to the repeated warnings of RAWA about the danger of fundamentalism to the security and stability of the world. And it was only after the New York and Washington attacks that the US woke up and found out about the danger of its own created and nurtured Frankenstein(s). If the US hadn't supported the fundamentalists in Afghanistan during the Cold War and if it had paid the least attention to the Afghan fundamentalists' human rights abuses, New York might never had to pay such a huge price. And the innocent Afghan people might never have had to face such heavy air strikes with lots of civilian casualties and hundreds of thousands of internal and external displacements.

Though the recent developments have removed the Taliban from the scene, it unfortunately hasn't been the end of the horrible miseries of our tortured nation. Contrary to the aspirations of our people and expectations of the world's freedom loving people, the Jehadi Northern Alliance as the main part of the current interim government shattered the dream of our wounded people for liberation, peace and safety.

Speaking on behalf of RAWA and on behalf of the agonized women of Afghanistan, I hereby would like to ask the great people of Australia, other human rights organizations, eminent personalities, intellectuals and all centres and gatherings of social activism to mobilise all the forces at their disposal, to utilise any available resource open to them to make sure that the fundamentalists of the Northern Alliance are not enabled once again to extend their sinister domination over Afghanistan. With this alignment you will be standing on the side of the people of Afghanistan and their aspirations for peace, democracy and in an honourable place amongst the nations of the world.

We also want to say in a loud voice that the place of the leaders of the Northern Alliance is beside war criminals at the Hague Court, and not in the seat of government in Afghanistan, issuing orders about our women. As long as they have not given an account to the people, and have not appeared at an international court, they have no right to rule

over our people. As far as RAWA is concerned, our battle against these enemies of democracy and women, whose only difference with the Taliban is merely wearing Western clothing and neckties, will continue as before and may be in different forms. Did the world forgive Hitler, Franco, Suharto, Khomeini and, more recently, the Taliban and Osama? Why then should the Northern Alliance be forgiven?

As the only humanitarian, political, democratic, anti fundamentalist and feminist organization, RAWA for years has been agitating for a democratic government as the only cure for the wounds of Afghan people and the real liberation of our women from the shackles and bonds of fundamentalism and similar mentalities. The fundamentalists have sounded the drum of opposition to democracy in various forms, and many danced to that drum as well. RAWA, however, is proud that it was not intimidated even for one moment, and kept the banner of democracy raised without paying attention to threats from fundamentalist terrorists.

We also believe that Democracy without secularism would be incomplete. The fundamentalists and their partners have used as much as they can to frighten people and to rant against secularism. They have tried to paint secularism purely and simply as a profane and unIslamic form of government, while secularism is the only means of keeping religion free of the influence of fundamentalists and other opportunistic elements.

A long history in Western countries, and even in some Islamic countries, proves the fact that in those societies where secularism governs as democracy's essential foundation, religion has by no means been destroyed. For these and many other standpoints we have always been told, and there are still people who continue to tell us, that the word "Revolutionary" in our name sometimes scares people away. In response, we have always maintained that the struggle of women for liberty and democracy in a country suffocating under native and international terrorists, and in conditions of extreme oppression and persecution, cannot but be revolutionary. Being irreconcilable against fundamentalism is revolutionary. Standing up for democratic feminism under the shadow of a general death sentence issued against members of RAWA, was and is the highest criterion of being revolutionary. Practical experience has borne out the revolutionary nature of our viewpoints, policies and activities which have drawn the support and commitment of countless freedom and justice loving national and international supporters towards our cause.

We hope the supporters of women's rights, human rights and democracy who are here today, by realizing the nature and danger of the Northern Alliance and putting pressure on the international community, do not let the fundamentalists of any brand rule Afghanistan any longer.

In an interview US playwright Eve Ensler said: “Afghanistan is everywhere.” But our Afghanistan is deadlocked, a deadlock that the late Ahmad Shamlu, an Iranian poet, powerfully describes:

In this dead end  
They smell your breath.  
You better not have said, “I love you.”  
They smell your heart.  
These are strange times, darling...  
And they flog love at the roadblock.  
We had better hide love in the closet...  
In this crooked, deadened and twisting chill,  
they feed the fire  
with the kindling of song and poetry.  
Do not risk a thought.  
These are strange times, darling...  
He who knocks on the door at midnight  
has come to kill the light.  
We had better hide light in the closet...  
Those there are butchers  
stationed at the crossroads  
with bloody clubs and cleavers.  
These are strange times, darling...  
And they excise smiles from lips  
and songs from mouths.  
We had better hide joy in the closet...  
Canaries are barbecued  
on a fire of lilies and jasmine,  
these are strange times, darling...  
Satan drunk with victory  
sits at our funeral feast.  
We had better hide God in the closet.

This deadlock must be shattered. Our women must be at the movement to shatter this humiliating deadlock.



1. Anna Caitlin Whale  
 2. Penny Tsu, Elise Canterbury  
 & Jhunette Lopez  
 3. Michael Hanley  
 4. Jan Saunders & Rachel Grimes

5. Richard Shepherd  
 & Michelle Power  
 6. Dorothy White  
 7. Justine Marsden & Angus Munro

8. Joel Shin, Michael Sexton,  
 Robert Sutter  
 9. Philip Pragasam & Arna  
 Pararajasingham  
 10. Natalie Goldman  
 Photographer – David Karonidis



Photo – David Karonidis

*Anna Funder*

In *Stasiland* (Text 2002), Anna Funder explores Berlin today through the stories from spies and Stasi men still loyal to their old Communist “Firm” and waiting for the next revolution, to stories from many with the courage to withstand that same dictatorship. As *Stasiland* illustrates, Berlin is a city of chaos emerging into life in the West. On Monday 8 April, Anna Funder addressed the Sydney Institute and described some of the encounters behind the writing of her book and demonstrated how, in her assessment, George Orwell’s *1984* reads like “a manual for the socialist regime in East Germany, complete with instructions for the thought police”.

# STASILAND: WRITING

## *A WORLD GONE WRONG*

**Anna Funder**

It's a great pleasure for me to be here this evening. I'm going to talk about *Stasiland* – about why I wrote it and how I wrote it, which seem to be the questions most asked of me, and I'm going to read from parts of the book along the way. I thought I'd say a few words too, about the choice of writing non-fiction as opposed to fiction.

I have to say that all along, and I've been working on it over the last 5 years, it has been a hard book to talk about. In fact, it's been more of a conversation stopper than anything else. I've noticed at weddings or dinner parties, I'll be on a table with someone who's trying to make conversation and when they ask me what I do, I'll say, "Oh I'm writing a book." "A novel?" they say hopefully. "Ah no, it's non-fiction." "Oh." They are disappointed. "And what's it about?" "It's about people who resisted the Communist regime in East Germany." "Uhh. Mhh," and their eyes glaze over, they cough and try to look somewhere else around the room for rescue, or say they need a drink and scoot off to the bar.

One of the reasons *Stasiland* was so hard to describe while I was writing it, is that it doesn't neatly fit into the usual writing categories. It's hard to know which box to tick on the Australian Society of Author's membership form where it asks: What do you write? Is it fiction? Non-fiction? History? Journalism? Biography? Travel? I usually hope there's the catch-all category of "Literary non-fiction". Sometimes *Stasiland* is not even clearly non-fiction: in more than one of the interviews I've done recently the journalist has consistently referred to the book as a "novel".

With the benefit of hindsight, and a little more confidence now that the book actually exists, I wish I could gather together all the people I've bored or puzzled or just caused to run away from me and explain. I'd say that *Stasiland* is a book about a place, but that place no longer exists. It's a book of other people's true stories, but it's written largely in the first person, and it's a book of non-fiction that uses the techniques of fiction – characterisation, the development of a whole

other world that those characters live in, and a beginning, a middle and an end. But what I most wish I could say to the runaways in this fantasy scene in which I redeem myself, is that, more than anything else, *Stasiland* is a book about human courage.

I'd like to read a little part to show how it is non-fiction, but inside a character's head, how it is in the first person but also the third, and how it is about courage, in this instance of the most obvious, physical kind.

This is about Miriam, a 16 year old schoolgirl. At this point in the book she has just spent one month in solitary confinement while the Stasi extracted from her, and her friend Ursula, confessions. The girls had made some leaflets at home, protesting about the arbitrary way in which the authorities had destroyed one of the churches in Leipzig. They posted them up around the city, and the Stasi hunted the girls down. Then Miriam is let out on remand, to await her trial. This scene takes place on New Years' Eve 1968. Miriam has caught a train to Berlin, where she'd never been before, with the idea of scaling the Berlin Wall. She has found a spot, near some cottage gardens in the lee of the wall and is checking it out for possibilities:

"I had a look at the lie of the land and decided: not too bad." Miriam could see the border installation, the cacophony of wire and cement, asphalt and sand. In front of where it began was a hectare or so of fenced-in garden plots, each with its own little shed. These handkerchief gardens are a traditional German solution to apartment dwellers' yearning for a tool shed and a vegetable garden. They make a patchwork of green in odd corners of urban land, along train lines or canals or, as here, in the lee of the Wall.

Miriam climbed through and over the fences separating the gardens, trying to get closer to the Wall. "It was dark and I was lucky—later I learned that they usually patrolled the gardens as well." She got as far as she could go but not to the Wall, because there was this "great fat hedge" growing in front of it. She rummaged around in someone's tool shed for a ladder, and found one. She put it against the hedge and climbed up. She took a good long look around.

The whole strip was lit by a row of huge street lamps on poles, their heads bent in submission at exactly the same angle. Overhead, fireworks had started to fizz and pop for the New Year. The Bornholmer Bridge was about a hundred and fifty metres away. Between her and the west there was a wire mesh fence, a patrol strip, a barbed-wire fence, a twenty-metre-wide asphalt street for the personnel carriers and a footpath. Then the eastern sentry huts stretched out about one hundred metres apart, and behind them more barbed wire. Miriam takes a piece of paper and draws me a mess of lines so I can see it too.

"Beyond all of that, I could see the wall I had seen from inside the train, the wall that runs along the train line. I assumed that there, behind it, was the west, and I was right. I could have been wrong, but I was right." If she had any future it was over there, and she needed to get to it.

I sit in the chair exploring the meaning of dumbstruck, rolling the word around in my mind. I laugh with Miriam as she laughs at herself, and at the boldness of being sixteen. At sixteen you are invulnerable. I laugh with her about rummaging around for a ladder in other people's sheds, and I laugh harder when she finds one. We laugh at the improbability of it, of someone barely more than a child poking about in Beatrix Potter's garden by the Wall, watching out for Mr McGregor and his blunderbuss, and looking for a step-ladder to scale one of the most fortified borders on earth. We both like the girl she was, and I like the woman she has become.

She says suddenly, "I still have the scars on my hands from climbing the barbed wire, but you can't see them so well now." She holds out her hands. The soft parts of her palms are crazed with definite white scars, each about a centimetre long.

The first fence was wire mesh with a roll of barbed wire along the top. "The strange thing is, you know how the barbed wire used to be looped in a sort of tube along the top of the fence? My pants were all ripped up and I got caught – stuck on the roll! I just hung there! I cannot believe no-one saw me." A Pierrot doll hanging on display.

Miriam must have come unstuck, because next she got down on all fours and started her way across the path, across the wide street, and across the next strip. The whole area was lit as bright as day. "I just got down on my knees and went for it. But I was careful. I was very slow." After the footpath she crossed the wide asphalt road. She could not feel her body, she was invisible. She was nothing but nerve endings and fear.

Why didn't they come for her? What were they doing?

She reached the end of the asphalt and they still hadn't come. There was a cable suspended about a metre off the ground. She stopped. "I had seen it from my ladder. I thought it might be some sort of alarm or something, so I went down flat on my belly underneath." She crawled across the last stretch to a kink in the wall and crouched and looked and did not breathe. "I stayed there. I was waiting to see what would happen. I just stared." She thought her eyes would come loose from her skull. Where were they?

Something shifted, right near her. It was a dog. The huge German shepherd pointed himself in her direction. That cable was no alarm: it had dogs chained to it. She could not move. The dog did not move. She thought the guards' eyes would follow the pointing dog to her. She waited for him to bark. If she moved away, along the wall, he would go for her.

"I don't know why it didn't attack me. I don't know how dogs see, but maybe it had been trained to attack moving targets, people running across, and I'd gone on all fours. Maybe it thought I was another dog." They held each other's gaze for what seemed a long time. Then a train went by, and, unusually, it was a steam train. The two of them were covered in a fine mist.

"Perhaps then he lost my scent?" Eventually, the dog walked away. Miriam waited another long time. "I thought he would come back for me, but he didn't." She climbed the last barbed-wire fence to reach the top of the wall bordering the train line. She could see the west – shiny cars and lit streets and the Springer Press building. She could even see the western guards sitting at their sentry posts. The wall was broad. She had about four metres

to cross on top of it, and then a little railing to get under. That was all there was. She couldn't believe it. She wanted to run the last few steps, before they caught her.

"The railing was really only so high," she says, putting an arm out to thigh height, "all I had to do was get under it. I had been so very careful and so very slow. Now I thought: you have only four more steps, just RUN before they get you. But here" – she marks an X, over and over, on the map she has drawn me – 'here, was a trip-wire.'" The voice is very soft. She marks and re-marks the X till I think the paper will tear. "I did not see the wire."

Sirens went off, wailing. The western sentry huts shone searchlights to find her, and to prevent the easterners from shooting her. The eastern guards took her away quickly.

"You piece of shit," a young one said. They took her to the Berlin Stasi HQ. They bandaged her hands and legs, and that was the first time she noticed her blood or felt any pain. The blood was on her face and in her hair.

"But they really hadn't seen me. No-one had even seen me." She came so close.

In the west the neon shone and overhead fireworks destroyed themselves in the air.

In this part Miriam's courage is physical: she is brave to the point of risking her life to leave the country. But this physical courage is an expression of the courage she had to respond to her conscience, that internal barometer of good and evil. She knew in her bones, she said, that the system was wrong in not consulting with the people. I think that this is the nub of what fascinated me about Miriam, and some of the other characters in this book: this courage they had to respond to their conscience despite the prevailing orthodoxy, wisdom or political necessity, and frequently at their own considerable cost. In fiction the good guys tend to win, and the endings are happy, or at least resolved. I was interested in what happens in real life, in a situation in which the goodies and baddies are about as clearly defined as you will ever find them. Do those with the courage to resist inhumanity win out in the long run? That was the question on my mind. Perhaps because East Germany was a society very clearly riven into "us" (the people) and "them" (the Stasi) I had no trouble finding people whose stories amazed me.

The story of Sigrid Paul is as extraordinary as Miriam's. An East Berliner, she had once heard a radio broadcast from a Western radio station in which a man told how he had been kidnapped from West Berlin by the Stasi, and then imprisoned. Years later, when the Wall went up, Frau Paul found herself on the eastern side, while her mortally ill baby was on the western one. One day the Stasi collected her off the street and tried to make a deal. They offered her the chance to visit her child, on condition that she arrange to meet a Western

acquaintance of hers for “a walk in the park”. Sigrid remembered the story of the kidnapping and decided, not without reason, that the Stasi were going to use her as bait in a trap to kidnap the Westerner. She wouldn’t let herself be used in this way, even though it meant, effectively, abandoning her son.

In another Faustian bargain, a young woman, Julia, is offered the chance to remain in East Germany with her family and friends on condition that she inform on them to the Stasi. And she refuses.

Other kinds of courage in the book are more subtle, or exercises in compromise. There is a Stasi man, Herr Bohnsack, who, after the regime has fallen, “outs” himself as having worked his whole life in the “Disinformation Division” of the Stasi. I think that, even though he did this because he knew that his name was on a list about to be published, it still takes a lot to go about your life now, admitting: “I worked for 26 years telling lies.”

I give these instances of people I admired or was fascinated by as a way of trying to explain why I wrote the book. When it comes to how I wrote it, I’d like to explore a little further the reasons that it had to be non-fiction.

The novel is the artform *par excellence* in which other worlds can be created and the reader can experience what it is like to be in someone else’s head, to feel their reality. It’s up to the novelist to make this convincing. Non-fiction, on the other hand, is less often expected to be moving, but it does have the cachet of being true. This means that things which are literally stranger than fiction can have a place there. It would have been possible for me to write a novel based on one of the four main stories in the book, most likely Miriam’s story. But in order to describe faithfully what it was like to live in the second German dictatorship of the twentieth century, I would have had to put in details and tales which, although true, would simply not make credible fiction. The thing about East Germany was, I couldn’t have made it up.

I’d like to tell you some of the things that wouldn’t have made it into a novel, and then some of the things that seemed to me too odd even, to make it into *Stasiland*.

It is scarcely believable in the first place that the Stasi numbered 1 in 50, or, as other estimates which include part-time informers would have it, 1 in 6 among the population. Some of the things they did, too, beggar belief. In order to track people they stole pieces of their underwear so as to train dogs to recognise a person’s smell; or they irradiated people by walking up to them in a crowd and spraying them with radioactive material. Other things verge on the ridiculous. When they got rid of the most outspoken members of the most popular rock band, the *Klaus Renft Combo*, the Stasi sent one of their own in to

manage the remaining players, so that the people would continue to hear the *same* songs, but from a band which was under Stasi control.

Some aspects of the now unified Germany are startling. In the early 1980s, Herr Koch, a Stasi man, in a fit of pique “souvenired” a plastic plate – an award – from his office. In the early 1990s, the authorities of western, democratic Germany decided to prosecute him for theft. Then the proceedings were discontinued, (on account of triviality – the plate was worth under \$5). But shortly afterwards they tried to sue him for perjury on the basis that he’d sworn to his Stasi Commandant at the time that he hadn’t taken the plate. As he said when the *Treuhand* officers came to his door, “*Will* you people make up your minds: do you want to prosecute me because I worked *for* the Firm, or *against* it?”

If I had been writing a novel I’d have thought twice too about including some of the heavily metaphorical physical details of Berlin. Early in the 1990s Hitler’s bunker was dug up during building works not far from where I lived. This set off a debate about what to do with it: some argued that the bunker and site should be made into a museum as a sort of warning from the past, but people were concerned that it might become a shrine for the malignant and expanding neo-nazis. Others thought that it should be destroyed, but were concerned that that might send a signal to the world that Germany was erasing its past. Eventually the issue was simply too hard: the decision was taken, 50 years after the war, to re-bury the bunker, just as it was. The mayor said, “Perhaps in another 50 years people will be able to decide what to do with it.”

Not far from there is a similar built reminder of the difficulties of dealing with the past, in this case the East German dictatorship that followed on the heels of the Nazis. The *Palast der Republik*, the parliament house of East Germany, is a monstrous 1960s structure of concrete and brown reflective glass. No-one can decide what to do with it either: to pull it down would be yet another erasure for the East Germans, and this time of the symbol of their country, however much they may have disliked it. To leave it there empty is, at the very least, a health hazard: the place is full of asbestos. But it is also a sign of how difficult it is to know what to do with history. When I was last in Berlin, the building just stood there rotting, cordoned off from everything around it like a crime scene.

There are lighter, more ironic aspects as well, that would be perhaps too neat or cute or odd to put in a credible novel. Herr Koch, the former Stasi man involved in the plate fiasco, is the man who, as a young Stasi recruit, got the job of drawing for General-Secretary Honecker the line where the Wall was to go. In August 1961 he was given new boots and a tin of white paint and a brush, and sent out into

the streets. As a result he is now extremely, perhaps understandably, obsessed with the Wall.

When I ran into him the last time I was in Berlin he took me on a tour of where it had been. Although it has only been gone 12 years, it is very hard to find a trace of the Wall. Herr Koch took me to a place where there was what looked like a small market garden. He told me that this was a corner of land that, strictly speaking, had belonged to East Germany, but that it had been too awkward to build a kink in the Wall to go around it, so it had stayed in the West. The Western authorities couldn't use it, for fear that the Easterners would take this as an appropriation of their land, even though it was outside their zone. Eventually, a Turkish family simply started to grow vegetables there. We walked around it one cloudy Berlin day, and Herr Koch pointed out that there was a cyclone fence dividing the plot into two. He smiled at me and said, "Do you know what this is?" "No," I said. "It's a wall dividing the garden into two." "Yes," I said. Then he explained. There were two brothers in the family who worked the plot and they had had a falling out. They could agree on nothing. The situation was so bad that in the end the only thing they could do was to build a wall, right down the middle of their little piece of country.

All of this is to say that truth is stranger than fiction. If I had used those things in a novel I would have been laying it on way too thick. In fact, there were some stories I came across that I decided would be laying it on too thick even for *Stasiland*. For instance, I had read and deeply admired all of George Orwell's works, except for *1984*. Whilst I was working on *Stasiland* I deliberately didn't rectify this, despite the fact that more than one of my characters mentions Orwell (whose work was banned in the German Democratic Republic). Just before I delivered the manuscript last year to Michael Heyward at Text, I read the book. I couldn't believe it. It read like a manual for the socialist regime in East Germany, complete with instructions for the thought police.

In *1984* Winston Smith lives in dread of being taken to Room 101 for his encounter with Big Brother. When I visited the former Stasi Headquarters at Normannenstrasse in Berlin I had learned that the office of Erich Mielke, the head of the Stasi, had the number 101. This was curious because, being on the second floor, it would normally have had a number beginning with "2". I don't know whether Mielke had read *1984*. I was simply told that he wanted to have the premier number for his office, and that therefore he had ordered that the first floor, where the offices would normally have had numbers starting with "1" was to be called "the mezzanine". That way that his office would be, "Room 101."

Beyond the issue of credibility, there is a deeper reason why non-fiction is the appropriate way to represent such a strange, true world.

Like all societies, but most explicitly totalitarian ones, East Germany was based on a number of fictions itself. One of the founding myths of East Germany was that the East Germans were not the Germans responsible for the Second World War and the Holocaust. This is a very fundamental lie, and it was a fundament of the East German state. Almost as soon as the Russians started administering the territory that was to become East Germany after the war, the official line was that this place was to be run by German communists, and because the communists had fought the Nazis, in this place the people, in a sense, were the victors. Practically overnight they were washed clean of their involvement in and responsibility for the war.

This meant that in 1989 when the Wall came down it revealed, among other things, 17 million Germans who had been brought up to have no consciousness of historical responsibility for the Holocaust.

Another fundamental lie was that there was no unemployment in East Germany. This is because unemployment is a by-product of capitalist exploitation of workers, and in the “workers’ and farmers’ state” the needs of the people override those of capital and full employment exists. What it meant in practice was that the state, because it controlled employment, could use unemployment as a means to punish people.

I’d like to read a little part of Julia’s story. Julia was the woman I sublet my apartment from in Berlin. She is my age, and was persecuted by the Stasi at school, then prevented from going on to university, although she was a straight-A student. After that, she was prevented from getting any kind of work at all:

[Julia’s] options were running out. She decided to enrol in a night course for a certificate as a *Stadtbilderklärerin* (“a Town Plan Explainer”).

“A what?” I have never heard this word. Julia says that it means a “tour group leader”, but that in the GDR the word “leader” (*Führer*) was forbidden after Hitler, *der Führer*. Because “führen” also means “to drive”, this meant there were no train drivers (a *Lokkapitän* or “Locomotive Captain” instead) and no drivers’ licences (but a *Fahrerlaubnis* or “Permission to drive”). Being a Town Plan Explainer was an occasional way to earn pocket-money. It was not a living.

Julia went to the Employment Office, took a number and stood in an interminable line. She was among people who might have had similar experiences, both explicable and not, to her own. She turned to the man behind her and asked, “So how long have you been unemployed?”

Before he could answer an official, a square-built woman in uniform, stepped out from behind a column.

“Miss, you are not unemployed,” she barked.

“Of course I’m unemployed,” Julia said. “Why else would I be here?”

“This is the Employment Office, not the Unemployment Office. You are not unemployed; you are seeking work.”

Julia wasn't daunted. "I'm seeking work," she said, "because I am unemployed."

The woman started to shout so loudly the people in the queue hunched their shoulders. "I said, you are not unemployed! You are seeking work!" and then, almost hysterically, "There *is no* unemployment in the German Democratic Republic!"

In my mind I tote up further GDR fictions: that *der Führer* was excised not only from their history but also from their language; that the news was real on television; and, contrary to Julia's lived experience, that there was no unemployment. By no fault of her own, Julia Behrend had fallen into the gap between the GDR's fiction and its reality. She no longer conformed to the fiction. Loyal and talented as she was, she was now being edged out of the reality.

The aim of these fictions, or myths, was to create a new kind of German. I don't mean, of course, that human beings in the GDR were fundamentally different from elsewhere, but there definitely was an attempt to create a different sort of human being there, or at the very least a new kind of German. More than one Stasi man I interviewed told me the qualities that the East German State wanted to create in its people, by telling me what they, the East Germans, were *not*. I remember sitting opposite one fellow in his high-rise apartment as he said that East Germans were more advanced than other Germans in that: they were not fascists like the Nazis and they were not imperialists and capitalists like the West Germans now, or the Weimar Republicans before them.

In essence, I think that the GDR regime wanted to create people who fitted into communism, because communism does not fit people. That led it to require people to believe in things that were not true. In the end, there were so many governing fictions – fictions of liberty, democracy, equality, and peacefulness in a state of oppression, dictatorship, inequity and the constant of the Cold War – that it seemed anyone who refused to go along with these lies, and to conform was punished.

It was these fictions that Miriam and Sigrid and others in the book could see through, despite the enormous pressures on them not to call it. Essentially, I was writing about the bravery of those who refused to say that the Emperor looked beautiful in those clothes, when he didn't have any on and he didn't look beautiful at all.

Finally I'd like to say that this issue of the governing myths in a society is not, of course, confined to the extremes of a mid-twentieth century Stalinist experiment.

It is easy, after the terrible twentieth century, for people outside of Germany to feel somehow innocent by comparison with the Germans. I think this is particularly the case perhaps, for an Australian, because one of our ways of seeing ourselves has been as a democratic,

multicultural nation with strong traditions of the separation of powers, a powerful and healthy anti-authoritarian streak and an ethos of the “fair go”. Both “fair go” for all, and, when a request from authority is too ridiculous, the sense of “*fair go!*” I think that these qualities are exaggerated by comparison with the Germans who, much as one might justifiably resist from making generalisations, do frequently refer to themselves as order-loving, diligent, thorough and subservient to authority. An eminent historian of the Holocaust, who became the director of research at the Stasi File Authority, told me, sadly, “at base I think there is this terrible tendency we Germans have to perfectionise everything”. He meant to carry out an idea, or an order, to the nth degree. It is perhaps this quality that led the nation of poets and thinkers, this extraordinary culture of Mozart and Beethoven, of Goethe and Mann and Kafka, of Freud and Nietzsche and Einstein to implement most thoroughly the ideas of one of their own, Marx.

As writer I had no interest in making these kinds of generalised observations. But I did wonder, when I was working on *Stasiland*, how much of what had happened there was peculiarly German, and how much simply human. I mentioned briefly, the Australian self-image as tolerant, multicultural and egalitarian. I think that this is a useful fiction we have had about ourselves. It has prevented us from dividing people into “us” and “them”. It is a fiction I grew up with in the 1970s and 1980s as fact, because it had bipartisan support and was little challenged in public discourse. However, the widespread popular support for the Howard Government’s treatment of destitute refugees has proved this to be a myth which, however useful it was, is no longer sustainable. In fact, it is being misused. When John Howard claims that the asylum-seekers are somehow manipulating a tolerant and generous-hearted people, he turns what was a useful, unifying fiction into an excuse for inhumanity.

I’d like to finish by reading a quote from Breyten Breytenbach’s *Confessions of an Albino Terrorist*, which I used as an epigraph for *Stasiland*. I chose it because it points out very beautifully that no-one is immune from the darker potential of human nature:

The two of you, violator and victim (collaborator! violin!), are linked, forever perhaps, by the obscenity of what has been revealed to you, by the sad knowledge of what people are capable of. We are all guilty.



1. Amanda Buckley

2. Philippa Watson ad guest

3. Henry Albinski

4. Ben Hall & guest

5. Margaret Szalay & Jason Soon

6. Zoe McKenzie

7. Darren Wickham

8. Michael Berman

9. Eva Gold & Kerry Edmeades

10. Peter Gardes

Photographer - David Karonidis



Photo – David Karonidis

*Brendan Nelson*

The new Minister for Education, Science and Training, Brendan Nelson, has been in the job less than a year but already has a vision for reform of the sector. In his first months he consulted widely and came up with a process to further reform the Higher Education industry in the Howard Government's third term. Brendan Nelson addressed The Sydney Institute on Wednesday 10 April 2002, to outline some of his plans and new direction in the next stage of Higher Education reform.

# THE VISION OF

## *EDUCATION – HIGHER EDUCATION REFORM*

**Brendan Nelson**

Thank you very much Gerard for your very generous introduction, and also for the invitation extended by both you and the Institute.

As Australians we have inherited an economic and cultural legacy that's been largely an exploitation of natural resources in land and labour, agrarian and land intensive industries, and in mining and agriculture. As a population of 19 million people, we represent 0.3% of the world's population, 1% of world trade and 6% of APEC, in a world that's coalescing into three major trading blocks where there is no place to hide from the winds of reform and change.

I represent the electorate of Bradfield and the people that I represent want Australia to be a republic and most embrace the share market. Most, when they write to me about the internet, write usually about slow internet access. I represent people generally who see Australia as being a part of the world, in every sense of the word – economically and culturally. That's not universal throughout my electorate but that's where most of the people I'm privileged to represent are at the moment.

But the further you go from the Opera House to the outer suburbs of our major cities and to some of our regions and, indeed, most of rural Australia, you will find Australians who feel that financially, technologically and educationally they are detached from those who live down the eastern seaboard of the country.

In many ways our country is changing and it's changing very quickly. In 1974–1975, for example, agriculture represented 3.6% of Australia's GDP, by the year 2000/2001 it represented 2.8%. Manufacturing in 1974–75 the year before the Fraser Government came to power, manufacturing represented 17% of this nation's total productivity. By the year 2000–2001 it had declined to 12%. Recently published data paints a stark picture of the changes that are being worked into our economic and social base. In the five years from 1996, of the 20 industries with slowest employment growth, seven were manufacturers – they were also the smallest employer groups with

employees who were most likely engaged in lower paid, heavy, manual work. Finance, investment, computers, insurance and telecommunications comprised five of the ten fastest growing employment areas in our economy. But health and community services are also growing at 3.5% per annum.

The National Commission of Audit has forecast that by the year 2031, we will need, in the absence of new technologies and with an ageing population, to spend some 10 per cent more of gross domestic product on the health and welfare costs of ageing above and beyond real growth from where we're currently at. And this is just to provide the services that Australians are currently receiving. So our future, obviously, is going to increasingly be in knowledge-based industries. My children are much more likely to be working in a field of economic activity which is based on knowledge, whether it's in information communication technology or bio technologies or education, health or finance than they are, to be digging resources from the ground.

If we want to change something, if we want to look forward to the future and think about where we want to be, we have to understand the values, principles and sacrifices of the people who made our country what it is. When Rupert Murdoch gave the Murdoch Oration last year, he said, "The key to the future of any country is not in its physical resources, or industrial capital, but rather its human capital that will fund the health and growth of nations." One hesitates to ever disagree with Rupert Murdoch, but of course he is quite right. Although our industrial capital will be extremely important to us throughout this century as well. But our destiny as a people, will not be determined by our economic indices with which we so often, understandably, seem so concerned.

In 1943, there were fewer than 30,000 students in Australian higher education, essentially after the establishment of Sydney University almost a century earlier. In other words there were as many students in the entire higher education sector in Australia as there currently are at the University of New South Wales. By 1990 there were 480,000 students and that has increased to at least 730,000 students today, a 50 per cent increase in one decade. And in the decade from 1991 the proportion of the population of 15-64 years of age holding a bachelor degree or higher, has almost doubled from 9 per cent to 17 per cent. There are in total now 2.3 million Australians who are studying towards some kind of formal qualification in higher education, or in vocational education and training.

When I was asked if I would be prepared to be the Minister for Education, Science and Training and to serve in the Cabinet, I was naturally pleased, and in fact I was overwhelmed. I consider it a great privilege to be Australia's Minister for Education, Science and Training in the first government of the twenty-first century. But I came into the

job without any predetermined agenda. I didn't carry any educational baggage into it. For those who read the *Australian*, you'll know that I'm still learning how to spell. The Prime Minister gave me no agenda in relation to higher education other than to respect it, and to enunciate to society the value of it, and of course to continue to implement workplace relations reform in the sector. But within three weeks of being in the portfolio, it became obvious to me that a number of things are true.

Higher Education is a sector which, in 2002, expects revenue to be \$10.4 billion dollars. It's a sector with \$20 billion in fixed assets, \$4.4 billion in liquid assets, borrowings at \$426 million, at 2 per cent of asset value. Australian investments in higher education are at 1.6 per cent of GDP, in excess of the OECD average of 1.33 per cent. Further to that, government or public investments in Australian higher education are at 1.09% of GDP, ahead of the OECD average of 1.06%. I've told the Vice Chancellors that in my briefcase I carry a lot of things around with me, but I also carry a financial analysis for every one of the 38 publicly funded universities. In my quiet moments I read it and reflect on it.

The failure to undertake reform in higher education today, in preparation for the future, will be an abrogation of our responsibilities to the next generation. It is time that we as a country had the maturity to recognise that we should be discussing, in a dispassionate but informed way, in the public arena the policy options that we have before us in relation to Australian Universities. And that debate ought to be informed and it ought to be free of some of the emotion and highly politicised language which has characterised it in the past. There are some things that should transcend what comprises public division in this country. The future of education, and higher education in particular should be one of them.

I have been speaking to the Secretary of the Department, Dr Peter Shergold and I have asked for a special unit to be established within the department, particularly to oversee higher education reform. I told the Secretary that I wanted people in that unit who don't work in higher education, but who are lateral thinkers. They can be people who work in other areas in education and training, but I want people who can bring a wider perspective to universities. I have also asked the Australian Vice Chancellors Committee to nominate the person they would like to work in this unit for the best part of the next six months. Someone who would be an employee in the Department on secondment to oversee the special unit. I also invite representatives of the community to nominate someone they would like to work in the unit.

The unit will be producing a series of discussion papers which will be released over the next six months or so. The purpose of those papers

will be to stimulate an informed public debate. They're not to represent government policy. But it's important that we consider all of the options, the choices, that we have and that each of us understand what the consequences might be of adopting one or the other. The important thing is, there is absolutely no point in having a debate, if you can call it that, about things that those in the profession want to debate. We've got to bring all Australians with us. Education is funded by the hard work of men and women throughout this country. Taxes are removed from low incomes and every single cent that we invest in higher education, in schools and in training, needs to be designed to meet the needs and the aspirations of everyday Australians. They have to be a part of this process as much as those of us who might attend the Sydney Institute on a regular basis.

The second thing I have done is begin the establishment of a reference group to advise me directly. It will comprise people who don't represent different parts of the sector, but I think the people – when they are announced – you will feel that you'll have confidence that each part of the sector of people who at least understand are directly advising me in giving me information about policy choices that I'll be debating in the public arena, and which will be offered in the discussion papers that will be released. In that group will also be one or two people who know nothing about universities, but who carry the confidence of the everyday, average Australian who's struggling to feed their kids, who's reading often what are described as "tabloids", and looking at Channel 10 news. Consequently, when people know that we're discussing higher education and how to spend \$6.1 billion of their hard-earned money this year on universities, perhaps there will be some wider perspective other than that of the sector itself. And of course there will be Vice Chancellors representing the different kinds of universities – there will be people from humanities, social science and applied sciences and representatives from the business community.

The special unit we establish will be convened by the Secretary of the Department and it will be having consultations with groups whom we feel we should be speaking to. It's my intention at the end of the year to conduct a two-day lockup with my reference group and others whom I'd invite. We will take the product into the internal processes of the government and I will then meet the challenge of taking a package of recommendations to my colleagues.

When I spoke to the Vice Chancellors, I said they needed to understand that there are three things in any approach to reform. The first, which is the easiest, is to do absolutely nothing. The second would be to simply have a look at things. There has been an enormous amount of work done in the sector – in a sense it has been reviewed to death. There are many quite informed and well researched views in terms of what should happen, and a lot of material already exists in the

public arena. At present we have a review in progress to bring as many Australians along with us as we possibly can. But review alone is not the best way to go. The third alternative is what I'm proposing to do. To see that everybody has a say, everybody has an input. As I said to the President of the National Tertiary Education Union when I met with her and her colleagues, you will know what finally comes of this because you will contribute to it. I will be consulting with you and you will understand the direction in which we are going, and what that means for a union. There will be some things, perhaps ultimately, with which they will agree and agree quite strongly and of course other things to which they remain quite opposed.

There are a number of issues that need to be looked at. Some of them are philosophical as much as they are practical. One of our problems in public policy in our country is that we don't often think so much about the philosophy as what we are doing. The first question for me is, what defines a university? At the moment, in Australia, we see universities as undertaking three things – research, scholarship and teaching. A Vice Chancellor said to me recently, in a kind of a critical tone of another institution, that a particular institution was not so good because there was far too much emphasis on teaching and not enough emphasis on research. But when you think about what Australians want, and what they expect from their universities, and especially for students who attend them, it is teaching which is a very high priority. We need to be asking ourselves – 13 years after John Dawkins' reforms in amalgamating colleges of advanced education with existing universities – what defines a university in the beginning of the twenty-first century?

There's a debate at present over Melbourne University Private and it has been suggested by some, including the Victorian Education Minister, that Melbourne University Private perhaps should not be described as a university because the research that it undertakes is essentially commercially driven. It's a legitimate argument for people to say well, it shouldn't be a university. But it's equally legitimate for others to say – yes it should, and perhaps our definition of universities should not be so narrow as to exclude one that undertakes research which is driven predominantly, but not entirely, by industry. But the one thing we certainly don't want is that to be the only model of an Australian university.

The second question I ask myself is, who goes to university and why do they go there? For example, of the 1992 cohort, 40 per cent who commenced a university education did not complete it and of those, 10 per cent came back at some later point while the rest did not complete and it's still at that level. And of those who don't complete – half of them drop out or leave in the first year. In a climate where we've got 52,000 people who try to get a place at university this year (half of

what it was ten years ago, but still a significant amount of unmet demand) at a time when we've got people who are going to university who perhaps are not likely to complete. So one of the questions I've been putting to the Australian public is, should everybody be going to university?

Having spent much of my earlier life dealing with young people who feel disengaged and feel that perhaps there's no place for them in modern society, when you scratch away the surface when you're working with kids who are on the edge, you find that many of them feel that they are being pressured to be what they are not. As a parent myself, I think one of the easy mistakes we can make is that we often project onto our children our own unfulfilled ambitions. I've dealt with too many young people who are pursuing a particular field of study or a career, not because in their hearts that's what they want to do but because a parent has throughout their lives, said "this is what we want you to be" and "this is what we want you to do".

A further problem we have is the one-size-fits-all model of funding for our publicly funded institutions. There are a number of Australian universities, not all sandstones, who do and should aspire to compete with the rest of the world. It's rather interesting that Ian Macfarlane, the Governor of the Reserve Bank commented recently on having an Australian university rank in the top 100. If twenty years from now we are to have a university that is considered to be in the top 50 or top 100 throughout the world, what policy reforms do we need to undertake now to achieve it? Or, indeed, is it desirable? Is it something that we should strive for? And then at the same time, is it possible to have a set of funding arrangements that includes regional universities but in no way threatens the viability or continued growth of those institutions. Currently regional universities are increasingly meeting quite complex and onerous community service obligations, and facing quite different challenges from a lot of the larger institutions. I can assure you nothing will be done to undermine the role of regional universities, whatever happens in reform in higher education. In fact, we need to do everything we can to strengthen those particular institutions.

Another issue we need to be looking at is the way in which our universities are governed for this century. We need to look at the structures that underwrite universities, notwithstanding some of the reforms that have already been undertaken, particularly in some of the institutions. We have to ask ourselves are these the best models for accountability – reporting, restrictions on commercialisation and so on. There are many issues here for the institutions themselves when you think that we're running \$400 million institutions. A number of Vice Chancellors have put particular views to me in relation to this. It is an issue that needs to be discussed in the public arena. There is the matter

of intellectual property, and the extent to which it's been commercialised or not commercialised in a number of institutions. Why are there barriers, cultural and regulatory, which make it difficult for universities to commercialise their IP?

Private sector investment in university infrastructure; why is it that it is not as prominent a part of university life here as it is in some other countries? I asked the chairman of a very large company why, for example, it was not possible to build the XYZ Department of Information, Communication and Technology at a particular University and then go into a long-term intellectual property share arrangement with the institution and researchers. He said, well we'd actually love to do that sort of thing, but there is a culture within Australia that rejects that sort of investment, and also there are some tax laws which would make it difficult to do so. I've also said to the Secretary of my Department that I want every aspect of the regulation that the Commonwealth Government imposes on universities to be reviewed from the point of view of asking to what extent are we making it harder for universities to undertake research and to teach students? In other words are Universities doing a lot of things which are required to meet administering requirements which are set by my Department which go beyond the reasonable realms of public accountability for a significant amount of public funds? And when I talk about review, I'm talking about review from our point of view, the Commonwealth government's point of view, as much as I am about the Higher Education point of view.

With the issue of research resources and the way we distribute them, obviously much competitive research funding goes to institutions, but there is a lot of other research funding which is distributed to institutions as well. We ought to have a public and a transparent discussion about how we distribute those resources. Are we doing the best we can with them at the moment? Then there's specialisation and differentiation, arguably one of the most important things. One university I visited, for example, offers 167 courses but 96 of the courses have fewer than 5 students enrolled. I go to universities and I travel from one university to another. It takes about 30 minutes. They are marvellous institutions, but the everyday person would go along and say well everything that I'm looking at here is being provided by the institution I was just at. Do we have a funding system which, instead of encouraging differentiation and collaboration between institutions, is instead encouraging institutions to offer all things to all people and at the same time perhaps not making the quality of what institutions want to provide as high as those who run them aspire them to be?

Last on my list, though certainly not least in priority, is my concern that if we continue further into a future, as we should, with a commercialisation of intellectual property predominantly in the areas of applied science, where does that leave the humanities? Fine arts,

literature, language and philosophy are what give meaning to us as a society. In a sense, universities are passing the soul of one generation to the next. And, as important as science and applied science is, it's how we use science that is much more difficult. We've been through this recently with human cloning and stem cell research. One thing I'm determined to do, if there is any reform, is to make sure that we're able to put humanities, literature and fine arts and the like on a sound footing, areas of study where it is much more difficult to seek private sector support.

Higher education is an area of concern to electors. In that, I can see that priority setting in science has the potential to change our country in ways that most of us wouldn't begin to imagine. There are people who are arguing that as a small country, with a relatively, by global terms, small amount of money to spend on research that we should focus it into specific areas, highly technical, special areas. There are others who say we should be looking at broader thematic priorities. And it's to this that I am attracted, as one Australian, and one member of the government. I see the opportunity to set some goals, some economic, social and human objectives for our country that might see us 5, 10 and 15 years from now having a clear idea about where we want to be. What we want to be good at and how we want to be seen by the rest of the world. Then the priorities that we set in science become a logical, strategic outcome, a logical way of achieving what we want. You could be looking at Australia's carrying capacity, which will be examined in applied science, ecological, environmental science, social sciences and start thinking about where we want to be in a whole variety of ways, as I say, in a decade from now.

On my wall I have, if you like, my vision of Australia. What I'd like to see us become. I see this portfolio as a great way of trying to achieve it. We should strive to become a people that values the health and integrity of human life, as much as we value our economic objectives. We should see barriers to the creation of wealth as being the enemy of an equitable social policy of which education is probably the foremost. We should also strive to be an outward looking and compassionate country, reconciled with our indigenous history, and the values of hard work, self sacrifice, tolerance and courage. That's what this portfolio is all about. It's about building a better Australia and building resilience in young people and seeing that education is a process that begins in early life and it ends only when you leave this earth.



1. Robin Marsden

2. Dianne Armstrong & Michael Armstrong

3. Simon Edwards & Katherine O'Regan

4. Jacqui Calandra & Mim Merrick.

5. Caitlin Boyce, Marissa Sandler & Tandi Rabinowitz

6. Adam Cagliarini & Tim Bulman

7. Christopher Pyme, Kate Carnell & Zoe McKenzie

8. Victor Voets & Penelope Nelson

Photographer - David Karonidis



*Nicola Roxon*



*Christopher Pyne*

Photos – David Karomidis

Both major parties are witnessing a drop in the number of young people interested in mainstream politics. The success of independents and single issue parties in recent elections has also drained votes from the major parties. Why the alienation among the young with the political process? To discuss this and more, Labor's Nicola Roxon, Shadow Minister for Children and Youth and Christopher Pyne, the Federal Member for Sturt, addressed The Sydney Institute on Monday 15 April 2002.

# **BUILDING POLITICAL**

---

## ***RELEVANCE FOR YOUNG PEOPLE***

**Nicola Roxon**

Let me start by dispelling the myth that young people are not interested in politics. I don't believe this and think it is a cop out, as a politician, to assert it. It may be that many young people are just not that interested in *US!* Or perhaps not interested in our language and maybe even the issues we identify? In a recent survey Labor did of young people, one of the questions was "what would you do if you were Prime Minister for the day?" Listen to this:

- from an 11 year old girl from Pascoe Vale, Victoria: "The first thing I would do if I were PM would be to give money to the poor, homeless and lonely people."
- Amanda, 25 from Birkdale in Qld: "Look at the price of living in today's world. All we do is work and pay bills. I'd hate to have kids as well. We would do nothing, we don't get out much as it is."
- "I would build more skate parks and bike jumps and since I've taken John Howard's job I would send him to Afghanistan and he would not be allowed to enter the country" – from an 11 year old boy!
- "I would think, what the hell am I doing being a Prime Minister?" (Female 14, Braybrook Victoria)

More seriously, is this response from 23 year old Jessica (QLD):

It is impossible to narrow down all the concerns of today's young persons to three items, but it's welcoming to see an opportunity to voice such concerns. Most young people feel totally alienated from the political process let alone understand how it actually works – hell I've talked to 35 year olds who thought globalisation had something to do with basketball (maybe it does).

The point is a lot of us have given up, given up on growing up – because once we're old enough to do your job the mess will be so bad, so irreversibly damaged, we might as well take drugs or jump off bridges or shoot our teachers.

All I want is to breathe clean air when I ride my bike to work, instead of choking on car fumes.

I want to eat food free of pesticides and chemicals.

I want the police to protect me instead of harassing me and searching me as I walk down the street.

I want to work and earn enough money so it's not worth being on the dole.

I want a workplace free of slaps to the arse.

And one day, when I have a husband and have children, I hope the damage is less, so I can teach them to live responsibly."

These quotes come from a survey and consultation process, conducted by me and other Labor MPs with young people in the last few months. I will talk about it more later, but what I think is very clear is that these young people care about the world around them, worry about their future and have plenty to say. Isn't this a recipe for political interest and engagement?

Polls clearly tell us that Labor is still by far and away the most attractive party for 18–24 year olds, attracting around 43 per cent of the primary vote, in contrast with the Liberals who get around 26 per cent and the Nationals on around 3 per cent. Nevertheless, Labor is concerned about its vote, particularly its primary vote, dropping amongst young people. There still remains a view within our party and within politics generally that young people more often vote "left" than when they are older. In the emerging generations, such an assumption is not necessarily holding up, or not to the extent it used to:

- Using public Morgan Polls, 18–24 year olds at the last election told us they intended to give us their primary vote at a rate of only 1.2 per cent more than the general population said they would.
- In contrast, in 1990, they gave us their primary vote by 10.4 per cent more than the general population.
- Our primary vote in the age group 18–24 has dropped 14 per cent since 1984.

This is something that we are concerned about, not only because of its obvious electoral implications, but because we believe that Labor's message about what it can do for young people is not reaching them – and we believe they deserve a better deal than they are currently getting from the federal government.

I spoke recently about this issue at the Young Labor Conference and ways the ALP might structure itself differently to help attract more young people as members, with a flow on benefit in attracting more young voters. The main suggestion was to look at ways of organising around issues and areas of interest, not just locality as we currently do. Of particular concern to me is a risk that we may be seen by young people as vacating the field to the Greens (or even Democrats), in areas

of interest to them. Not only shouldn't we do this, but Labor doesn't need to do this. On issues like the environment and international affairs we have a record to be proud of and shouldn't be spooked out of trying to sell this message properly.

Let's just look at two of these two areas as examples. First, the environment. Recently released research by Australian Council for Educational Research found that 75 per cent of 14 years olds surveyed believe that taking part in protecting the environment is important. With such a high rating on this single issue I believe the Greens' popularity is assisted by its clear identity with this issue. The very thing so many young people care about is written right there on the ballot paper with the name of the party – the Greens. They are a single issue party, easily understood and attractive. But why should we merely vacate this political field to one issue parties? Labor has a history of good environmental policies and achieving sensible balances between environmental needs and jobs. We have made hard and good decisions on the Franklin Dam, for example, Antarctica, even establishing Landcare. We are the only major party pushing for Australia to sign the Kyoto Protocol.

The second example is global politics. The Australian Labor Party was instrumental in setting up the United Nations, we supported and promoted beyond our shores an enormous range of treaties on international labour standards and women's rights, we led the way in the Cambodian Peace process. Labor activists campaigned on international issues such as the war in Vietnam and apartheid in South Africa. We still care about and I believe could interest young people on many issues such as world poverty, the AIDS epidemic, child labour, women's rights and freedom in the Middle East, and even the impact of international money movements or multinational investment decisions, not to mention the world wide web.

These are just two issues that are high profile examples for young people. The point was enhanced by our survey results showing a very high interest in "social justice" issues from world peace, to poverty and racism. Labor, with the lion's share of voters who are 18–24 preferring us over any other party, still has the sense and foresight to see that this can change, that the community is changing and we need to look at trends that affect this and develop policies and communication strategies long term to help woo young voters. Labor can do a lot better, but the hysteria around the growing Green and Democrat vote amongst young people is just not being supported by their results. They certainly have a niche but, as smaller parties, they can afford to focus narrowly. Dierdre Macken describes the Democrats phenomenon last year in an interesting way:

The Democrats have always been an in between party – in between the seat of government and house of review, in between the hard-nosed liberals and

the factionally fraught Labor, even in between the Greens and One Nation – but they could end up the party of a demographic transition – in between high school and the first mortgage party.<sup>1</sup>

Nevertheless, it may be that this “transitional group”, between high school and home buying is growing in size. Last year’s study by the Committee for Economic Development of Australia on “Future Directions in Australian Social Policy”<sup>2</sup> clearly shows that young people:

- can no longer rely on any kind of certainty in the labour market,
- either by choice or necessity they are entering home ownership much later if at all,
- the likelihood of settling with a partner and deciding to have children is also happening later if at all, and
- many more women will never have children of their own.

In the last 20 years the birth rate for 20-24 year olds has nearly halved, and for 25-29 year olds it has dropped by a third. The transitions and patterns that young people in the past have gone through with some level of predictability are no longer stable. If the traditional patterns of moving from education to employment, from family home to independent living, from adolescence to adulthood are occurring later in life for this generation of young people, then this must have implications for the role of young people and their interests in the political process. Never more so than before, it is clear that policies “about young people” need to cover a wide range of issues, both in terms of age and in terms of life stages.

I think this group will increasingly look critically at policies like the first home owner scheme, the new baby bonus and other family benefits, especially if they favour a particular type of lifestyle. Clearly some of the factors influencing young people to delay buying homes and having children will include economic pressures, thus some of these types of policies might be looked at favourably. The flip side, however, is that as more and more people don’t buy homes or have children they will see these policies as very narrowly targeted (and not at them) and not necessarily see why they merit public expenditure or how helpful they are to the broader community.

Particularly on questions like assistance for children there are some risks. The “child free” movement here is pretty much non-existent but not so in the United States – where they talk about children being a “consumer choice” of the parents. *I don’t agree with this philosophy.* But I think that if we accept a political approach which looks to support parents and families only through direct financial incentive, then we will increasingly alienate non-parents – the growing group amongst young people. We must be able to set out the arguments supporting investment in children, why it is important to the community as a whole and its future, and not just rely on parents alone understanding this. Otherwise it has long term consequences for us all, especially the way

we use public money to assist families. It seems to me that whichever party grapples fully with these changes first and properly understands the patterns and differing needs of today's young people, will have the best chance of winning this group of young voters. And perhaps it might also help establish loyalties that may last into the future. As some of these transitions and lifestyles diversify for young people other issues like leisure and recreation could become increasingly important. If people are not necessarily wedded to voting for one party because of their family or economic policies they would look more broadly.

Let me briefly tell you how this survey I keep referring to came about. I was promoted to the front bench after the last election and given the new portfolio of Children and Youth. I quickly recognised that young people are largely not among the groups that come to our offices, ring talkback radio, write letters to the paper. Their voices are often not heard in the political sphere. So Labor conducted a survey that generated responses from nearly 2500 young people across the country. Not a bad number of replies from an age group everyone keeps saying isn't interested in politics!

In addition, last week, as part of National Youth week, I co-ordinated eight Labor members, including our leader Simon Crean, in a range of activities with young people. Amongst other things, I spent a shift on the check out at Coles, others worked as apprentices, went to TAFE, went horse riding and to other sporting events. Our main aim was to go out and talk with, and in many cases work and study alongside, young people rather than expect them to come to us or use other more traditional ways of lobbying MPs.

Overall the Report includes information from over 3000 young people. You have heard some quotes that come from the collation of that survey and research. The full text of that Report, *A Snapshot of Youth 2002* is available at [www.nicolaroxonmp.com](http://www.nicolaroxonmp.com) Through this type of initiative Labor is trying to engage young people more actively. We are looking ahead, trying to excite young people, exploring changing demographic trends and looking for the right policy areas to develop.

But Labor also has a defensive role to play. I can't let tonight pass without registering my extreme concern at a piece of Howard government legislation which is currently before the Parliament. The proposal eliminates the seven day period between the calling of an election and the closing of the electoral roll. Undeniably, a smaller window disenfranchises younger voters disproportionately. Younger voters obviously move house more frequently. It is harder for them to keep their enrolment details up-to-date. And first-time voters make up the overwhelming majority of new entrants onto the electoral roll.

The harder it is to register or change enrolment details, the more young Australians you disenfranchise. The conservative parties have always been keen to close the window. The reason for this of course is

that younger voters are assumed to vote in larger numbers for Labor. But in a democracy surely political parties should aspire to attract groups of voters by improving their policies, not by pushing those who may disagree with them off the electoral roll?

Even the ever cautious and neutral Electoral Commission felt it could not remain silent on this Liberal policy, saying: “Of particular concern is the possible impact of the early close of rolls on young people who wish to take up their franchise for the first time but are usually only motivated to do so by the announcement of an election”. The Commission estimates 80,000 to 100,000 people – overwhelmingly young voters – enrol for the first time in the week following an election being called.

Legislation proposing this unfair policy is before the parliament right now. I mention this because we have here my parliamentary colleague Chris Pyne who was the architect, as chair of the Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters, of this legislation. So I’m very much hoping he’s here tonight with a quick and painless “*mea culpa*” to announce the withdrawal of this legislation. That would be good news for young voters, and Labor would support it into the bargain.

This is just one indication of how the government is missing the mark with young people. Even after two elections, our survey showed the GST as still at the forefront of young people’s minds. Removing the GST was the issue that came up most often when young people were asked what they would do if they were PM for a day. Fifteen year old Renee from West Sunshine: “I would roll back the GST because I think it is unfair for teenagers because most of us have no income and have to pay more for goods and services and get no benefits from it.” Young people rely on services. Many of their costs have been affected – transport, books, movies, take away food, sport. Most young people get none of the elusive trade-offs offered. Other issues that ranked high with young people if they were PM were:

- fix poverty
- increase (or reduce) the number of refugees
- improve the environment and
- increase education spending

After this top five, young people would create employment, help the homeless and seek world peace. All not a bad starting point.

The Snapshot Report has helped Labor identify some areas for future work on youth policy. These include:

- Assessing ways to relieve financial pressures on young people
- Investigating ways to more actively respond to young people’s recreational, sport and music interests
- Addressing their personal safety and driver safety concerns
- Considering a commitment to a free, universal year 12 equivalent

- Re-examining the traineeship regime and what it is delivering
- Providing greater consumer protection, financial management and debt counselling for young people.

Let's look briefly at the recreation and sport example. An overwhelming 60 per cent of young respondents listed sport as one of their three favourite activities, socialising was at 48 per cent, music and dancing next at 28 per cent. Computers, shopping, TV, movies, families and cooking rated between 15-5 per cent. Perhaps as "past-times" we have regarded these as fairly predictable but I think we should not dismiss them as "non-political" issues. If we do I suspect we could be ignoring them at our peril. At the very least, they are clearly a hook into capturing many young people's interest or attention.

Furthermore, I believe we need to do more work to examine the link between sport (and other recreation) and the prevention of anti-social behaviour later in life. If the provision of adequate recreation facilities is a preventative tool, maybe public investment is worth it for the safe and happy development of our children growing into adulthood. Our interest in urban planning and community development may also tie in here.

It is our obligation as policy makers and advocates to explore the links between young people's interests and some of the areas perplexing us like crime, drug abuse or self harm. We need to use young people's issues and make the appropriate connections. We can see a changing landscape for politics in the twenty-first century and as a party determined to take a leading role in that landscape, Labor must be prepared to look at what needs changing in our own backyard as well as what is changing in the world around us – if we neglect either of these tasks, there are great risks for us in the future. As an alternate government (in contrast to single issue parties) Labor must have policies for the whole nation and be able to govern for the whole nation.

My argument is that young people, new voters and the next generation, deserve as much attention, specific thought and inclusion in our planning and policies (and in our Party) as any other section of the community.

## References

---

1. *Financial Review*, 22 October 2001
2. Committee for Economic Development of Australia, "Future Directions in Australian Social Policy", Growth 49, December 2001

# WHY PEOPLE AREN'T

---

## COMING TO THE PARTY

**Christopher Pyne**

People don't randomly join organisations and clubs. Like any choice people make, there needs to be a motivating force for people to want to join. In decades past there have been strong motivating forces at work in drawing large numbers of people to political parties.

The parents of the Baby Boomer generation were prolific joiners of political parties. They had reason to be. They lived in turbulent times. Two world wars, the great depression and the rise of communism left people with little choice but to be politically aware. Australians of that generation had fought hard for their freedom and didn't take it for granted. Australia was an infant democracy and Australians wanted to play a role in its development and progress.

The Baby Boomer generation did not continue this trend and as a result their children have not been exposed to party membership as much as the generation before. It's a phenomenon that threatens to trickle through the X-Generation and beyond until only the most passionate supporters of a party are inclined to join and become active.

### **The politics of motivation**

In 2002 young Australians enjoy a strong and stable democracy, a high standard of living and a promising future. There is no longer a significant factor to motivate young people to agitate for change. The great conflict between the left and right in Australian politics has narrowed to a nexus between the centre left and the centre right. There is no groundswell of public sentiment to dramatically alter this situation. In contemporary Australia young people are more issues focussed rather than having ideological allegiances.

People no longer believe the answer lies with just one party. They seek solutions from other sources and in some cases have turned to single issue parties. The major political parties focus on the important big ticket items such as balanced budgets, privatisation, deregulation, low interest rates and competition policy.

But most young people aren't interested in these issues. And these are the issues that the major parties push, they concentrate less on the social issues that young people are more passionate about. Politics might be the battle of ideas, but in that battle the only ideas that count are the ones that people can relate to. More and more young people are finding that their political interests are outside the ambit of the major political parties.

### **Motivation versus time**

Compounding the problem for major political parties is the fact that young people today have less spare time, greater responsibilities and a wider range of extra-curricular activities from which to choose. Ten years ago Australians in the 25–34 year age bracket spent an average of just over five hours a day on socialising, recreation and leisure<sup>1</sup>. Five years later that figure fell to three hours and 45 minutes a day<sup>2</sup>. On those trends it will now be around two and half hours per day.

People are busier because they are more career driven compared to 20 and 30 years ago. According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics 2.5 million Australians – or a third of the workforce – work overtime. Of those who work overtime, a third are unpaid. In a similar study it was found that, on average, full-time employees do two hours and 40 minutes of unpaid overtime per week. The same study found that unpaid overtime amounts to six per cent of all employees' weekly working hours.

Our work has also begun intruding on our social lives. Office drinks, work related conferences, industry dinners, professional development courses and part-time tertiary study have become a part of our after hours culture.

Over the last 30 years there has been a dramatic increase in the number of young people who are participating in some form of tertiary study. In 1972 there were just over 600,000 people enrolled in tertiary studies in Australia. In 2002 there are expected to be more than 1.6 million enrolments. In other words, an extra one million people have additional time constraints as a result of tertiary study.

Greater accessibility to tertiary studies means that more socio-economic groups are able to participate in further education. That has resulted in a higher number of students with less spare time as many need to work part-time to survive. Most university courses are now assessed on a continual basis rather than end-of-year assessment, thus placing further strains on young people's available time.

### **The decline in community participation rates**

It's not just political parties that are suffering a downturn in participation rates. Most community organisations and clubs are experiencing problems mustering a ground force. With such a wide

variety of leisure, recreation and entertainment options available, we are less inclined to commit ourselves to membership of community based clubs and organisations.

According to data collected by the Australian Bureau of Statistics, participation rates in community sporting clubs is steadily decreasing at a rate of just over 1.5 per cent of the population per year. The same trend is being replicated in non-sporting clubs. Approximately 100,000 Australians a year are choosing not to renew their annual memberships.

### **Damage control: the problem with image**

If the major political parties are going to successfully compete for young people's limited spare time we will need to start with a political make-over. The fact is, major political parties have an image problem. There is a social and professional stigma attached to being involved.

The role of the media cannot be underestimated in this regard. The media has an unhealthy obsession with denigrating politics and politicians. They trivialise politics, make it personal, create conflict where none really exists, cover issues that interest the media as a group rather than the community and refuse to cover issues where there is agreement and consensus. All of this disillusiones the electorate including younger people. The profession, and thus, the practise of joining a party is seen as a waste of time.

But some of our image problems are self inflicted.

The image of political parties is tainted by the perception of the politics of politics – too many young people perceive it as all about infighting, autocratic decision making, empire building and number crunching exercises. Compounding the image problem is the fact that many young people believe there's no point in joining a political party because they can't really change anything and no-one will listen to them.

### **Lessons from the USA and UK**

These problems are not confined to Australia's major political parties. In the United States the major political parties are experiencing the same recruitment and retention difficulties we are witnessing in Australia.

According to American research there was a 26 per cent decline in the number of people attending political meetings between 1968 and 1996. In the same period the number of people who did voluntary work for a party halved. And yet in the same survey period there was a 250 per cent increase in the number of people who had been contacted by a political party<sup>3</sup>.

Despite a long history of electoral success, the ageing population base of Britain's Conservative Party threatens its future existence. The average age of its members is 62 and only one per cent of its membership are under the age of 25<sup>4</sup>. The youth wing of the Conservative Party is

undergoing a major facelift in an attempt to regenerate its membership and broaden its appeal.

They started the process by re-branding themselves and are now known as Conservative Future. Their recent annual conference was aimed at launching a “caring image and finding new members”. The president of the movement used the conference as an opportunity to issue guidelines for a recruitment offensive that begins this month. The guidelines advocate informality and a sense of humour. “Suits are a definite no-no!” the handbook states. In place of earnest speeches, recruiters are told: “Do not talk to people for more than three minutes, otherwise they will switch off.”

Richard Stephenson, Conservative Future’s policy director, said: “In the old days, Young Conservatives wore pinstripe suits, and were desperate to make speeches and be prime minister. Now the pomposity has gone and our membership has changed. We’re not all here because we want to be politicians. Many of us went to new universities. Many grew up in working class areas or on council estates. That is the all-embracing image we want to get across.”<sup>59</sup>

Like Conservative Future, Young Republicans are in the process of revitalising their image. It’s an image that took a battering during the halcyon days of Newt Gingrich when he told delegates at a conference of Young Republicans: “I think one of the great problems we have in the Republican Party is that we don’t encourage you to be nasty.”<sup>60</sup> Gingrich’s sentiments highlight the cynicism of the 1980s and 1990s that contributed to young people’s indifference to the political process.

Whilst a positive image is important to create a good first impression on potential members, we will not retain them if the party lacks substance. It is sheer folly to suggest that Pepsi Generation gimmicks and championing trendy causes will draw young people back to political parties. It certainly hasn’t worked for Natasha Stott Despoja and her waning Democrats.

As the self proclaimed spokesperson for the younger generation Natasha Stott Despoja leads a party whose life blood is the trendy left issues that typically attract young people. And yet when she challenged Meg Lees for the party leadership in 2001 only a reported 1,500 Democrat members nationwide were inspired enough to cast a ballot, of whom 500 voted for Meg Lees.

## **Turning the tide**

How can the major political parties re-connect with today’s busy, disillusioned and politically uninspired youth? To gain their interest we need something of a makeover of our own.

The late former United States Speaker Tip O’Neill famously remarked that “all politics is local”. If the major political parties are going to engage a new constituency then we must raise issues that affect

people in their streets, suburbs and neighbourhoods. The Liberal Party is ideally placed to maximise our inherent strength over the Labor Party at the community level. The Liberal Party's membership comes from all walks of life and are active contributors in their local communities. At the branch level this is our strongest point of differentiation to the Labor Party which are top heavy with union members who have joined at the direction of their union bosses.

Further strengthening our ties with the community through joint ventures with local voluntary organisations like Meals on Wheels, sporting clubs, Rotary, Lions, the Community Fire Service, churches, Neighbourhood Watch, opportunity shops, Scouts and Guides will give us greater exposure and connectivity with the community. Organisations with a sense of social responsibility and a shared experience and a commitment beyond themselves build a community. In instances where joint ventures are not possible, a branch could sponsor and organise its own community activities.

Earlier I referred to the time demands that young people now face. Combining political activity with community service would be one way of avoiding the requirement for young people to choose between one or the other – a choice that often sees political membership come off second best.

If we are going to successfully broaden the franchise of the Liberal Party we also need to canvass the idea of making our annual membership fee more competitive. Many potential members find the cost prohibitive. In marketing ourselves as an organisation wanting to serve the community we may need to adopt the same nominal membership fee structures of other community service groups. I have long advocated that the party should have a broad based, grass roots membership reflecting the entire cross-section of our communities. Only by making party membership more affordable will we be able to attract a mass membership made up of people from all walks of life.

The Liberal Party could also change its branch structure to provide a vehicle for people in their thirties to become more involved. Thirty-somethings have deserted the membership of major political parties. And women thirty-somethings are scarcely part of the political mainstream. Young Liberal members are required to leave the movement by the age of 30 after which they can join the senior party. Many Young Liberals seldom make the transition.

We can establish special branches that maintain strong links to the community and cater specifically for thirty-somethings. This initiative will give thirty-somethings a direct connectivity to their peers and members of parliament as well as improving the retention rate between the youth wing and the senior party. It will lend itself to a more professional, dynamic and representative Liberal Party with a greater capacity to mentor emerging talent in the ranks.

In the United States, membership of the Young Democrats and Young Republicans is open to voters under the age of 36 and 40 respectively. Raising the age limit to 36 or 40 is one option the Young Liberals may care to consider as part of an overall review of our approach to attracting young people to politics.

## Conclusion

If Robert Kennedy was right when he said, "The youth of our nation are the clearest mirror of our performance", then the mirror is telling us we need to lift our performance. The future of the Australian political process is at the crossroads. People no longer gravitate to the major parties. Instead, the challenge for political parties is to reach out to young people and give them a vision of what can be and how they can help make it happen. We need to link ideology to a practical outcome at the community level.

We cannot realise the opportunities of the twenty-first century, or meet its responsibilities, or strengthen our communities unless we are resolved to rebuild our memberships.

## References

---

- 1 Australian Bureau of Statistics
- 2 Australian Bureau of Statistics
- 3 *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*, Dr Robert Putnam, Simon & Schuster 2000)
- 4 "Why don't British young people vote at general elections?", Richard Kimberlee
- 5 "Youth wing dumps suits for t-shirts", *The Guardian*
- 6 "The mean strategy backfires", *The New York Times*, 28 May 2001



Photo – David Karonidis

*Neil McDonald*

Australia's Damien Parer was an outstanding cinematographer, famous for dramatic footage of Australian soldiers in the Middle East and Papua New Guinea during World War Two. With ABC broadcaster Chester Wilmot and journalist Osmar White, Parer shot his most famous film *Kokoda Front Line* in 1942. On Tuesday 23 April 2002, author and historian Neil McDonald addressed The Sydney Institute to retell the fascinating story of how the film was made.

# GETTING IT RIGHT -

## ***DAMIEN PARER, OSMAR WHITE AND CHESTER WILMOT ON THE KOKODA TRACK***

**Neil McDonald**

Damien Parer's *Kokoda Front Line* is undoubtedly the most famous Australian film of the Second World War. Its images became our visual memory of the Kokoda battles: but it is only part of the story. Parer shot the film to what we would call today "a very precise agenda"; and this agenda was in part supplied by the two men who were with Parer on his journey up the Kokoda Track in 1942 – ABC broadcaster Chester Wilmot and Melbourne *Sun* correspondent Osmar White. They accompanied the 2/14 and 2/16 Battalions in their march over the Kokoda Track to relieve the hard-pressed 39<sup>th</sup> and 53<sup>rd</sup> Militia Battalions who were fighting a desperate rear-guard action against the Japanese at Isuravia. Between them these three reporters filed some of the finest despatches of the Second World War.

Nowadays we tend to concentrate on *Kokoda Front Line*, the visual despatch if you like. People still read White's *Green Armour* and fragments of Wilmot's broadcasts are trotted out every Anzac Day. But in September 1942 White's articles were all over the Australian papers, Wilmot was broadcasting his despatches on the ABC and publishing in the ABC Weekly, while Cinesound's *Kokoda Front Line* and Movietone's *Road to Kokoda* were on screens all over Australia.

So what sort of men were Wilmot, Parer and White, and how did they go about finding their stories?

Damien Parer was a filmmaker. Before the war he'd been part of the floating crew Charles Chauvel used for films like *Uncivilised*, *Heritage* and *40,000 Horsemen*. Parer had also worked as a studio photographer with Max Dupain and his first wife, Olive Cotton. Max remembered Parer writing on a blackboard in their workroom John Grierson's dictum: "Documentary is the creative treatment of actuality." The outbreak of war found Parer working for the Film Division of the Department of the Interior, soon to be transferred to the Department of Information, the body responsible for propaganda and censorship. With some "fast talking", Parer persuaded his bosses to let him accompany 6<sup>th</sup> Division AIF to the Middle East. There he functioned as a "one-man-band", covering the Division's training until

joined, first by stills photographer George Silk, and later Frank Hurley, Ron Williams and Alan Anderson. It was here Parer made his reputation, covering bombing raids, action in Syria and Greece and naval engagements; and it was here, too, that he met Chester Wilmot.

Wilmot was a much more sophisticated man than Damien Parer with his uncomplicated Catholic piety and enthusiasm for film and what it could achieve. Chester was a graduate of Melbourne University, had worked briefly as a lawyer and had been a formidable debater. Argumentative, dogmatic but never personal, Wilmot was exactly the kind of tough, competent professional Parer was always drawn to. In the Middle East Wilmot had won a reputation for broadcasts explaining the underlying strategy of the battles they were reporting. Parer would use Wilmot's insights in his decisions about what he should film.

Osmar White made a fascinating contrast to the exuberant Parer and the incisive, argumentative Wilmot. Slim, lantern-jawed, Osmar's years knocking around what was then known as the Far East as freelance writer and journalist had given him an encyclopaedic knowledge of tropical conditions. In a letter to his wife, Chester has given us a delightful pen portrait of his two colleagues:

Damien's ... a super bloke and we get on wonderfully together. He's quite an irrepressible chap — full of enthusiasm about everything he does and he lives only for his camera. He's always grubby and looks wild and woolly but he couldn't say an unkind thing about anyone. Os (Osmar) is just the opposite. He's as quiet as Damien is noisy, as careful as Damien is careless, as cool as Damien is hot-headed. He knows New Guinea well and is an expert at looking after himself in the wilds. He writes superb stuff, too good for any daily paper.... Damien and I were together so often overseas and it's grand to be teaming up again.

Before Parer and Wilmot arrived in New Guinea, White had been the prime mover in what was virtually a strike by the war correspondents against the conditions under which they had to report the war. White, George Johnston of the Melbourne *Argus*, Hugh Lennard of the ABC, among others, had simply withdrawn from Port Moresby. "If the Japanese land in Port Moresby," White wrote in the report he submitted to Army Public Relations, "any message will be worthless as factual reports." None of the censors, White insisted, had clear guidelines. American pilots could be named in stories of air action while Australian flyers had to remain anonymous. Worse still, blanket bans applied in New Guinea were violated down south. "When I first arrived in Port Moresby, Air Force Intelligence strongly impressed upon me that no reference should be made to Moresby as an operational base for aerial attacks on the Japanese in New Britain... Within a week of my arrival Moresby was referred to as an operational base in a broadcast authorised by the Minister for Air..." On another occasion, White stated "The personal story of Squadron Leader John

Jackson<sup>1</sup>, CO of 75 Squadron, one of the most moving and heroic personal stories to come out of the Pacific war, was forbidden Moresby correspondents ... yet a garbled version of this story was released in Townsville.”

This confusion came about as a result of General MacArthur's attempt to control the flow of news (a situation that was later to cause the Australian Government to get Parer's friend Ron Williams, and later White himself, to report confidentially on the accuracy of the American communiqués). Nevertheless White's report was well received and Errol Knox, Head of Army Public Relations, promised that they would be setting up a new system that would deal with most of White's and the others' complaints. Inevitably censorship remained a problem for the reporters but White had succeeded in creating a situation in which his own, Wilmot's and Parer's great reporting of the Kokoda battles became possible.

In a sense they were all insiders. No-one wanted to endanger the lives of Australian troops. What all of them resented were censors preventing them getting stories that aided the war effort. Undoubtedly Damien Parer's *Kokoda Front Line* had the most immediate impact. It begins with an introduction by the gaunt, intense Parer himself:

Eight days ago I was with our advance troops in the jungle facing the Japs at Kokoda. It's an uncanny sort of war, you never see a Jap even if he's only twenty yards away; they're complete masters of camouflage and deception. I should say about 40% of our boys wounded in these engagements haven't seen a Japanese soldier, a live one anyway. Don't under-estimate the Jap, he's a highly trained soldier, well-disciplined and brave, and although he's had some success up to the present, he's now got up against him some of the finest and toughest troops in the world — troops with a spirit among them that makes you intensely proud to be an Australian. I saw militiamen over there fighting under extremely difficult conditions alongside the AIF and they acquitted themselves magnificently. When I returned to Moresby I was full of beans. It was the spirit of the troops and the knowledge that General Rowell was on the job and now we had a really fine command. But when I came back to the mainland, what a difference. I heard girls talking about dances, men complaining about the tobacco they didn't get. Up the front they were smoking tea some of the time. There seems to be an air of unreality, as though the war were a million miles away. It isn't. It's just outside our door now. I've seen the war and I know what your husbands, sweethearts and brothers are going through. If only everybody in Australia could realise this country is in peril, that the Japanese are a well-equipped and dangerous enemy, we might forget about the trivial things and go ahead with the job of licking them.

The footage that follows is not in the order in which it was photographed by Parer on the Kokoda Track. Instead, producer Ken G. Hall and his editor Terry Banks cut it so it became a series of impressions of conditions on the trail. The commentary, based on Parer's notes, emphasises the problems of supply, the need for jungle-green uniforms, the churning mud of the Track itself and of course the

crucial role of the native bearers. Parer had noted that this was one of the first times a major force was to be supplied by air so he took a series of shots of the planes dropping the supplies at Myola that finally enabled 21<sup>st</sup> Brigade to advance to Isuravia.

The newsreel had an enormous impact in September 1942. Overseas stories in the newsreels usually appeared well after they had been covered on radio or in the papers. This time the newsreels had a scoop. *Kokoda Front Line* reached the screen at the same time as White and Wilmot's despatches appeared in the papers and on radio.

But for Parer's agenda we need to examine Wilmot and White's despatches. Together with Parer they accompanied 21<sup>st</sup> Brigade as far as Eora Creek. This journey is covered brilliantly by Osmar White in *Green Armour*, the book he wrote the following year, which I used extensively in *War Cameraman*; but the best, concise account is by Wilmot in a skilful piece of writing in which he uses his own and the others' experiences to illuminate the problems of the troops:

(The Track) was so narrow that you had to stand aside to let another man pass ... so slippery that you had to sling your rifle and leave your hands free to grab the nearest vine or branch as your feet slid from under you ... so steep that in some places you could scale the mountain face only by using both hands and both feet ... so muddy that at times you sloshed through a quagmire more than ankle-deep and felt the cloying mud suck your feet back at every step.

That was the track they were fighting for down there. Bad as it was, it was the best way through the 7,000 feet dip in the range that has been called The Gap ... it was by this track that Damien Parer, the official photographer, Osmar White and I trekked across the range.

This strange war path passes through an almost unknown world of mountain, river, forest and jungle. Before the war not twenty white men had tried to traverse it, and they'd got through only with a train of native carriers. But when the men of the AIF marched across the range they had no native carriers. They carried nearly 60 lbs a man and climbed an average of 2,500 feet a day to get across the sawtooth ridges of the Owen Stanleys. They walked with their webbing packed full of ammunition and in their haversacks they carried five days' bully beef and biscuits and a minimum of personal gear. Beside the shorts and shirt they wore, all they had was a pair of slacks, a sweater and a change of socks and underpants.

To save weight they'd taken only a third of a towel per man, one razor per three and one mess tin per two.

Every ounce saved was important and so they didn't even take blankets or greatcoats and they slept as best they could in rough bamboo shelters with only a groundsheet to keep out the mountain cold.

Our party followed a day behind them.

In his notes, Damien Parer put it even more concisely. "This is a war of walking and hill climbing. No field guns, no petrol. If a stretcher case wants anything, a drink, a shit, the natives take care of it."

After they reached Eora Creek, Parer stayed to film while Wilmot and White made their way up to Brigade headquarters. Wilmot later told his ABC listeners:

... Now and then we passed a stretcher case. The stretchers are only two saplings with a blanket strung between them and sewn up with lawyer vine. It's hard enough to keep your feet with only a pack and a rifle on your back. It's a miracle how they carry those stretchers. But they get through, even though it takes eight men all day to move one stretcher back two or three miles. But the troops up forward are holding on, giving them time to get all the wounded out. They put one stretcher down by the track for a moment to give the fellow a rest from the jolting. He's got a bedraggled, half-damp fag in his mouth and he asks for a match. Mine are damp, they've been damp all the week — but Ossie has some waxies he's carefully preserved in an oilskin tobacco pouch. We give him a light, roll another cigarette for him and he says — "Thanks mate, a smoke helps a lot. I'll be okay now." They lift him gently but he winces as the slow, agonising jolting begins again.

Here now is White's description of the same scene. It was headed *Two Weaving Crescents of Killers*:

Gradually the picture of what is happening sorts itself out. All through these hills are two weaving crescents of men seeking out another to kill — blind, trying to achieve invisibility, silence of movement.

Sometimes forces come on one another and open fire at ten or twenty yards range or travel parallel below a knife-edge on either side of it, tossing grenades at one another. Uncanny.

The ting of a twig on a steel helmet, one uncautious movement on the skirts of a clearing, may bring a searching spray of fire from some hidden spot. Cold feet. It's hard not to crouch anywhere — there, or there, or there, a machine gun might suddenly open up.

Man with a bullet through his neck says to be careful at the creek crossing. The Japs have a gun on the other side doing it up every now and then.

Dark coming on. Creek and waterfall. Met Major — (Cameron) coming out. Calm, pale with exhaustion, with a bright aware look in his eyes.

Up the hillside behind me is a long procession of carriers and stretchers. The MGs are still going, you can see the treetops flutter ...

The Major asks where we're going. We tell him. "Well you can't go. The Japs have just done it up. They're coming round behind our fellows, swarms of them. There's no good you can do. You'll only be in the way." The private puts it even better. "Better scram. Little —s are all over the place, they love mist and rain."

I was grateful for the blanket of dark. Walking wounded. Wounded walking. There's a difference. They're going out to prepare the new positions. Stretchers, each with bearers juggling them up vertical banks as slippery as ice, edging them inch by inch over long crossings with rapids twenty feet below, all in the pitch dark.

A line of men, whole and wounded, form up behind me, snail's pace. Faces stare up from beds in the bush. "Going to — ?" "Yes." "Tell them to send a lantern down and a blanket, will you?" Never a call for a stretcher. Never.

Not once. Mortars still going behind, rain is falling gently, steadily. There can be no more fortitude than I saw on that Track.

Fortitude is not a thing to pity or be sad over. I wish by some magic words I could make all the mothers, the sweethearts – even the shirkers and the place-seekers and cowards at home, feel what I feel so passionately now. That's what men suffer in their minds and bodies for a good cause. Not suffering to be pitied or wept over. It's a suffering for which to be grateful and proud with a calm heart.

All three men were acutely aware of the foul-ups by Land Forces Headquarters and the Australian Commander-in-Chief, Sir Thomas Blamey, not to mention the American Air Commander, General Whitehead. Here is part of Wilmot's censored despatch in which he denounces some of the mistakes and errors of the campaign. He began the script with a description of his thoughts as he looked down on the Track:

... Campaigns are often lost by little things. Our troops in the mountains were vitally dependent on air supplies. Ten days before the Japanese made their attack they raided Port Moresby. They found the aerodrome packed with transports and bombers lined up wingtip-to-wingtip on the runway...A perfect concentrated target.<sup>2</sup> They didn't miss. On the road to the front our reinforcements were held up four days waiting for supplies to come through. In those four days the Japanese gained the initiative and launched their attack. But for that raid ... but for our failure to disperse our aircraft on the ground, our fresh troops would have been in the front in time. They would have been in position to stop the Japanese, they might even have been able to seize the initiative from them. In Greece and in Malaya we lost more planes on the ground than we did in the air, because of inadequate dispersion. But we still had to have the bitter lesson of Moresby before we took real steps to see that it didn't happen again. But by this time the damage had been done ... a chance had been lost ... and because of this I felt bitter as I stood on that spur of the Owen Stanley Range looking down on the treetops in the valley that leads to Kokoda ... I was bitter for I knew that somewhere under those treetops there were unnecessary Australian graves.

This was too much for the censors in 1942. The passage is scored out in Wilmot's copy. Later they banned the entire despatch, undoubtedly on the grounds that it might cause the public to lose confidence in its leaders, in fact in the conduct of the campaign taking place only a few miles from the Australian coast, not to mention their American allies.

It was probably the reporters who first alerted the Australian Commander, General Rowell, to the Americans' failure to disperse their aircraft. All three had volunteered to go up as unloaders for the aerial dropping of supplies and there is a note in Parer's papers about the planes being parked wingtip-to-wingtip and all three of the reporters were at the Seven Mile Aerodrome just after the Japanese attack. Parer filmed the scene. The footage was suppressed at the time but used by Wilmot two years later in the compilation film *Sons of the*

*Anzacs*. However, Parer's pan from the lined up planes to the burning crates has never been shown publicly until I found it about a year ago.

Wilmot was right about the delay causing unnecessary casualties; but it would still have been impossible for Brigadier Potts' forces of roughly four battalions to have halted the Japanese, even if they had reached Isuravia four days earlier. The Australians had been told they were up against 2,300 of the enemy. In fact they were trying to stop a division of 10,000 combat troops with an under-strength single brigade. All of which, to be fair, Wilmot reported later, although along with the Australian High Command, he still under-estimated the Japanese at 6,000 men. (Intelligence gathering in jungle warfare is notoriously unreliable.)

Another issue the correspondents took up was the need for jungle green uniforms. The commentary in *Kokoda Front Line* based on Parer's notes makes the point by emphasising the Japanese skill at camouflage and concealment. Parer tried, on black and white film, to make the point that khaki caught the light and stood out against the green. I persuaded Chris Masters and Jacqueline Hole to ask their cameraman for *The Men Who Saved Australia*, the late Brett Joyce, to repeat one of Parer's shots in colour. Joyce's sequence shows flicks of light brown against the dark green foliage, a gift to any Japanese sniper.

Wilmot probably said it best: "The most important thing is that the men should be given complete uniform and equipment that will merge into the green background of the jungle and then they must be made camouflage conscious." When White made virtually the same point in one of his articles, the Melbourne *Sun* made it the subject of a full editorial.

Sir Thomas Blamey, however, remained obdurate. Wilmot wondered whether having sent the men in without the proper uniforms in the first place, Blamey was afraid to admit that he'd made a mistake. In any case there was a spectacular confrontation between the correspondent and the General when Wilmot asked Blamey "whether he thought green uniforms were necessary". The General replied they were not, "that they had been designed in India as the ideal camouflage for the jungle and that he had no evidence that this jungle was different from that in India". Wilmot replied that he could provide several thousand witnesses who had fought in the country who thought otherwise. Later Wilmot discovered Blamey had told the War Council that green uniforms were unnecessary, even though by then most units were changing over.

When the Americans were about to embark for New Guinea, General Eickelburger invited Parer and Osmar White to headquarters where they screened *Kokoda Front Line* for him. On the two correspondents' advice, Eickelburger ordered the American uniforms to be dyed mottled green.

But how was it that the correspondents were right and the army hierarchy wrong? First of all, they did ask questions of everyone, from General Rowell down to the lowliest private. As well, the field commander Arnold Potts was well known to Wilmot as was Rowell himself. We can be pretty sure that just about everything the broadcaster wrote in his despatches, and later in a confidential report for Rowell, came from Potts and the other soldiers Wilmot, White and Parer questioned.

Another important influence was Parer and White's experiences a few months earlier with the 2/5 Independent Company commandos who had been operating outside Salamaua. There the correspondents were extensively briefed on the need for proper camouflage. The commandos had been trying to dye their uniforms at least a little darker in coffee grounds, which had the side effect of making the cloth start to disintegrate.

White and Parer had become convinced that guerrilla or commando tactics were the key to jungle fighting, a view Wilmot shared. The idea was that you don't cling to the track as so many of the inexperienced troops did during the Kokoda fighting, you treated the jungle as a pathway, not a barrier, and of course light equipment such as the Japanese used had to be provided. These ideas came from the men in the field but the correspondents discovered they were not being disseminated.

Some of the footage Parer shot with the commandos is actually in *Kokoda Front Line*. They were included over Parer's protests by Cinesound's Ken G. Hall and his editor, Terry Banks, because there was no action in Parer's Kokoda film. These sequences include the exploding hut and just about all the action scenes. They are also entirely re-enacted because, as Parer put it, "I arrived too late for the actual stoush". The cameraman didn't direct anyone to do anything. Rather, he asked the commandos to describe the sort of actions they had been involved in, then let them devise the sequences themselves. The exploding hut, for example, was based on an incident during the Salamaua raid, only the dwelling was a bungalow, not a native hut. (I might add that without any shame whatsoever, Hall and Banks cut this same material into another newsreel, *War on the Roof of New Guinea*, which finally portrayed the commando tactics as Parer originally intended.)

The correspondents were among the first to recognise the vital contribution of the 39<sup>th</sup> Militia Battalion – the first Australian soldiers to encounter the Japanese after they'd landed near Gona. Parer's haunting images of the parade at Menari when they were addressed by their Commander, Lt. Col. Ralph Honner, just before they were relieved, are justly famous. (Honner, by the way, was well known to the cameraman. Parer's first combat photography was of Honner leading

his company from the 2/11 Battalion during the attack on the Derna airfield in the Western Desert.)

It was not until Chris Masters' *Four Corners* documentary, *The Men Who Saved Australia*, that we found out exactly what Honner was saying. Both the military historian, Peter Brune, and I had asked Honner about his speech and he told us he'd passed on a message from Potts commending the Battalion. True enough, but he omitted to add this important allusion to the 53<sup>rd</sup> Battalion on the right flank, told to Chris Masters by Jack Sim of the 39<sup>th</sup> Battalion:

I can't remember his exact words; I can't quote him verbatim, but I'll always remember what he meant and what he implied when he said: 'You're all Australians and some things you've just been through you must forget. Some of the men that were with you, you feel have let you down. But they didn't. Given different circumstances they'd be just the same as you. The fact that their leaders may have failed them, and yours didn't, doesn't mean they're any worse than you are.'

The 53<sup>rd</sup> had broken. Poorly trained and led, they were among the most tragic victims of the Kokoda battles, all of which was fully recognised by the correspondents.

Wilmot too covered the 39<sup>th</sup>. He even made a wisecrack about their colour patch. Chokkos or Chocolate Soldiers was the nickname for the militia. Wilmot described the 39<sup>th</sup> colour patch as chocolate over red. This was later cut, either by Wilmot himself or maybe the censor. Still, he covered their achievements in two key broadcasts. One was an interview with an important officer, Noel Symington, the other was a description of their re-taking of Kokoda in the first weeks of the campaign. It is also clearly the 39<sup>th</sup> Parer is describing in the newsreel when he talks about militia battalions acquitting themselves as well as the AIF. Osmar White in *Green Armour* and in his despatches includes unforgettable portraits of the 39<sup>th</sup>'s walking wounded or, as he put it, wounded walking, coming back down the Track.

Inevitably, before long the correspondents became involved in military politics. When they returned to Port Moresby the town was full of rumours that Rowell was to be replaced. Both Parer and Wilmot believed this would be a disaster, especially if Blamey tried to exercise field command in New Guinea. It is clear Parer and Wilmot were fully aware of the reports circulating about the Commander in Chief's erratic behaviour during the retreat in Greece. They were also acutely aware of the disparagement of the AIF battalions performance in some of the Australian papers. Correspondents like George Johnston, based at MacArthur's headquarters, decried the failure of the Australians to "hold the Gap" in the Owen Stanleys. This was corrected by Wilmot in a broadcast when he explained that the so-called "Gap" was actually between two mountains, not a fortified position. These stories by George Johnston and others reflected the even more scathing attacks on the Australian performance expressed privately by General MacArthur.

According to Hank Nelson, Curtin never received from Blamey a clear, unequivocal briefing about the Kokoda battles. Consequently the only straightforward military advice Curtin received on the matter was from MacArthur. Yet if anyone should have been deferring to anyone, it was the Americans to the Australians. MacArthur's conduct of operations in the Philippines had been abysmal while the AIF had scored a string of victories in the Western Desert. Yet Blamey would only go so far in supporting his own men to Curtin, especially when many of their alleged "failings" were really his own responsibility.

We know Wilmot despised both MacArthur and Blamey. Parer left Osmar White with the impression that "Blamey was not a good thing, something about him being drunk all the time during the retreat in Greece". In later years White was to describe MacArthur's behaviour at this time as criminal. Parer was even blunter about the American Commander. In a note I found in his papers, MacArthur was referred to as "an inflated balloon of bullshit". (This was actually fair comment in the light of MacArthur's hare-brained schemes to mount an amphibious invasion of Rabaul.) So when Parer went south with his film, he gave a series of interviews praising Rowell and the Australian commandos. He also included a tribute to Rowell in his opening narration for *Kokoda Front Line*.

Meanwhile Blamey made two visits to New Guinea. After one he defended the Australian performance. On the second he relieved Rowell and set about, in his own words, "re-energising the situation". At the time it was said Rowell sacked himself. Certainly he was so angry with Blamey he nearly "threw a boot at him". And he did allow his distaste for the Commander in Chief's lifestyle to affect his judgement. When asked by official historian Dudley Macarthy why he had disliked Blamey, "the great head reared back and he spat out, 'because he was debauched and I would not join him in his debaucheries'." Nevertheless Wilmot was appalled and with the support of the ABC made representations to Prime Minister Curtin. Curtin agreed with all Wilmot's criticisms of Blamey but said his, Blamey's, predictions about the Japanese plans had been so accurate that they could not afford to remove him at this time. This was, to say the least, disingenuous. Blamey and MacArthur's predictions had been based on the work of the code breakers. Moreover the two generals had undervalued evidence that the Japanese were going to attack over the Owen Stanleys.

When he returned to New Guinea, Wilmot helped Rowell draft his despatch and at Rowell's suggestion compiled his own report on the campaign. Rowell enclosed this with his despatch, noting that he wished there were men on his staff capable of producing anything as good. (In fairness to the Australian staff officers of the 1940s, Rowell's staff in New Guinea were untypically dreadful.) Wilmot's report was objective and devastating. By implication it made all the criticisms of

Land Forces Headquarters Wilmot had been forced to soft pedal in his broadcasts. Worse still from Blamey's point of view, Wilmot pointed out that most of 7<sup>th</sup> Division had been left in north Queensland when they should have been used to counter the Japanese advance. (It was reasonable to have kept the 7<sup>th</sup> Division in Queensland until June 1942 but after the battle of Midway destroyed the Japanese fleet, which meant there was no possibility of a Japanese invasion of northern Australia, leaving them there was indefensible.) This is not hindsight. As Rowell put it, "... I am on record, on the Sunday following fall of Tobruk, as saying ... 'if we were where we should be, it would be with the 7<sup>th</sup> Division in New Guinea'."

Blamey retaliated by suppressing Rowell's despatch and ordering Wilmot's report destroyed. However the report is believed to have been widely circulated amongst the Americans. Then Blamey moved against Wilmot, calling him in and summarily removing his accreditation. The ostensible reason was not Wilmot's activities on behalf of Rowell or the report, but that the reporter had continued to investigate Blamey's possible corrupt involvement in the picture contract to screen films to the troops in the Middle East after having been warned off by Blamey's solicitor. When asked if he would deny discussing this matter with anyone else, Wilmot replied no, he wouldn't. I know now that the man Wilmot discussed the contract with in confidence was actually present at the interview. It was General Herring, a fellow Melbourne Grammar old boy in whom Wilmot had confided and who had betrayed him to Blamey. Incredibly the ABC continued to support Wilmot. As Sir Charles Moses said to me when I asked him why he had backed his reporter against the Australian Commander in Chief in war time, Moses replied, "Chester was so level headed, if he said Blamey was corrupt, he was."

Wilmot's discreditation effectively ended these three great reporters' coverage of New Guinea. At the instigation of Sir Keith Murdoch, Osmar White filed a confidential report of his own but did not return to New Guinea. Parer, instead of being sent to film the Gona Buna battles, was despatched to cover a story of high adventure behind enemy lines in Timor.

So how good was White, Wilmot and Parer's reporting of the Kokoda campaign? In my view it was superb. Unable to get to the action, Parer recorded the conditions that all three men had come to believe were vital to understanding jungle tactics. Between them they created an irrefutable answer to the disparagement of the Australians by General MacArthur and condoned by Sir Thomas Blamey. Anyone who has researched the Kokoda campaign – Raymond Paull, Dudley McCarthy, Peter Brune, even me – walks in White, Wilmot's and Parer's footsteps. Still they were not perfect. Peter Brune's research for his book *Those Rugged Bloody Heroes*, reveals that the impression that all three correspondents convey of a retreat was wrong. It was rather a

fighting withdrawal – possibly the finest rear guard action in the Pacific campaign. Throughout, Potts had succeeded in keeping a viable force between the Japanese and Port Moresby until the enemy's supply line snapped and the Japanese were ordered to fall back. That the full extent of this achievement was concealed for over forty years is no fault of these three great correspondents. Throughout they strove to get it right and served their country as well as the soldiers whose stories they told with such intelligence and compassion.

## Afterword

Kokoda doesn't end with the Japanese withdrawal at Itima Ridge or the raising of the flag (the Union Jack) over Kokoda Village. After the withdrawal, at a parade at Koitkaki, Sir Thomas Blamey abused 21<sup>st</sup> Brigade as "rabbits that ran", in effect accusing them of cowardice. In the words of one observer, "He (Blamey) was lucky to get out alive". And indeed there are reports of one officer advancing on him, his hand on his revolver, before being grabbed by his mates. Peter Brune believes that Blamey's attack on 21<sup>st</sup> Brigade created in the minds of its new commanders the impression that they were poor troops. (Dare I add expendable troops?) In any case the new commanders, who included Wilmot's betrayer, General Herring, ordered a series of frontal attacks on Gona that were inadequately planned, in the wrong place and without proper forward reconnaissance. It was the Western Front all over again, only this time it was Australian commanders who were responsible for the carnage. If anything, the Buna battles were worse. All this was to impress the Americans whose own troops broke and ran in their first engagement in New Guinea.

It is doubtful if any of this disgraceful conduct of operations would have survived the scrutiny of a Chester Wilmot, an Osmar White or a Damien Parer. Wilmot did get some inkling of what was going on and broadcast warnings about frontal assaults against entrenched Japanese positions but it was to no avail. He didn't have enough hard information to take to the government.

The wider issue is still with us. Wilmot, White and Parer were right in 1942 but not every reporter is as highly principled or responsible as they were. C.E.W. Bean and Keith Murdoch's intrigues against Sir John Monash proved that. In September 1942 the real failure was Prime Minister Curtin's. He preferred to take advice from a foreign general who had just lost the Philippines, and a corrupt, morally dubious Commander in Chief, instead of a young and dedicated reporter. Indeed, as Major General Lloyd told Wilmot's father, the real reason for Chester's discreditation was the report – "the truth of it". Blamey was afraid the politicians would get hold of it and use it to dictate Army policy. Well, perhaps they should have because the real victims of Blamey and the Government's failures were the troops in more "unnecessary Australian graves" outside Gona and Buna.

There has been a lot of confusion about the picture contract used by Sir Thomas Blamey as a pretext for discrediting Chester Wilmot. The facts as I discovered them are as follows: Wilmot had been investigating rumours that substantial sums had been going into Blamey's account from Albert Shafto, the man granted the contract to run films for troops in the Middle East. The broadcaster's attention had been drawn to the story by reports from soldiers complaining about being charged to see out of date films in poor prints. Blamey got wind of Wilmot's inquiries and arranged for his solicitor to warn the correspondent off. Wilmot didn't know that the Australian distributors had provided free of charge mint copies of all their new releases for the troops in the Middle East. Given this, the inference is obvious. Blamey had a supply of free prints, and he had supplied them to Shafto who in return paid off Blamey.

Much of the foregoing is cited from my *War Cameraman* by David Horner in his biography of Blamey (Allen & Unwin, 1998), only he argues that the distributors' provision of mint prints to the Army means there was nothing to Wilmot's suspicions. This is really disingenuous. If battered prints of out of date features were being shown to the troops instead of new prints of current releases provided by the Australian distributors, then what had happened to the mint prints? The most likely explanation was that the troops only got to see the films provided by the Australian distributors, if at all, after Shafto had run them in his chain of cinemas in the Middle East. If Wilmot had known this in September/October 1942, Australian military history might have been different. All he would have to have done was raise awkward questions about the "missing" prints. Moreover, there is reason to believe Wilmot did find out later. In Kenneth Slessor's diary he records Wilmot coming to him and promising a story proving Blamey was corrupt if the Australian Commander prevented him leaving Australia to take up an offer from the BBC. Wilmot was allowed to go and the material never arrived.

My source for the story about the films is Ken G. Hall, the head of Cinesound and producer of *Kokoda Front Line*. Hall was close to Parer and Parer was, of course, a mate of Wilmot. It seems likely that someone, possibly Damien, tipped off Wilmot about the distributors' generosity. There is no smoking gun or final piece of paper but there is a lot of circumstantial evidence.

## Endnotes

---

- 1 A sort of autobiography of John Jackson, based on his letters home, has just been released.
- 2 The attack took place August 17. Two transports were lost, five seriously damaged.



Photo – David Karonidis

*Clare Martin*

Clare Martin took over as Chief Minister of the Northern Territory in August 2001 – the first Labor leader to take power in the Territory’s entire 26 years of self-government. Clare Martin is the first woman Chief Minister in the NT in what has been a very rough and tough political environment. On a visit to Sydney, Clare Martin spoke for The Sydney Institute on Monday 29 April 2002 and gave her audience a rare glimpse of Territory politics.

# NORTHERN GATEWAY

– *NT FINDS THE FUTURE*

**Clare Martin**

I'm very pleased to be here to address the Sydney Institute. Gerard and Anne Henderson have had great success with this organisation, over the last 13 years, building it into a unique Ideas Exchange for Sydney and for the rest of the country. Your speakers reflect the Hendersons' wide interests: artists, writers, diplomats, scientists, philosophers, architects, lawyers, journalists and even humble politicians have spoken to Sydney Institute audiences.

It's rare these days to find a speakers' forum that welcomes such diversity, and we should value and nurture it. Unlike so many other organisations' speakers' lists the Institute seems to have no problem attracting good women! And as the Northern Territory's first woman Chief Minister, I'm pleased to be able to contribute to the equality celebrated by this Institute.

The Institute is also a forum for *international* ideas, welcoming outside visitors and speakers. And that contribution to broadening our discourse is a rare and pleasant thing to find during this time when our national political debate appears so inward-looking.

We Territorians sometimes get treated like foreigners when we come to Sydney. People seem to believe the Territory is some sort of giant theme park, and that we are all Crocodile Dundees. In fact the Territory is a remarkably multicultural and outward-looking place, with close ties to Asia. It is more than 3000 kilometres from Darwin to Sydney – Jakarta is much closer. A trip to K.L. and Singapore takes about the same time as to the east coast. Hong Kong, Manila, Taipei are not much further.

Darwin itself is an interesting mixture of peoples. There is a strong Chinese community, entrenched in the business world. The Greeks are a big influence in the town. Aborigines from the local Larrakia play a big role in the city. Vietnamese, Thais, Indians, Malays, are strongly represented.

If any of you have visited recently you will know the Territory as an exciting and progressive place, with people from diverse

backgrounds and cultures sharing one of the world's most beautiful environments. Just take a stroll through the Mindil Beach markets as I did last week, with the sun setting over the harbour, and food and handicrafts from all over the world on display, and you feel that this is what Australia should be.

Our vision for the Territory is to build upon what we have already achieved, and to expand into a real northern capital for Australia. Already we have set about major reforms across all policy portfolios, and established new accountability and transparency rules for Government. Among our first acts, we apologised to the stolen generations, and repealed mandatory sentencing for property crime. But to make the major changes we need in the Territory to deliver fair and equitable health, education and other services to all our communities, we need a much stronger and more independent economic base.

And this is what I'm here to talk to you about tonight.

My government took office last August – the first Labor government in the history of the Northern Territory. We were armed with a fully-costed plan for reform, Access Economics had gone through it and confirmed that it was achievable. Our euphoria was short lived. Almost the first public servant to walk through my door informed me that the expected Budget deficit of \$12 million was actually more than nine times that size. It really was a scandalous indictment of our predecessors' financial management. And it was a big shock to us and a setback to our plans.

Nevertheless, we have re-grouped, and presented a mini-budget to get our finances back into balance over the next three years. Our prospects are looking good. Forecasters Access Economics and BIS Shrapnel, expect vigorous growth across NT business and industry in the next five to 15 years. We are now starting to get the message across to others that it is an exciting place for investors, on the verge of substantial development as we try to expand our resources and energy sector, rapidly improve our transport infrastructure, and build our knowledge industries and services.

The Territory has always seen its future in the market places of Asia, and improvements should be seen with the better economic growth of neighbours to our north. This is good. But what we really need is a quantum shift in our fortunes.

We need to think about northern Australia in a different way. It is an important part of any vision for Australia, any nation-building vision, that the north should be strengthened, and planners as far back as John Curtin (and there are probably even earlier ones) have thought about ways to do this.

Kim Beazley did a lot for the Territory with his far-sighted defence policies of the 1980s – sending far more of Australia's forces to

the north. We have the railway. I'm sure few of you thought the Alice to Darwin rail link would ever take place. But the track-laying is well underway. We have a new port facility under construction. When the railway is complete importers and exporters will find a smooth operation for their goods. We're talking to the South Australians regularly on exports of fresh food and other products through this central trade corridor to Asian markets.

We are Australia's Gateway to Asia. And we have a rare opportunity now to really strengthen the Top End, to provide an economic base for expansion. We have the opportunity to get away from our reliance on the Commonwealth to whom we currently look for about 80 per cent of our revenues.

Most of our plans for the future hinge on bringing the vast gas resources of the Timor Sea onshore for industrial expansion of the Territory, and to feed into the national energy grid to the south and east. Oil and gas are not Sydney's favourite issues as I well know as I try to find airtime when I want to talk on these subjects! Nevertheless these are the major issues we are grappling with at the moment. And I want to convince you that they are very important for you here in Sydney as well.

It is not too long a bow to draw to say that Sydney's future petrol prices may be tied to the ability of the Territory to get its gas resource onshore. And I'll tell you why.

The peak energy producers' conference in Adelaide last week heard from senior executives that Australia was facing higher petrol prices as oil supplies dried up around this country. Australia's oil self-sufficiency is expected to drop from its current levels of more than 80 per cent of national demand to 40 per cent within ten years. "Find more oil, use more gas" was the theme of the conference, and a very important theme from the Territory's point of view.

Natural gas is cleaner and greener and more environmentally friendly than oil as a fuel for industry. It would be far better for Australia to develop its as yet untapped gas resources than to start importing vast quantities of oil from foreign countries. It would be better from our balance of trade point of view, and it would be better from a national security point of view.

So let me paint you a picture of how the Territory comes into this.

As I've said, to the north of the Territory lies one of Australia's most important gas provinces, all up containing 21 trillion cubic feet of natural gas. Two of the biggest areas in this Timor Sea gas province are names possibly familiar to many of you even those not in the resources game: Bayu-Undan and Greater Sunrise. We are well advanced with plans for the Bayu-Undan field: the major developer Phillips Petroleum

has begun the first phase of this project. The Bayu-Undan field is shared between East Timor and Australia.

We are vitally interested in Bayu-Undan because, when its second stage gets going, its gas will be piped all the way to Wickham Point, near Darwin to a \$3 billion Liquefied Natural Gas plant – Australia’s second only LNG plant. Many hundreds of jobs for Territory workers will be created over the lifetime of the project as gas is liquefied and shrunk into containers. But essentially, all of the Bayu-Undan field will be exported to Tokyo. It will not be available to service Australia’s growing energy needs.

There have been many ups and downs in the Bayu-Undan story, and the project is still held up as the final royalty and tax arrangements are thrashed out before East Timor’s independence on 20 May. But we are hopeful of this major development taking place in the near future – something that will be of great benefit to the Territory in terms of revenue, spin-off business for our entrepreneurs, and jobs for our people.

Greater Sunrise, a gasfield nearly three times bigger than Bayu-Undan, is a different proposition, and I predict you are going to be hearing a lot more about this over the coming weeks and months. Sunrise is also shared between East Timor and Australia.

The proposed Sunrise developers are: the giant multinational Shell, Woodside, the Australian operator of the field, and Phillips (the Bayu-Undan operator). A lesser stake is held by Osaka Gas. The giant Sunrise development has been talked of for years as a major contributor to Australia’s energy needs. There have been many proposals for its development. Most have included Australia’s domestic gas needs as an important element and have included a pipeline to Darwin as the first step in piping the energy into the national gas grid, as well as providing the fuel for several major industries in the Northern Territory.

This is no longer the case.

Some people think my becoming Chief Minister was the biggest shock received in the Territory in the middle of last year. But I think a bigger shock may have been the news during the election campaign that Shell and Woodside had decided not to bring the Sunrise gas onshore. The developers of Sunrise announced that this major Australian resource would now be extracted for conversion into LNG onsite in the Timor Sea. This would be done on a floating barge parked in the middle of the ocean, and tankers would take the resource away to markets in the US.

The floating barge would be built in Japan or Korea. There would be minimal jobs for Territorians, and no chance of this Australian resource being piped into Australia’s energy grid or used for domestic gas customers. This new proposal is now being presented as a “done deal” by two of the Sunrise developers, Woodside and Shell.

This is the same company that only a year ago was presenting itself around Australia as a true blue Aussie enterprise that must remain in Australian hands in the national interest. You will recall that so persuasive was this argument that the Howard Government – that prides itself on its non-interventionist credentials – actually intervened to stop Woodside falling into Shell's hands. We now have Woodside, the very same company, in boardrooms around Australia arguing *against* our view that this giant Australian gas resource should come onshore to Australia in the national interest.

I have made plain to Woodside my intense disappointment at its role in this proposal. The Territory commissioned a report from ACIL Consulting, who worked in parallel with the Centre for International Economics (CIE) in modelling the effect of losing the Sunrise gasfield. ACIL predicts that without Sunrise gas onshore, South Australia and the east coast will not have enough gas from about 2008 to meet a moderate increase in demand for commercial and industrial use.

By contrast, if Sunrise were fed into the national grid, there would be certainty of supply, increased competition, and reduced gas prices particularly for Queensland, South Australia and the Northern Territory. Even NSW customers would receive about a 3 per cent cut in gas prices. It is estimated the onshore proposal and its spin-offs would generate 4,400 more full time jobs around the country than the floating LNG option.

Bringing Sunrise gas onshore would create \$15 billion in additional wealth for the nation over the life of the project (over and above the floating LNG proposal). It would also provide additional government revenue of \$110 million – most of which would go to the Commonwealth. Research by the Centre for International Economics shows Sunrise gas onshore would increase national Gross Domestic Product by \$4 billion every year for the life of the project and Territory's Gross State Product by 46 per cent.

There are also environmental factors to consider. Gas onshore would reduce greenhouse gas emissions by allowing fuel oil and black coal fired plants to move to gas, a cleaner fuel source.

There are several projects that could go ahead in the Territory if the Sunrise gas came onshore. These include a \$3.6 billion aluminium smelter and power station, expansion of MIM's zinc plant at McArthur River, the Compass Resources and Mt Grace metals projects, a pipeline from Mataranka to Gove to allow a \$1.2 billion expansion of Alcan's alumina plant, and the proposed pipeline linking Sunrise gas to the national gas grid at Moomba in South Australia. This would mean that Darwin would get a significant industrial base and we would help supply the energy needs in the southern part of Australia. And after all, the resources of the Timor Sea belong to the Australian and East Timorese people.

It is widely known that Woodside and Shell have told the federal government and anyone else who will listen that it would cost them an extra \$2 billion to bring the gas onshore – money they are not prepared to pay.

We question this figure – last year they said it was \$500 million, then it was \$1 billion. Now it's supposed to be \$2 billion. We believe that they need to review their decision in light of information provided to them by Phillips Petroleum, one of the joint developers of the Sunrise field. Phillips has told us, and the federal government, that a domestic gas project is commercially viable. By contrast, we know that the floating LNG plant concept has never been tried anywhere in the world. It is hard to see how the developers can have hard and fast figures on how much this will cost when it's never been tried before.

These issues are becoming important to the rest of the country as national petroleum supplies become scarcer and our energy needs more urgent. In a profound irony, a senior executive of Woodside Petroleum told a peak conference of the industry last week that there was an urgent need for more gas onshore in Australia. Woodside director of new ventures, Dr Agu Kantsler, coincidentally the chairman of the Australian Petroleum Production and Exploration Association (APPEA), on the eve of last week's APPEA annual conference said Australia was facing a rapid decline in crude oil self-sufficiency.

This could lead to massive rises in petrol prices and create a national balance of trade nightmare within just a few years, he warned. I want to quote Dr Kantsler, because I agree with him: "All governments recognise that it is in the national economic and environmental interest to create opportunities to allow for the greater use of Australia's abundant resources of natural gas." Well, how amazing that he is an executive of the very company that is threatening to take Australia's newest gasfield offshore, with practically no benefits for Australia!

We are taking out full-page advertisements in *The Australian* and the *Financial Review* tomorrow calling on Woodside shareholders to contact their company executives and to persuade them to act in the national interest over the Sunrise gas. We really believe that Woodside could change its tune if it thinks of its long-term reputation. We know it has a responsibility to shareholders. But we have a responsibility to our shareholders too, the people of the Territory.

The federal government is right now closely examining the floating LNG versus gas onshore options. The figures involved need to be vigorously tested and this is being done by Invest Australia, the federal government's investment arm. The federal government is very keen that potential gasfields are developed in order to meet future energy needs. We expect there will be elements in the next federal Budget encouraging gas exploration and production. I think the

Howard Government is responding to widespread pressure to introduce a national energy policy for Australia, and this is well overdue.

I just want to leave you with this thought.

No one should be in any doubt that we are aware there is a big gap between our vision of what the Territory could be, and the reality for a great many of our citizens, particularly those in indigenous communities. My ministerial colleague, Jack Ah Kit, in a courageous speech to our Parliament said it was hard to find a fully functioning Aboriginal community in the Territory. The problems are very deep and very difficult. There is a burning need for better education programs to encourage indigenous children to stay at school. We have former Senator Bob Collins chairing a taskforce on this subject now, but everyone knows it is a very difficult business to turn around, requiring resources that at present are hard to find.

Aboriginal health is another area of great difficulty for the government. Just take renal problems alone. Each community should have its own renal unit, because of the enormous number of people who need this treatment as they get older. But the costs are enormous, as are the nutrition and basic health programs to try to stop these problems before they arise. If the Territory could get its resources onshore there would be more revenue for us to do these things that are so badly needed. Perhaps more importantly, there would be jobs for those who at present have very little prospect of employment.

For all these reasons we need the gas onshore. We've begun a campaign to get it. And I want to enlist your help here tonight.



Photo – David Karonidis

*Susan Boyd*

Susan Boyd became Australia's High Commissioner in Fiji in July 1999, after just one year as Consul general in Hong Kong and just after the election of Fiji's first Indo-Fijian Prime Minister, Mahendra Chaudhry, who headed the mixed race Fiji Labour Party. The government of Prime Minister Chaudhry was not to last, falling in the dramatic circumstances surrounding the Speight coup in May 2000. Susan Boyd has watched Fiji, from an Australian perspective, at close range in its troubled return to democracy. On Tuesday 30 April 2002, Susan Boyd addressed The Sydney Institute and gave an update on Australia's relations with Fiji and the aftermath of its recent political turmoil.

# FIJI – SOCIAL AND

## *POLITICAL UPHEAVAL*

**Susan Boyd**

Friends were puzzled when, after just one year as Consul General in Hong Kong, I moved to be Australian High Commissioner in Fiji. To most people in Asia, and, I suspect, to most Europeans and Americans, the Pacific is nowhere, and the shift seemed an odd career move.

However, for Australia, the Pacific is very much in the centre of our policy focus and we are a major player in this region of the world. It is a region where the tectonic plates are pushing inexorably up against each other. Not only the physical plates, which produce volcanic eruptions, land shifts and tidal waves. But also the social and political plates. States made up of communities with complex and powerful traditional cultures are being pushed by the inexorable forces of modernism.

The outside world has been pressing in on the Pacific Islands for some 200 years, the pressure increasing through the twentieth and now the twenty-first century. Education, travel, paid employment, the mass media, the introduction by the colonial masters of formal, national, representative systems of government and central administration, of legal systems based on the rule of law – all these pose challenges to traditional authority and traditional economic systems. And we have been seeing the results of these clashes in increasing tensions, particularly in the Melanesian societies in Fiji, Solomon Islands, Vanuatu and PNG.

Another significant factor has been the large scale movement of people and the resultant break down in cultural homogeneity. We are seeing the result of internal migrations in Solomon Islands. In Fiji, the large scale importation of Indian indentured labourers, for Fiji's sugar industry has led to a situation where currently 43 per cent of Fiji's current population of 900,000 are non-indigenous. While some of the non-indigenous population are European or part European, are Chinese or come from other islands, the vast majority are Indo-Fijians.

Originally expected to stay only a short time, and to return to India after the expiry of their period of indenture, very many chose to

stay behind and to settle permanently in Fiji. Another significant group of migrants were the Gujarati traders and business people from India, who now dominate Fiji's business community.

It was inevitable that these immigrants should seek a political role in Fiji, and that the differences in value systems and cultures should give rise to stresses and strains.

Land is a critical issue in Fiji. Eighty per cent of land is owned by traditional, indigenous owners. Some 20 per cent passed out of traditional control and into private or state ownership through the resumption of land for the cane industry or through individual purchases by early settlers, who established copra plantations and a short lived cotton industry. Indigenous Fijians believe that their land cannot be permanently alienated – the land is them and they are the land. The word “Vanua” means both land and people, and their traditional belief and culture. Every Fijian belongs to a land-owning group, and may at any time return to that land and be supported by it. Every indigenous Fijian is a custodian of the land for future generations, just as their ancestors, who are venerated, looked after and passed on the land to them.

The immigrants, of course, possessed no land, and thus had to lease it from the traditional landowners for modern productive use. Most of the sugar cane land is native owned, most of the land where tourism resorts have been developed, the site of the hydroelectricity project, the land on which factories and shops are located. So also are the sites of schools and places of worship. The landless immigrants, having no sustaining resource of land ownership to fall back on, have had, perforce, to embrace education, entrepreneurial, industrial and mercantile skill development, and productive farming, in order to survive. The contrasting cultural and value systems of each of the two major population groups in Fiji is a source of tension and a contributing factor to the interesting mix of challenges which faces contemporary Fiji.

I arrived in Fiji to take up my new post in July 1999, just after the historic election of Fiji's first Indo-Fijian Prime Minister, Mahendra Chaudhry, who headed the mixed race Fiji Labour Party. The 1997 Constitution, under which the election was held, was a highly innovative document, based on the premise of cooperative power sharing between the major groups, rather than on the combative Westminster model. And yet, elements of the Westminster model were there – there is a Prime Minister and a Leader of the Opposition. Ministerial authority is assumed over a public service, which is shaped after the British model, bequeathed by the former British colonial administration. There is an independent judiciary. Overarching this, is an institution, derived from Fiji's traditional power structure, the Great Council of Chiefs. This non-elected body has a limited constitutional

role, but its power can be crucial, as was proved when, on 19 May 2000, a group of indigenous Fijians, with George Speight as its front man, took Mahendra Chaudhry and his ministers, both indigenous and Indo Fijian, hostage, in the name of the indigenous cause.

The full and true analysis of what really caused the coup, and who was really behind it has yet to be written, but among the elements were certainly fear among some indigenous Fijians that their rights, interests and land were in danger from the Indo-fijians. Some in the armed forces shared those fears. George Speight has recently been described in the *Fiji Sun* as “a bald headed freak, sweet talker, fly-by-night imposter of the indigenous cause, and bankrupt businessman” (*Fiji Sun*, 5 April 2002). It is notable that things in Fiji have now progressed to the point where people feel secure enough to speak in these forthright terms, rather than hedging their comments cautiously. Some say that Speight’s involvement in the coup, apparently a last-minute draft, stemmed from his resentment of Chaudhry who had removed him from the highly lucrative post of Chairman of Fiji Hardwoods Corporation, apparently convinced that Speight had been “bought” by one of the two contenders for the right to develop Fiji’s mahogany resources. Fiji possesses the largest resources of plantation mahogany in the world, a resource which, if developed properly, will sustainably yield Fiji billions of dollars and the basis for a whole new industry.

There are also allegations of others whose corrupt and lucrative business connections and activities were being interrupted by Chaudhry and who therefore had plenty of incentive to want to see him removed. Chaudhry was a man in a hurry – he wanted to settle Fiji’s ills, redistribute power so as to benefit the economic have-nots and institute major reforms. This was deeply unsettling for many.

In this scenario, the authority of the traditional chiefs seemed no longer to hold much sway. George Speight’s supporters, who swarmed in their thousands into Parliament House to act as a human shield, were predominantly the urban youth and their sympathisers from the villages in George Speight’s highland home area. Educated youths, with no jobs to go to. Peri-urban squatters. Youths whose traditional leaders had proved unable to provide the leadership required in a modern society. It is also notable that the Speightists, who evolved into a strongly nationalist political party, the Matanitu Vanua, drew their support from those remoter areas of Fiji, in Naitasiri and Cakaudrove, which had yet to share the benefits of the modern industrialised state. Bad roads, where there are any roads at all, no access to electricity, no telephones, poorly resourced schools, little health care infrastructure, little non-traditional employment opportunity, little modern agricultural activity. In their eyes, while others in Fiji might be benefiting from Fiji’s international integration and modern

developments, none of the benefits were seen to be flowing to them. They had nothing to lose and, they thought, much to gain by joining the Speightists. International opinion meant nothing. The prospect of national economic hardship was not persuasive.

Fiji's most respected chiefly leader, President Ratu Mara, who in earlier times might have been expected to knock heads together, in a traditional chiefly fashion, and restore order and bring the contending parties to a consensus, found his traditional "mana" had been challenged. As the situation worsened, his sons-in-law and the army chief, using traditional Fijian protocol, persuaded him to step aside, and assumed power. What is also notable is that his two sons-in-law were themselves senior chiefs from areas in competition with the confederacy from which Ratu Mara comes. Thus we have an additional element in the complex scenario – chiefly rivalry between competing traditional power groups.

This then is the situation which faced Australia and the world in May 2000.

Our challenge was to assist in ending the hostage crisis, help restore democracy and constitutionality, and prevent the breakdown in law and order and a slide into anarchy. We had to ensure the safety of Australian citizens in Fiji – then numbering some four and a half thousand, with many thousands more coming as short-term tourists. We had to protect Australia's trade and investment interests. We had to ensure that Fiji did not become a strategic threat to Australia.

Australia's success in meeting these challenges is not, I think, widely understood or appreciated in Australia. Few academics in Australia work on the Pacific, and the number is declining. The Australian news media, except for sensationalist and photogenic episodes, pay the Pacific little attention. Rowan Callick of the *Australian Financial Review*, one the few Australian journalists knowledgeable about the region, was recently in Suva for a local media training course. He asked his employers to stay on for a couple of days and do some stories: they told him not to bother. In March, following the annual meeting in Australia of Australia Heads of Diplomatic Missions in the Pacific this March, we invited the editors of Sydney's major newspapers to a comprehensive background briefing. None accepted the invitation.

Following the May 2000 events, as we had done before, Australia used its influence and leverage in Fiji to work with those who wielded influence and power in Fiji to protect and advance our interests.

We recognised that Fiji's problems were for Fiji to resolve, in Fijian ways, reflecting Fiji's unique set of circumstances and we used our international and regional influence to encourage Fiji back onto the internationally acceptable path. Within the Commonwealth and within the Pacific Islands Forum we worked to encourage Fiji for an early

return to constitutionality. We worked closely with other external powers – with NZ, the EU, Japan, the USA, the UK – to ensure a coordinated response, coherent and consistent international pressure, and headed off extreme pressures which we judged would not produce outcomes which were in Fiji's long terms interests or our own, like the trade sanctions that Australian and NZ trade unions wanted to impose.

In Fiji, we used the development cooperation program both to encourage along the right path those who wielded power, and to assist forces in Fiji's society also working for constitutional and democratic norms. While suspending some aid, as a "smart sanction", we nonetheless continued with health and education projects which assisted grass roots development and would benefit the dispossessed and the disillusioned. We provided financial and technical support to enable elections to be held earlier than the interim government had proposed. We also used introduction of a new trade support mechanism, the SPARTECA-TCF scheme, as a lever of influence. To persuade the ordinary, sports mad, Fijians that it was not worth being beyond the international pale, we imposed a ban on Fiji's sporting teams. We also imposed targeted travel restrictions.

We funded and provided other support to non government agencies like the Save the Children Fund and the Red Cross, firstly to ensure the welfare of those held hostage, to encourage their early release, and then to assist those worst affected by the economic turnaround – families who could no longer afford school bus fares, school fees and school lunch money.

Once the hostages were released, we offered all of them medical treatment and post traumatic care in Australia

Once the hostage crisis was over, and the perpetrators were in prison awaiting trial, we provided support to strengthen the capacity of the Public Prosecutor's office, so that the legal cases were likely to be sufficiently well prepared to ensure that the due processes of law could be fully and effectively carried out. For the same reason, we provided assistance with the court reporting system. And when the military set up a court martial to try those involved in the coup and in the November 2000 mutiny, which tried to remove the military commander, we also provided appropriate support.

Once the constitution was restored and illegal attempts to overthrow and amend the constitution had been headed off, once the election had been held, in September 2001, parliament had met and a democratic government was in place, Australia led the world in extending recognition to these achievements, and we lifted sanctions in November 2001.

Others, such as NZ and the EU, chose to maintain their sanctions until the courts resolved a constitutional challenge to the composition of the new cabinet. They judged this to be a form of pressure and

leverage on the new government indeed to abide by its word, and act in accordance with the decision of the courts. We saw this as a slippery path – the legal challenges were in the Fiji courts, which were quite capable of resolving the issues themselves. Continued international pressure, we argued, undermined the authority of the courts, constituted a statement of mistrust of a government legally installed and, more importantly, denied us the opportunity to work constructively with the new government, to encourage it along paths which were in accordance with our national and international interests. Another concern was the length of time it might take until a fully internationally acceptable situation had been achieved. We were in a process, not an end game. In this scenario, we saw ourselves being potentially caught in a limbo of influence.

So we turned to, and began to work constructively and formally with the elected Qarase government, while other international players found themselves frozen out of any capacity to influence policies. We started discussions on the shape of a new development cooperation program, we lifted the ban on senior military contacts and began talks on a new defence cooperation program. Fiji sporting contacts began again. As a result, we continued to enjoy close access to those making policy decisions, and for our counsel to be heeded, as the new government moved forward. Not everyone agreed with our path, of course, and Chaudry's Labour Party in particular, was deeply opposed to Australia's stand. The FLP had won 27 of the 71 seats in parliament, and wanted to be part of government, as the constitution allowed, rather than constituting the official opposition. They urged Australia to maintain pressure on Qarase.

Notwithstanding this pressure, in due course, the other international players saw things much the same way as Australia, and Fiji was readmitted to the Councils of the Commonwealth in time for it to attend the Brisbane CHOGM. NZ, UK and the EU normalised relations.

This does not mean that everything in Fiji is fixed – far from it. I see Fiji as a “work in progress”. The courts are still working on the question of whether or not the Fiji Labour Party should be included in cabinet, and the political working out of the consequences of their decision is by no means fully predictable. The position of Leader of the Opposition is itself contested. Affirmative action programs and political and economic measures are under way, designed to try to ensure support for the constitutional processes by the nationalist political forces, dissuading them from seeking to advance their objectives by violent means.

The challenge for the Qarase government is to ensure that those sections of the nationalist indigenous Fijian community feel that their interests and concerns are being taken into account by the

constitutional processes. Otherwise, the danger is that they will once more seek to advance their interests by overthrowing the constitution and some of its institutions, as happened in 1987 and 2000.

At the same time, the interests of the Indo Fijian community need to be safeguarded and advanced, if Fiji is to survive economically and the debilitating brain drain is to be halted. Long standing industrial disputes need to be resolved. Fundamentally, the question of equitable access to land for productive purposes, while protecting indigenous ownership, needs to be resolved. The sugar industry, in inexorable non-competitive decline, needs restructuring and alternative employment needs be found for dispossessed cane farmers. Alternative productive uses for agricultural land must be found.

As we argued in he run up to the elections, the elections themselves would not solve these problems. And nor would, of themselves, the return to constitutionality and democracy. The framework is however in place for these issues to be tackled effectively and equitably.

What we are seeing in Fiji, as in so much of the Pacific, is a painful and uncomfortable adaptation in the face of new forces. It is notable that Fiji's new leaders, as was the case after the 1987 coup, are a new breed. They are commoners, not chiefs. Rabuka was a commoner, but a soldier, and in 1987 used military force to replace the traditional authority of the chiefs. In 2000, the leader who emerged, as the consensus choice and then the leader of the parliamentary majority, is Liasenia Qarase, a commoner, one of Fiji's small group of respected indigenous entrepreneurial business leaders. Society and power structures are evolving. But not without pain.

For Australia, we have no option but to remain involved. We have key interests in Fiji which affect our national well being.

For both Australia and Fiji, development and the growth of a modern society requires stable, democratic government. In traditional strategic terms, the South Pacific is important to us. We need to ensure that no hostile powers are able to establish themselves in the Pacific in such a way that they could constitute a military threat to Australia.

In terms of modern strategic threats, it is important for our national security that the Pacific does not become a major conduit for transnational crime. The highly successful cooperative police action between the Australian Federal Police and the Fiji Police led in 2001 to the interception of 357kgs of heroin, originating from Burma and bound for Australia, NZ and the USA. The estimated street value of this haul, the fifth largest haul intercepted anywhere to date, is a billion dollars. The social and economic impact of such a large consignment of drugs hitting the streets of Australia is inestimable.

Drug trafficking, people smuggling, illegal migration and money laundering are other modern threats to Australia's security in which the access via the Pacific is providing a relatively easy route.

In response to these threats, Australia has boosted cooperation between the AFP and regional police forces, and we have police liaison units established in Fiji, Vanuatu, Solomon Islands and Port Moresby, working from there throughout the region. It is in our national interest to boost the capacity of the local law enforcement agencies to be able to counter these threats.

Australia has significant trade interests in the Pacific. Our merchandise exports to Fiji in 1999-2000 were \$A684 million, while our export of services were worth a further \$193 million. We imported \$254 million of merchandise from Fiji, and \$ 347 million in services. As a trading partner, Fiji ranks 32nd, higher than with two thirds of the countries of Europe. Including the Russian Federation and a fair proportion of EU members and all countries in Latin America except Brazil.

In Fiji, Australian interests dominate four of the five major industry sectors. (Gold, Garments, Tourism and Business Services. The exception is sugar, which depends on preferential access to the European community). We are Fiji's largest trading partner, supplying, for example, 41 per cent of Fiji's imports. The next largest supplier, NZ, has 18 per cent of the market. Per capita, the Pacific region (including NZ and PNG) consumes more Australian product than the population of any other geographic area – \$636 per year. Japan consumes \$185 per head per year, the USA \$42 and the EU \$31.00.

Political and economic pressures in the region, as well as the emerging global job market, have led to significant migration, and many of those leaving are coming to Australia. Fiji is the eighth largest source of independent skilled migrants to Australia [ie those who meet the points test in their own right without requiring sponsorship by an Australian relative and the tenth largest source of skilled migrants overall. In 2000-2001 almost 2000 Fiji citizens applied for skilled migration to Australia. A significant proportion of the migrants from Fiji have skills that are in the highest demand in Australia such as nurses, accountants and information technology professionals.

And these are good quality migrants – educated and skilled, with good English language capacity. Migrants from Fiji tend to hit the ground running, needing little government support.

The current population of Fiji is some 900,000, projected to grow to 1.3 million by 2025, despite migration trends. Fiji is a developing country, with per capita GDP of around \$US1638 . The latest Reserve Bank figures show a provisional growth figure of 4.4 per cent, so the economy is recovering slowly from the serious economic downturn which followed the coup in 2000. Nonetheless, it requires continuing

foreign aid, and Australia's development cooperation program is both sizeable (currently about \$A14 million) and well targeted. We focus on health, education, good governance, civil society and the law and justice sector.

The High Commission, which I head in Suva, is relatively large, reflecting the range of Australia interests. There are currently 21 Australia-based staff, and 40 locally engaged staff. This number will rise as our new defence cooperation programs come on line later this year and as the new law enforcement cooperation unit becomes fully operational. We have specialist aid and immigration staff. We are responsible not only for Fiji, but also for Tuvalu and Nauru. I am also Australian Permanent Representative to the Pacific Islands Forum, which focuses on issues facing all the member states, including free trade, economic management, and regional security concerns. We also work with a range of regional technical agencies based in Suva. In defence cooperation, we also cover Tonga and Samoa. One way or another, we account for official expenditure of some \$40 million Australian dollars.

In the last two and a half years in Fiji, I have had professional experiences shared by few of my diplomatic colleagues in a lifetime. We have had a coup, a hostage crisis, a serious economic downturn, threats to law and order and a mutiny. I have had personal threats against my life, and had "close personal protection" (ie bodyguards) for several months. I was withdrawn from the post, as a form of diplomatic protest, and evacuated the high commission families and non essential staff twice. We encouraged Australians to leave Fiji while they were able to do so, and before we had to consider a formal evacuation.

We have had extraordinary influence and access, reflecting the significance of the Australian presence. During the many months of the crisis, I woke up every day thinking, now who do we need to talk to, to influence today? And all the players remained constantly willing to talk with us.

We have successfully assisted Fiji return to constitutionality and democracy. No Australians were harmed and we worked with Australian business, which has been in Fiji a long time, to ensure that business continued throughout the crisis. The institutions of Fiji stood up well. The only thing I have not yet experienced in Fiji is a cyclone – and the experts say one is currently overdue!

In all this, the High Commission is, of course, the Australian government on the ground. We were an integral part of the process by which Australian policies and day to day responses were decided. We worked closely and directly with our Ministers and the Prime Minister, as well as with their close advisors.

In such a relationship as Australia shares with Fiji is we will naturally be resented at times, and seen as "big brother". We are the

first country which people turn to, and we are expected to be involved, but an element of resentment is inevitable. There was time when Australia and NZ and Alexander Downer and Phil Goff were pretty unpopular in Fiji, especially when it came to sporting bans. That comes with the territory, our shoulders are broad and on the whole, we are well respected and our role is seen as vital and positive for Fiji's future and wellbeing.

All in all, I think I made the right decision in accepting the move from Hong Kong to Suva. It has been a privilege and a challenge to be able to play an active part in shaping this "work in progress", as well as personally rewarding. And, despite the dangers and the sheer exhaustion, plus a severely curtailed personal social life, a lot of fun as well.

# ISRAEL

## AN AUSTRALIAN VIEW

“The upsurge of antisemitism is disturbing, we are told, but if only Israel would change its policies of retaliation and self-defence against terror all would be well. To which George F. Will, the distinguished American columnist writing in the *Washington Post* answered:

*People who say that do not understand the centrality of antisemitism in the current crisis. ... As cannot be said too often, antisemitism is not directed against the behaviour of the Jews, but against the existence of the Jews. Israel holds just one thousandth of the world's population, but holds all the hopes for the continuation of the Jewish experience as a portion of the human narrative. Will Israel be more durable than antisemitism?*

The question hangs in the air. It is unsettling, scary, even subversive.” –  
(Sam Lipski – May 2002)

**SAM LIPSKI AM** -  
Commentator & Former  
Editor, Australian Jewish  
News

**DATE:**  
Tuesday 29 October 2002

**TIME:**  
5.30 for 6.00 pm

**VENUE:**  
1 Phillip Street, Sydney

**LIGHT REFRESHMENTS**

**RSVP: (02) 9252 3366**





Photo – David Karonidis

*Judith Keene*

In *Fighting for Franco: International Volunteers In Nationalist Spain during the Spanish Civil War* (London/NY Continuum, 2001), Judith Keene examines the myth that the Nationalist forces in Spain, who won the Civil War, consisted of patriotic Spaniards. Many groups on the European right were galvanised by the Nationalist cause – European Fascists and conservative Catholics – and rallied to the figure of Franco, who appeared to be holding the line against secularism, modernism and Bolshevism. On Tuesday 7 May 2002, Judith Keene addressed The Sydney Institute and explored some of the lesser known facts surrounding the rise of Spain's Franco.

# FIGHTING FOR FRANCO

## - IN THE SPANISH CIVIL WAR

Judith Keene

It could hardly be more timely that we are discussing a set of individuals on the Extreme Right in Europe in the 1930s and the environments which produced them. At this very minute, a powerful undertow in Europe is moving national politics inexorably right-wards. Currently a conjunction of popular xenophobia, extreme nationalism and a strident rejection of immigration is scouring out a new European political landscape, and in the process revealing many contours which would be familiar to supporters of the extreme Right between the wars.

My study, *Fighting For Franco* reconstructs the experiences of foreign volunteers who fought for General Franco during the Spanish civil war. Whether they were pious Catholics, old style conservatives, aspiring fascists, crypto-Nazis or anti-Semites of a number of stripes, many of them identified with Franco and his "Glorious Crusade" because he appeared to share the political objectives that these activists on the Right were themselves agitating for between the wars.

Until recently very little has been written about Franco's volunteers. Certainly there is nothing like the volume of what we know of the volunteers who fought on the Spanish Republican side. The numbers with Franco are far fewer: some 2,000 compared with forty to fifty thousand foreign volunteers for the Spanish government. In an enormous literature historians and the participants themselves have mapped the motivations of the International Brigadistas and told their stories, large and small. As well there is a veritable library of material tracing the political disputes on the Republican side between Spanish liberals, socialists, communists and the "anti-authoritarian left", of anarchists and Trotskyites, as well as the role of international volunteers in all these combinations.

Perhaps even more significantly a lot of the writing produced by and about the pro-Republican foreigners in Spain has become almost iconic in the annals of twentieth century literature. One needs think only of George Orwell, who fought with a left wing militia on the Aragon front and recorded his observations with dazzling fluency in

*Homage to Catalonia*. He tells us too that his ideas about the tyranny of totalitarianism, later expressed so powerfully in *1984* and *Animal Farm*, were formulated during his time in Spain. Ernest Hemingway, the larger than life American reporter, touring the fronts in a car stacked to the roof with fine food and cases of cognac, and carousing with reporters and soldiers in the Hotel Florida in Madrid, also wrote a rivetting account of the war. *For Whom the Bell Tolls* and the film of the same name, is probably the most widely-read novel of the Spanish civil war in English. As well the Republican cause attracted writers like the Frenchman André Malraux, an heroic figure who flew with the air corps for the Republic and produced the film and literary account of it in *L'Espoir*. Or, there is Arthur Koestler, Hungarian journalist working from Paris for Willie Muenzenberg and the Movement Against War and Fascism, whose arrest by franquistas towards the end of 1936 produced a world-wide protest. Koestler's, *Spanish Testament*, the account of the three months he spent on death row in Seville became a best seller in the 1930s and has remained a pre-eminent literary account of the emotions of an individual whose life lies under the sentence of death. And there are, too, our own Vance and Nettie Palmer. When the war broke out, they were living cheaply on the Catalan coast while Vance revised *Such is Life*. Nettie has left her first hand recollections of this time in her diary, *Fourteen Years*. Once the Palmers returned to Australia, Nettie became a founder of the Spanish Relief Committee and a tireless publicist and fund raiser for the Republican war effort in Australia.

By contrast the literary record of the Right is sparse. In addition, both Left and Right played down the presence of foreign volunteers with Franco. The Left did so because it emphasised the heroism of the Republicans to claim that real volunteers came of their own free will and to the Republican side, while conversely the foreigners with Franco were Italian, German and Portuguese soldiers conscripted by their fascist governments. Franco, for different reasons, also downplayed the presence of foreigners with him. Indeed one of the enduring myths of the franquista state after the war was that Franco's supporters consisted of patriotic Spaniards fighting against Republicans who were a rag tag army of foreign Reds. From the end of the Second World War, also, it fitted franquista foreign policy to play down the enthusiasm with which European fascists had embraced Franco's cause and reciprocally, vice versa, his of theirs. From 1944 as it became apparent that the Axis countries would lose the war, Franco began to reposition Spain in the new configuration that would dominate post war international politics. In the political landscape of the Cold War Franco's anti-Communism was eminently acceptable but his previous pro-Mussolini and pro-Hitlerism was not and therefore the Spanish state censored any mention of these previous alliances.

Before we look at where Franco's foreign volunteers came from, and what happened to them, it may be worth recalling briefly the main details of the Spanish civil war. It began in July 1936 when a group of Spanish generals led by Francisco Franco staged a military uprising against the Spanish government. Or to use the proper Spanish term, the generals made a *pronunciamiento* against the government of the Second Spanish Republic. The *pronunciamiento* was a classic mechanism perfected in nineteenth century Spain to force a change of government. Traditionally when military leaders pronounced, they called out their troops, a few shots might be fired; there would be a few casualties; and the existing government would collapse and quite quickly be replaced by a new one.

Without a doubt, Franco and the military camarilla around him imagined that their *pronunciamiento* would work in the old way. By 1936 however Spain had turned a new page in history and Spaniards were no longer passive observers of national politics. Instead they had become active citizens. The new Constitution of the Second Republic in 1931 had expanded the suffrage to men and women. It had separated church and state, abolished aristocratic titles, begun to implement land reform and, perhaps most ominously, had introduced reforms to bring the Spanish army under civilian control. In the process of making these changes Republican politicians had antagonised various Spanish interest groups, the uprising being the clear proof of this. But also, it was the case, that as soon as the military uprising took place, a great many Spaniards responded by taking up arms in order to defend the Republic. What began as a military uprising triggered off three years of bloody civil war.

Also in the febrile atmosphere of international relations in the decade leading to World War Two there was no way that a large conflict in the heart of Western Europe in 1936 could remain quarantined from the larger tensions of international politics. And indeed it was not. The Spanish civil war which began over quintessentially domestic issues came to be the critical event which reformatted international relations into the configuration of Allies and Axis that we know in the Second World War.

On the Axis side, it was in Spain that Italy and Germany became allies. The Anti-Comintern Pact between Germany, Italy and Japan came out of the Spanish civil war (Germany and Japan signed the Anti-Comintern Pact in November 1936, and Germany and Italy in November 1937). Previously, Hitler and Mussolini had regarded each other balefully as adversaries in Southern Europe. From 1936, however, both dictators sent aid to Franco and the Insurgents. Germany equipped the Condor Legion, the crack flying squadron of fighter planes and pilots and the sophisticated system of communications that supported them. Their involvement in Spain provided the

German armaments industry with information that was invaluable to rearmament providing a testing ground for new technology under battle conditions.

Mussolini sent upwards of 50,000 soldiers as well as planes and submarines. Indeed Italian and German intervention in the first months of the uprising was critical as their planes ferried the Army of Africa, which included the Spanish Foreign Legion and the Moorish Regulars, from North Africa to the Spanish mainland.

In relation to the nations that later became the Allies, Western European diplomacy in the Spanish civil war sealed the Allied policy of appeasement. When the *pronunciamento* took place, the Spanish Popular Front government looked to its fellow Popular Front government in France. The Prime Minister, Leon Blum, originally indicated that the French government would support Spain. The assistance soon melted away, however, when it became clear that Britain, whose support France saw as indispensable against a rearming Germany, would never jeopardize European peace by becoming involved in a matter on the other side of the Pyrenees. The Non-Intervention Committee which was Britain's policy became France's policy as well, even though it never stopped their own citizens or anybody else's reaching Spain, let alone German, Italian and Soviet military aid.

Similarly, Soviet foreign policy underwent a transformation on the Iberian Peninsula. The eventual outcome was the Soviet-German Non-Intervention Alliance signed with Germany in August 1939. Stalin led the only nation to make a substantial contribution to the Spanish government cause. Initially, Stalin assumed that Spain would provide a place for Soviet *rapprochement* with Western Europe. There he could lock in western links into a policy of collective security against Germany. When it became abundantly clear that Britain and France intended at all costs to stay out of the fray, the Soviet Union switched tack. By 1938 Soviet support for the Republic had dwindled and Stalin was making feelers towards a separate Soviet alliance with Germany which lasted until mid 1941 when Germany invaded the Soviet Union.

The end of the story of the Spanish conflict is common knowledge. After three terrible years of civil warfare Spain was torn apart and the Spanish government was defeated. In Madrid on 19 May 1939, the Nationalists held a huge victory parade in which General Franco took the salute flanked by the Italian, German, Japanese and Portuguese ambassadors as the Nationalist Army, the Foreign Legion and the German and Italian units marched past in full colours. By then more than a million Republican Spaniards had fled across the border into exile. Spain remained a repressive military dictatorship under General Franco until his death in November 1975.

The volunteers for Franco from outside Spain saw the Iberian Peninsula as the place where they could undertake the battles that were of real and symbolic importance in their own home countries. In most cases they knew little about Spain and spoke even less Spanish. On the Spanish side, Franco's military commanders, taking their lead from the Caudillo himself, had no interest whatever in the non-Spanish affairs of their foreign supporters. As a consequence foreign volunteers in Nationalist Spain, despite their apparent willingness to lay their lives on the line for Franco, were treated very harshly; and most usually Spaniards looked upon them with a great deal of mistrust. As well their military contribution to Franco's war machine was minimal, even less.

There were individuals and groups with Franco in Spain who were motivated by ideology and adventure. They include an Australian, Nugent Bull, a Joey's Old Boy and the son of a prominent Catholic family who were undertakers in Newtown. There was also a fearless and formidable bunch of independent women engaged in the paradoxical task of raising support for Franco in order to bring in a franquista state in which independent and forthright women like themselves would have no place. In the book I deal with all these characters, but in the discussion here I shall speak briefly about some of the groups and their military contribution.

One of the largest groups of foreigners for Franco was the 700 strong Irish brigade who came to Spain to "fight for the faith of their fathers". Wearing the uniform of the proto-fascist Blueshirt movement of their leader, Eion O'Duffy, and after several abortive attempts at departure from Ireland, they arrived in Lisbon in November 1936 and crossed into Western Spain. Without a doubt many of the Irish volunteers were devout Catholics who come to Spain to defend the Church which they saw as under siege from Communism in the guise of the secularising Spanish Republic. But they were poorly led. The Irish leader, Eion O'Duffy, was driven by an irresistible need to cut a figure with other international fascist leaders, rather than to lead his troops. There were cultural and military differences between Spaniards and the Irish as well. The Irish found Spanish food inedible; and at a bullfight benefit put on for the Irish the soldiers cheered for the bull. Spaniards found Irish drinking capacities inordinate. Spaniards are extremely abstemious, whereas the Irish out of barracks for a night on the town inevitably became riotously drunk and disorderly. There were few Spanish speakers among the Irish and therefore communications were often crossed.

After three months in barracks in Caceres, the Brigade moved up on 17 February 1937. As they approached the part of the front which they were to occupy they were fired upon by a battalion of Falangists. Newly-arrived from the Canary islands, the Falangists mistook Franco's fighting Irish for men in the International Brigades. From this

inauspicious start matters rapidly deteriorated until at the end of six short weeks the men in the brigade voted to return home.

The small contingent of eight Romanian Iron Guardists embody in ideology and practice another set of features of Franco's foreign volunteers. The Romanians believed that Franco and they were on a worldwide crusade to defend Christ and the Cross against what they called in their graphic parlance "Satan and his Judeo-Masonic henchmen". Their identification with Nationalist Spain was such that they conflated Romania and Spain into a single entity. Accompanied by their own "Pope", he went with them into the trenches wearing full religious regalia, a long black soutane and a large gold cross on his chest. In their literature and great flurries of letters home they argued that a defeat for Freemasons, Jews, Reds and atheists anywhere, and in 1936 it was Republican Spain, would constitute a victory for Christian, Anti-Semites in Romania. After travelling across Europe, greeting Hitler in Berlin, enjoying a hearty welcome from Toledo Falangists they were at last moved up to the front in the sierras behind Madrid.

At 10am on 13 January 1937 they entered the trenches. Though without kit or warm clothes, being expected to scrounge these from the enemy in battle, they were in a state of exhilaration that at last they would engage with the adversaries of Christ. By 2.30pm, two of the eight had been killed; the dead men were the leaders, Visili Marin and Ion Motsa. Their comrades were devastated and particularly shocked by the callousness of their Spanish field commander. He brushed aside their grief and shouted at them (according to Nikolai Cantecuzina) : "Too bad, this is war get back to your positions". After frantic interventions from Bucharest with Franco the Romanians were allowed to leave the front and accompany the bodies of their comrades home. Dolefully, they retraced their trip outward: by German ship to Berlin, a greeting from Himmler, and a long looping journey by train with the bodies through Bukovina and Transylvania. At each station and in the Transylvanian countryside kneeling legionaries of the Iron Guard saluted the train carrying the bodies. On 13 February 1937 the public funeral for the "Spanish martyrs" brought Bucharest to a standstill and provided the first, and very ominous, national display of the real number and muscle of the Iron Guard.

French fascists, and members of the proto-fascist leagues and of L'Action Française, upwards of 500 of them, served in Spain. Most were attached to the Joan of Arc Brigade which was created as a separate French-speaking unit in the Spanish Foreign Legion. They came to Franco's Spain in order to lay down the gauntlet to Leon Blum and the Popular Front government in France. Despite effusive early welcomes for Charles Maurras and celebrities of the Action Française like the inter-war sculptor Réal del Sartre, the ordinary French volunteer soldiers were treated extremely harshly by the Nationalist

military. Franco and the Nationalists saw these men, first and foremost, as Frenchmen and therefore inevitably tainted with the red brush of Communism of the French Popular Front.

Perhaps the best example of crossed perceptions between Franco's Nationalists and his foreign volunteers took place with the White Russians in Spain. The leaders of the White Russian veterans assumed that the way back to Petersburg would be through Madrid. Most of the approximate 200 Russians in Spain came from the White emigré community in Paris. Commentators from the community at this time from Vladimir Nabokov to the ex-Imperial princes have described the isolation and alienation of exile. Relations between the Russian emigré community and their French hosts were constantly strained. Among the displaced emigrés, perhaps the least able to manage the life of exile were officers in the ex-Imperial Army. Trained in imperial military academies to serve as a military caste these men were poorly qualified for civilian life. In inter-war Paris, the Russian ex-imperial officer was a stock figure: the uniformed Cossack as the hotel doorman, or waiting on tables, or at the wheel of a taxi.

For these men, the Spanish civil war was a godsend. They assumed that Franco's crusade against the Spanish Reds and their own against the Russian Bolsheviks were exactly the same. The commander of ROVS, the White veterans organizations in Paris, wrote to Franco that the Whites would defeat the "Godless no-gooders" of Spanish Bolshevism and then carry on back to the Motherland for a second, this time victorious, round with the Bolsheviks. Apart from the unreality of the plan, there was the sticking point that General Franco had no desire to provide a marshalling ground for the reconstituted White Army in exile. He refused to allow large numbers of Whites to cross the border together and those that did were offered only enlistment as ordinary Spanish soldiers. The officers who took this option were confronted also with the disheartening fact that few Spaniards were aware that there were Russians of any colour other than red. Spaniards with whom the Russians bivouacked were also ignorant of the fact that Russia was a country with a religion and an imperial tradition as long and as glorious as Spain's own. In Franco's Spain the words "Russian", "Red", "Comintern" and "Communist" were used interchangeably so that it was difficult to convince Spaniards that Russians could be "White, monarchist and anti-Communist."

As the senior White general in Spain, Nikolai Shinkarenko noted in his diary, it was galling to have his imperial training overlooked especially when he had superior experience to the Spanish command because he had two recent wars under his belt. Shinkarenko did not mention that the Whites had in fact lost these two most recent engagements, in the First World War and the Russian civil war. The White officers were military men of the old regime. Shinkarenko tells us

that he and his fellow Whites considered it unseemly to bend over in the trenches which meant they were literally standing targets and indeed Shinkarenko suffered a serious head wound in 1938 from a sniper's shot.

The importance of class had been drummed into these imperial Russians from birth and the way in which its minute gradations finessed the behaviour of a gentleman. Shinkarenko again in his diary noted that "people from the top social class are the same everywhere": they all "held their knife and fork in the proper way" and were "perfectly acquainted with Robinson Crusoe and the life of Julius Caesar". With an almost visceral belief in social hierarchy Shinkarenko was humiliated when he was treated as an ordinary soldier by those men whom he considered his social and military equals. When he joined the Foreign legion he assumed he would meet General Yagüe in person and stood at ram rod attention outside Yagüe's head quarters for hours. Later when the two did come face to face as Yagüe was inspecting the troops, the commander passed down the line not indicating even by the flicker of an eyelid that he recognized the figure standing straight as a flag pole who was wearing the narrow ribbon of the imperial Russian tricolour. Later when he joined Varela's command in the mopping up operations after Teruel and after enjoying the pleasure of dining with the Chief of Staff and his seconds on the first night, Shinkarenko was mortified the next day to receive the message that "owing to a shortage of cutlery" he henceforth should eat with the junior officers. When eventually he had the opportunity to correspond with Franco he attempted to convince him of the scheme to resuscitate the White Army and that they could attract formidable imperial soldiers from across the Globe. His twelve page petition elicited from Franco a single sentence response which declined the request.

In the victory parade in Madrid at the end of the civil war White Russians marched as a separate contingent under the Imperial Russian flag. But with the war over they faced penury. Their veterans organization was out of funds and many of the Whites were reduced to scrounging for a living by performing acrobatic military dances to Russian music in Spanish taverns. In 1942 when a French Legion was formed up to fight on the eastern front with Hitler it contained a good number of White Russians who had seen active service with Franco in Spain. Similarly a number of Whites who had remained in Spain after the war, joined up with Falangist Blue Division which fought with the German army on the eastern front.

The sources for this study are in a range of languages: English, French, Italian, German, Spanish, Romanian and Russian and to be found in far-flung archives. This has provided me with a very interesting time in researching and writing the book because I have had to familiarise myself with a whole series on national histories and deal

with the vagaries of the languages in which they are written. It has also entailed travel to widely dispersed archives in which material is held and in the process of meeting a great many hospitable and helpful people.

To return to the original connection suggested between the radical Right in Europe in the 1930s and in 2002 it strikes me that there are strong similarities even though the ideologies may be different and the specificities of the groups against which the Right railed in both cases. Certainly in racist discourse in the 1930s it was the Jewish community who were perceived as the enemy whereas in 2002 it is immigrants from the periphery of Europe, attempting to work and live within Europe proper, who are seen as a threat. Similarly, since the end of the Cold War, Muslims, whether from Eastern Europe, the Middle East or from North Africa, have replaced Communists as the universal other whose very existence is seen as a challenge to the cultures of the West. Despite the variation in the content of the categories of opposition the potential for violence and the inherent intransigence towards cultural diversity between the New Right of the 1930s and of 2003 is the same.



Photo – David Karonidis

*Gina Lennox*

Gina Lennox once rode a motor bike from London to India and back through Turkey, Iran and Pakistan. Since then she has read widely, produced a series of three radio programs on Iraqi Kurds in 1994 and lived in an Egyptian village near Luxor in 1997-98. *Fire, Snow and Honey – Voices From Kurdistan* (Halstead press 2001) is Gina Lennox's fourth book. In its foreward, Madam Mitterand has written, "It is no longer acceptable ... to close our eyes to the massive violations of the rights of the Kurds." Gina Lennox addressed the Sydney Institute on Monday 13 May 2002.

# **FIRE, SNOW & HONEY**

**- VOICES FROM KURDISTAN**

**Gina Lennox**

*Fire, Snow and Honey – Voices from Kurdistan* is a collection of essays, life stories, poetry, fables and short fiction contributed by Kurdish refugees and migrants from Iraq, Iran, Turkey, Syria, Armenia and Georgia. In the book Kurdish men and women, aged between 23 and 103 – including scholars and freedom fighters, teachers and doctors, mothers and musicians – describe their history, religions, literature, music, food, politics and life experiences.

Perhaps many of you first heard about the Kurds when they rose up against Saddam Hussein after his defeat in Kuwait in 1991, or when they demonstrated outside Greek embassies around the world, after a Kurdish leader from Turkey, Abdullah Ocalan, was refused political asylum in Europe and was kidnapped in Nairobi and returned to Turkey. For the last three and half years he has been held in solitary confinement on the prison island of Emrali.

Many people know little about the Kurds but, increasingly, documentaries, feature films and newspaper articles are referring to them. Although not enough – given the critical part they have played in world history, the importance of the region they occupy and for the genocide they have suffered in the last 80 years. This is because both ancient and modern Kurdish history has been wrapped in secrecy. Did anyone see the documentary on SBS on Saturday, 11 May about Mustafa Kemal Ataturk, the father of modern Turkey? The program highlighted his achievements but never mentioned his slaughter of 200,000 Armenians and tens of thousands of Kurds in 1922, so he could establish the borders of Turkey, without the threat of nation states called Armenia and Kurdistan.

Consequently I would like to tell you why it is so important to know more about the Kurds, especially in the times we live. I will do this by amplifying the subject in terms of the words used in the title of the book: *Fire, Snow & Honey*.

## **Fire – Newroz or New Day**

For Kurds fire represents the fires of freedom that are lit – if possible – on the night before the first day of spring, to commemorate an ancient legend of a blacksmith called Kawa, who rose up against Zohag, a tyrant king. A snake grew out of each shoulder of this tyrant king and, in order to relieve the pain, the snakes required a daily feed of human brain! Every day two boys were selected, until the king's adviser took pity on the people and decided to mix one human brain with one sheep's brain. The child who escaped slaughter was to go to the mountains to look after the sheep. It is said these children were the ancestors of the Kurds. One day Kawa, the blacksmith, was asked for his last surviving son. He told the king's men, "I will come with you and kill my child by my own hands." However, instead of hitting his son on the head with his blacksmith's hammer, he killed the king and lit a fire on the mountain behind the palace, to tell others to rise up against the king. Fires were lit on every mountain to pass the message of revolution across the region.

Kawa did not become king, because in those days a king had god given power by being born into the right dynasty. But ever since – on the night before New Year – fires are lit on the mountains of Kurdistan and people sing and dance, defying the possibility of imprisonment or, worse, for celebrating the possibility of freedom against tyranny. Indo-European people from Anatolia to Afghanistan tell versions of this story, and hold Newroz picnics on 21 March, the first day of Spring.

## **The importance of fire for Ezidi and Alevi**

Fire is very special to the Ezidi – people who follow the original faith of Kurdistan, before the coming of Zoroastra and Islam. The Kurds claim the Ezidi are the first practitioners of monotheism. The earliest records of Ezidism are found in the clay tablets of Sumer, some 3000 BC (well before Judaism). In the Torah, Noah is said to have found refuge from a great flood. Other sources place this refuge in the Ararat mountain range – in the centre of Kurdistan. The Ezidi and Alevi (a sect mixing Ezidi and Islamic beliefs) believe fire is sacred: the home fire must burn continuously, and water must never be used to put out the fire. In October each year, Ezidi religious leaders dance around seven little fires, seven being a sacred number: the number of lesser gods serving the most High God, the creator of all.

## **Fire as symbolic of a history of genocide**

So, for Kurds, fire represents freedom. But it also represents the genocide of the largest nation in the world, which is not represented by a nation state government – an estimated 25 to 40 million people.

The Kurds and Armenians were promised independence in 1920 at the Treaty of Sevres in the aftermath of World War I, and the

collapse of the Ottoman Empire. However, three factors went against the Kurds being given a nation state: the majority of the population was isolated and uneducated. Britain had found oil in Iraq in the 1890s and in the early 1920s Mustafa Kemal Atatürk convinced Kurds to trust him and their Muslim brothers rather than the Europeans, that they could have autonomy within a nation state called Turkey. It was Kemal who went to the Treaty of Lausanne in 1923, and negotiated the borders of modern Turkey. As a result, Kurds became large minorities in four countries: Turkey, Iran, the British protectorate of Iraq and the French protectorate of Syria.

The 1920s saw large scale Kurdish uprisings in Turkey, Iran and Iraq and, ever since, Kurds have been subject to extreme poverty, repression and genocide, including ethnic cleansing, mass slaughter, imprisonment and torture by the governments of these nation-states.

I will later explore in more detail what happened in the different parts of Kurdistan but suffice to say that if the last century has been dark for the Kurds, the last 40 years have been the blackest. Since 1960, an estimated 10,000 Kurdish villages, mainly in Turkey and Iraq, have been destroyed, up to 9 million people have been deported to areas outside Kurdistan, and more than 500,000 people have been killed. Today the greatest hope for Kurds is in Iraqi Kurdistan, which has been protected against Saddam Hussein and Turkey's excesses by a no-fly zone since 1991. However, if the US decides to topple Saddam Hussein it will be the Iraqi Kurds who have the most to gain or lose. The US has betrayed the Iraqi Kurds twice – in 1975 and 1991. No wonder the Iraqi Kurds are cautious about USA's overtures.

## **Snow**

The word "Snow" represents the incredibly harsh winters of Kurdistan – particularly on the snow covered mountains from which spring the major river systems of the Middle East – including the famous Tigris and Euphrates Rivers. Around these river systems developed the first pastoralism and agriculture about 13,000 years ago, and the first evidence of civilisations about eight to nine thousand years ago. Today these river systems supply Iraq, Iran, Turkey and Syria with water and electricity. However, Turkey is intent on taking control of its rivers by building dams, displacing millions of Kurds and affecting the survival of Syria. Israel is said to be negotiating the purchase of water from Turkey. The rivers of Kurdistan are going to be major political and economic factors in determining the stability of the region in the coming decades. A war over water is not out of the question.

The beautiful soaring mountains of Kurdistan, with their gorges, waterfalls and springs, oak and pine forests have been the Kurds biggest blessing and burden. The mountains and their fertile valleys have meant the Kurds have survived in sustainable villages for thousands of

years. The freedom fighters who fought Saddam Hussein in these mountains lived in incredibly harsh conditions, but were invincible because of them.

Yet the mountains have cut Kurds off from each other and the outside world. Refugees have to cross these mountains – as did the exodus of two million Kurds after the March 1991 uprisings – following Saddam Hussein's defeat in Kuwait, fifty people dying a day from cold, hunger and illness.

Perhaps the story that was the most significant in me embarking on the book was of a man Sami Barwari, who had been a freedom fighter against Saddam Hussein as well as an Iraqi soldier – for five years fighting in the terrible eight year war between Iraq and Iran. When he was fleeing over the mountains, helping his elderly mother, trying to keep his family together – he walked behind a man with three children. The man laid the youngest near a rock and Sami asked why. The man said, "I cannot save all three." Sami picked up the baby and carried her until he found a relation. This was a time when his own daughter was missing among the million or more people fleeing into Turkey. This humane act by a person who had spent so long as a "killing machine" would not leave my mind. Incidentally – while Saddam's helicopters and tanks bombarded the fleeing people – US aeroplanes could be seen flying above. It was after this exodus that a no fly zone north of the 36<sup>th</sup> parallel was established. But note – this no fly zone carefully excluded the major oil fields of Kurdistan, and a number of Kurdish towns (including Sulaimani, Mosul and Kirkuk).

## **Honey**

Honey, in the book's title, represents the physical and cultural wealth of Kurdistan. Visitors and Kurds alike say Kurdistan is a paradise on earth. In between the mountains are broad valleys with the richest, most well watered agricultural lands in the Middle East. The land offers an abundance of wild foods (collected by the village people) and animals – wolves, bears, gazelle, and even lions and tigers as recent as 50 years ago.

In the 1890s the British discovered oil. However, instead of using the wealth from oil to develop Kurdistan, the Kurds say that the wealth has been used to buy weapons and support armies to destroy them. Similarly the agricultural produce found no large markets as the regimes did not build roads, or provide electricity, factories, or any means of communication. The first roads were built for the armies. Many Kurds only had access to education in the last 30 years. Kurdish contributors to the book, who are university educated, have parents who are totally illiterate.

Honey also refers to the richness of Kurdish culture – one in which music and poetry penetrate every aspect of traditional life. In the

villages people sing and dance to celebrate the birth of a child, when they sow and harvest their crops and on cold winter nights. The dancing is communal – men and women joining hands in a circle or line, similar to Greek dancing.

Kurdish culture has a strong oral tradition with ancient myths, fables and proverbs being passed down from generation to generation. Proverbs have been used to title many of the contributions to *Fire, Snow and Honey*. Thus we learn:

A fox is not a camel but he must think like one

He who does not fight has a sharp sword

Grass does not stay under a rock

Necessity is the first teacher

The eye can see, but the hand is short

See the mother, know the girl

Kurdish culture puts community strength above individual wishes. It is very supportive, providing people conform to community values.

Indo-European people migrated to Kurdistan 4,300 years ago, mixing with the local population. Some argue that the newcomers originally came from the area. The proto-Elamite script is as old as the Sumer script. The Kurds claim the original religion of the Kurds – Ezidi – to be the origin of monotheism – with written references going back to 3000 BC. Variations of the word “Kurd” are found in tablets from the third millennium BC. As already mentioned it is believed Noah found land and settled in the Ararat Ranges in the centre of Kurdistan. Abraham is said to have fled Ur, in the south and come to his brother’s town of Haran in Kurdistan. Jacob returned to Kurdistan to marry. The Jews began writing the Torah when they were in exile in Babylon (600-550 BC). The Babylonian King responsible for the Jews going into exile was Nebuchadnezzar II, otherwise spelt Nabu-Kudur-usar, said to be an Ezidi. The Kurds claim the Medes to be their ancestors. Assyrian tablets of 800 BC refer to the Medes and the Persians. The Mede Empire (727 BC–550 BC), the precursor of the Persian Empire, spread from Cappadocia, possibly as far east as Afghanistan. The modern form of “Kurd” comes into play around 225 AD.

While ancient Kurdish culture is said to have been matriarchal, once empires began controlling the region, and particularly since the coming of Islam, Kurdish society has become patriarchal, with a strong tribal warrior tradition. As a consequence the greatest internal problem for Kurds, historically and to this day, is the inability to unite. Before 1923, Kurds were divided by mountains, religions, tribes and dialects. After 1923, they have been divided by borders, persecution and politics. In the worst scenarios, described in the book, brother

indirectly kills brother by belonging to different political parties who are fighting. Since 1923 Kurds have had little opportunity to discuss major issues, show entrepreneurial initiative or practise a modern form of democracy. Yet in the last 20 years Kurdish society has been changing rapidly and miraculously; in the last ten years Iraqi Kurds have made genuine attempts to establish a civil society.

The essays and life stories in my book, reclaim this long history of Kurdistan and tell it from a personal perspective – a history no longer about rulers and statistics, but about humanity, in all its forms. The book does not idealise Kurds – the contributors have been very honest about their strengths and weaknesses.

I'll now go into more detail about the last 80 years of history in the different parts of Kurdistan.

## **Turkey**

Modern Turkey was founded on an extreme form of nationalism, with much bloodshed and betrayal. After 1923 many of Mustafa Kemal's Kurdish supporters were assassinated. Others committed suicide. In response to a number of Kurdish uprisings in the 1920s and because one third of the population was Kurd, repressive laws made it illegal to speak Kurdish, anywhere, even at home, mention the word Kurd, dress Kurdish, write Kurdish or play Kurdish music. These acts were considered treason. All people and villages had to assume Turkish names. The armed uprisings continued until 1939 – when slaughter, including that by chemicals, basically killed off all hope of the Kurdish people to some form of dignity within the Turkish State.

The Turkish education system brainwashed everyone into believing Turkey was the mother of all nations, the Turkish language was the mother of all languages and that Turks are invincible. Kurds were taught to be ashamed of being Kurdish, and some became the worst oppressors of their own kind. It was not until the 1960s that educated Turkish and Kurdish intellectuals, inspired by socialism, began speaking out about social justice and Kurdish issues – and were promptly imprisoned or killed.

The 1970s saw extreme brutality of the Turkish army and police in Kurdish villages and it was in this climate that the PKK, a militant political organisation, came to prominence in the 1980's. PKK was promptly labelled a terrorist group because of their attacks on police, army and Kurdish aghas and others who worked for the Turks. The PKK were radical when compared to other Kurdish groups. They even trained women to be guerillas. However the PKK claim that many atrocious acts attributed to them, were in fact carried out by the Turkish government which spent millions of dollars each year buying military hardware and maintaining an army and village guard system to combat the PKK militants operating in South East Turkey.

Yet for nearly 20 years, until 1998, the PKK and its leader, Abdullah Ocalan, were allowed to operate out of bases in Syrian controlled territory – until Turkey threatened to go to war with Syria if President Assad continued protecting PKK. In September 1998 Abdullah Ocalan fled to Russia and then Italy, promising to give up armed struggle in his request for asylum. Somehow he found himself in Nairobi where Turkish commandoes kidnapped him and took him back to Turkey in early 1999. PKK called a unilateral ceasefire in 1999, many guerillas fleeing to Iraqi Kurdistan, yet the movement is still on the list of terrorist organisations.

Today Turkey wants to join the European Union. Turkey's constitution is based on one written after the military coup of 1980. The government passes legislation guaranteeing freedom of expression and language in broadcasting and publication, but then says that any such expression is illegal if it encourages separatism. Consequently, Turkish and Kurdish people continue to be sacked, imprisoned or disappear for speaking about democracy, the building of dams in Kurdistan, which is displacing hundreds of thousands of people, or attempting to broadcast or publish in Kurdish. In the last 20 years, tens of thousands have died and four million people have been deported. Up to 5,000 Kurdish villages have been destroyed. Mosques have been built in villages, which are not Muslim and every day life in Kurdistan is made unbearable. There is very little employment and farmers are not allowed to grow certain crops in case these are used to feed militants. Check points on the edge of every town make cars and pedestrians wait for hours, subjecting people to humiliating searches of body or possessions.

Elections are conducted with Kurdish representatives being harassed, imprisoned, and sometimes lynched. The most famous case is of Leyla Zana and six other Kurdish MPs who were imprisoned in 1994 for 15 years for talking in the Turkish parliament and elsewhere about the need for Kurds and Turks to find peaceful solutions and learn to live as brothers. Turkish prisons continue to be horrific places. And so it goes on. Yet Turkey's government is a strategic ally of both USA and Israel.

Nevertheless, more and more people in Turkey want change. Turkey is a party to the European Convention on Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms in which it is enshrined the right to a fair trial, freedom from arbitrary detention and torture, and certain requirements for internal displacement. Human Rights groups have submitted 3200 complaints against the Turkish government under this convention, including the case of Leyla Zana, and it is hoped that Turkey will not be accepted into the EU until the government puts into practice its legislation to ensure self determination for all people in Turkey.

## Iran

In Iran, the Kurdish uprisings were squashed by 1931 when the leader of the uprising was assassinated on his way to negotiations with the Iranian government. However, in 1946 the Kurds of Mahabad declared a Kurdish republic, led by a highly respected judge, Qazi Muhammad. After 11 months of establishing democracy, schools for boys and girls, publishing houses, theatre groups and unity, Qazi Muhammad gave himself up rather than have his people slaughtered. He was executed three months later.

In the book *Fire, Snow and Honey*, Fariba Qazi, grand niece of Qazi Muhammad, describes what it is like to grow up in such a family. As a 17 year old girl, she became a first aid supplier, treating the wounded and burying the dead, when Ayotallah Khomeini declared war on the Kurds. For being a first aid supplier, she was imprisoned, with her 3 year old son, in a cell 1.5 metres by 1 metre, for three months, followed by another three months in a group cell.

The Iranian government has not slaughtered Kurds in the numbers of Iraq and Turkey. The Iranian government is very smart, preferring to cut off the head of the snake – killing their leaders. Two Iranian Kurdish leaders have been exceptional – Qazi Muhammad, already mentioned, and Abdul Rahman Qassemlou, a European educated, democratic socialist who was declared to be a manifestation of Satan by Ayotallah Khomeini in 1979. Qassemlou was assassinated in 1989, while attending a meeting with Iranian officials in Vienna. Both Qazi Muhammad and Qassemlou were very intelligent, moderate and democratic in their practices and had genuine popular support. That is why they were so dangerous.

In Iran, Kurds are allowed to speak Kurdish, even in the school playground, but not in the classroom. They are not allowed to dress in Kurdish clothes at school or in any government office. Surprisingly they have been allowed to play Kurdish music, even while all other forms of music were banned. Yet they have no political rights. You will not find a Kurdish mayor even in a town which is 99 per cent Kurdish. As well, the region remains extremely underdeveloped. There were no high schools in the region until the late 1950s. There are few roads and many villages are without electricity. In 2001 the impoverished state of Kurdistan was called to the attention of the UN General Assembly. In 2001, a more moderate Iranian government began allowing Kurdish radio and publishing. However, it remains illegal for Kurds to organise politically.

## Syria

In Syria, the French allowed Kurdish schools and publishing but when Syria got its independence in 1946, all these forms of expression were stopped. Kurdish newspapers went underground. In 1962 the Syrian

government evacuated Kurdish villages in the border areas and replaced Kurds with Arabs.

In 1968 the Syrian government withdrew citizenship from somewhere between 150,000 and 200,000 Kurds. Who lost citizenship was arbitrary – some members of the one family lost their citizenship, others did not. To this day these non-citizens are not eligible for subsidised food, education, health services or government jobs. They are not allowed to travel freely between towns as they have no identification cards. They are not allowed to own land, a house, or a car. Kurds in Syria are allowed to speak Kurdish, but they are not allowed to have Kurdish language schools, or celebrate Kurdish New Year with fire, or publish any political material. Many families have been divided by the border between Syria and Turkey.

## **Iraq**

The fires in Iraqi Kurdistan began in earnest when Britain used their air force to bomb civilians for the first time in 1923. But this did not stop the Kurdish struggle against the British and their imported King from Syria. By 1932, when the British granted Iraq its independence, Kurdish aspirations for self government were squashed, with the imprisonment of their leader Shaykh Mamoud.

It must be said, ironically, Iraqi Kurds have more legal and cultural rights than any Kurds, even those of the Soviet Union. In some areas, schools taught in Kurdish. There were Kurdish publications and Kurdish radio and television broadcasts – albeit under strict government censorship. However, Iraqi Kurds' political rights became the stumbling block, particularly after Iraq became a republic in 1958, under President Abdul Karim Qassim. By 1961, in response to Qassim's army slaughtering Kurdish civilians, the great Kurdish leader and hero, Mustafa Barzani, led the Kurds in a popular uprising against the Iraqi government.

In the early 1970s, this revolution was helped by finance from the USA and Israel, channelled through the Shah of Iran. However, the Algiers Agreement of 1975 between the Shah and Saddam Hussein, then vice president of Iraq, put a stop to the supply lines. The revolution came to an abrupt halt, but the bargain that was struck to stop it – Iranian rights to the waterway known as the Shatt al Arab – directly led to the bloody and expensive war waged between Iraq and Iran between 1980-88.

Following the Algiers Agreement of 1975, Saddam Hussein began a policy of genocide. The book contains first hand accounts of what it was like to watch one's village go up in flames, and fathers and brothers be taken away to prison. The springs were cemented, orchards cut down and people were moved to the south of Iraq or into well guarded collective towns. There was no employment in these towns unless one

was willing to spy or guard or become a soldier for the government. The only alternative was to become a freedom fighter. Consequently the Kurdish struggle continued throughout the 1980s.

Accounts by freedom fighters describe the hardships they suffered in the mountains, particularly during Saddam Hussein's *Al-Anfal* operations of 1988 when more than 200,000 Kurds lost their lives, and Saddam Hussein used his chemical weapons. Of these, around 182,000 people simply disappeared. Some believe there is evidence that many were used as guinea pigs for the regime's experiments in chemical and biological weapons. In *Snow, Fire and Honey*, a doctor describes cases he saw of soldiers and prisoners who were used in such experiments. Tens of thousands of people were taken south, some being buried alive in mass graves. In March 1988, chemical and biological weapons caused more than 5,000 citizens to be killed in the town of Halabja in just two hours. Some 250 villages and much of the countryside was bombed with chemicals causing humanitarian and ecological devastation to this day.

The accounts of being chemically bombed are harrowing, and the high rates of cancer, infertility and abnormal births continue. But at the time the world turned a blind eye. In fact the Arab world was told that *Al Anfal* was a propaganda stunt to discredit Saddam Hussein. But the *Al Anfal* operations are well documented, with much of the documentation having been taken to the USA after the 1991 uprising. Every Kurdish family in Iraq has stories of imprisonment, torture, disappearances and death yet no one has attempted to take Saddam Hussein to court for his and his commanders' crimes against humanity.

## **The current situation in Iraqi Kurdistan**

The Iraqi Kurds now find themselves in a very dangerous predicament. If the USA fulfils its threat to topple Saddam Hussein, the Iraqi Kurds are going to be main players. Their future is precarious.

The Iraqi Kurds benefit from the continuation of the no-fly zone in Northern Iraq. In 1992 they conducted democratic elections and formed a Kurdish parliament, which was not recognised by outside governments. Saddam Hussein promptly slapped a trade embargo on the region, which was already suffering from an international trade embargo on Iraq. Nevertheless, the two main Kurdish parties engaged in a genuine attempt at power sharing. However, because Saddam refused the "oil for food" program until 1997, between 1992 and 1997 Iraqi Kurds lived in desperate conditions. There was no employment – even people who had jobs often worked for no pay. People had to use what little remained of the forests after 30 years of war. The deforestation of Kurdistan has resulted in unprecedented drought. After so much war and removal of people from the countryside, the men only knew how to be soldiers, and neighbouring governments were

willing to supply arms. Consequently, a minor skirmish in 1994 plummeted the region into four years of civil war. A detailed account of how the Kurdish democratic experiment was nearly destroyed by this horrific war, from two opposing points of view, is presented in the book.

Surma Hamid describes how women became scapegoats of a traumatised society. Honour killing, punishment by fire, mutilation or household imprisonment occurred with unprecedented frequency. Between 1991 and 1997, women's groups set up to help women, were attacked, and some women working in these organisations had a *fatwah* or death sentence placed on them. Arab and Iranian supported Islamic fundamentalist groups burned down hairdresser shops and cinemas. Attempts at suicide also became more frequent.

In 1997 Saddam Hussein at last agreed to the UN "oil for food" program. Of all oil exported by Iraq – the second largest producer in the world – half would go to war repatriation and half to buy food, medicines and finance humanitarian projects. Of this half, Iraqi Kurdistan gets 13 per cent. Iraqi Kurdistan has never had so much money to develop their region. However there are big catches with this money. All food under this program must be imported which undermines local agriculture. But at least the people do not go hungry – unlike in Southern Iraq, where Saddam has been squandering the money on edifices and weapons. Worse than this, all projects must be approved by Baghdad, so many projects with long lasting benefits to the Kurdish region are refused.

In September 1998, the Washington Agreement brought peace to Iraqi Kurdistan. Since 1996, the Kurdish region had been divided into two areas of administration – each dominated by a major political party, but both are trying their best to provide food, employment, infrastructure, education and health to the people. Multi-party elections are regularly held for local councils. Satellite TV, radio, publications of all sorts and the internet allow freedom of expression. Iraqi Kurds are much better off than the Iraqis under Saddam Hussein's control, even though many industries cannot be established and electricity and water supplies remain intermittent, mainly because of the central government's refusal to approve the importation of necessary machinery and materials.

However, the Iraqi Kurdish state is still unrecognised by other governments and who knows what its future will be. The Iraqi Kurds' biggest fear is Saddam using chemical weapons against them. The central government maintains military bases with tanks, armoured personnel carriers, artillery and infantry units, close to cities under Kurdish administration. Even if Saddam Hussein goes, he may be replaced by another dictator. What is more, if Iraqi Kurds achieve their aim of a multi party democratic federation of Iraq, much like we have

in Australia, Turkey has threatened to invade. The last thing Turkey wants is a stable, democratic state of Kurdistan, as Turkey fears this will inspire its own growing Kurdish population.

The Iraqi Kurds desperately need support for their negotiations with the central government. They need support for a democracy and federal system. They want UN observer status and human rights people to come to Kurdistan to teach local lawyers, judges, police and army about human rights and to collect data for future legal cases. The three Iraqi Kurdish universities – two of which have been established since 1992 – want to form relationships with universities around the world, to develop collaborative research and joint projects in agriculture, land and water management, mining and industry. In fact, Australian expertise could play a vital role in the development of Kurdistan. But above all, Iraqi Kurds need political recognition of some form if they are to create a safe, democratic and prosperous society.

Meanwhile, because of all the uncertainty, many Kurds continue to be refugees. In Kurdish areas still under the central government's control, ethnic cleansing policies continue with the confiscation of land, displacement of Kurds and resettlement of Arabs in Kurdish areas. Many of the displaced people go to the no-fly zone, which is unable to provide adequate accommodation. Kurds are being forced to change their names to Arabic names. The central government does not recognise graduate degrees from Iraqi Kurdish universities and supports militant Islamic fundamentalism in the Iraqi-Kurdish enclave, which has recently resulted in atrocities being committed in the Halabja area. The government regularly sends saboteurs into the area, often targeting UN workers, and does not allow the importation of sophisticated land mine clearing equipment to clear 20 million landmines in the area.

In April 2002, Masoud Barzani and Jalal Talabani, the two main leaders in Iraqi Kurdistan, met in Germany with US officials from the Pentagon, State Department and CIA to discuss the sort of government that could replace Saddam Hussein's Ba'ath regime and what role Kurds could play in toppling Saddam. The Kurds have the largest army in Iraq outside Iraq's forces. Although it has not officially been spelt out, it is suspected that USA would use these fighters much like they did the Northern Alliance in Afghanistan. This is because it would be very hard to organise a military coup in the south. The Iraqi army has many divisions and the moving of any military unit requires numerous approvals from the military, the Ba'ath Party and a number of internal security departments. Even when this is granted, military units are not allowed to move with ammunition.

The dilemma for the Kurds is that they have already experienced betrayal by the USA. They fear Saddam's capability of using chemical and biological weapons against them, and they fear Turkey. Somehow the Kurds must convince the USA, Britain, Turkey, Iran, Syria, and

Iraq that it will be to everyone's best interests for Iraqi Kurds to be self governing, albeit within the nation state of Iraq. I can see at least two possibilities for this. Firstly the reforestation and land and water management of Kurdistan will benefit the river systems supplying Turkey, Iran, Iraq and Syria. And secondly, as the majority of Kurds are Sunni Muslim, while 65 per cent of Iraqi's are Shiah, the Kurds could offer a political balance of interests between the Sunni states and Shiah states of Iraq and Iran.

### **So why does an Australian Woman concern herself with all this?**

My interest in the Middle East dates back to 1980 when I rode a motorbike from London to India and back via Turkey, Iran and Pakistan. I was overwhelmed by the people's hospitality, kindness, warmth, curiosity and willingness to engage in discussion – about politics and religion – and their ability to laugh and dance and enjoy themselves. They were nothing like the way western media portray them. Until 1991, I had no knowledge of the Kurds. It was only when they rose up against Saddam Hussein after his defeat in Kuwait that I became aware of their existence. I was to learn a lot more in 1994 when I made three ABC radio documentaries on refugees from Iraqi Kurdistan. Their stories were so powerful I embarked on *Fire, Snow and Honey* in 1998.

The biggest questions I was asking myself were:

- How do people and a society cope, and maintain their humanity after so much pain and suffering?
- What is it like to be a freedom fighter?
- When, if ever, would I resort to armed struggle?

### **Evaluation of the Kurdish predicament**

To sum up – Kurds from all four nation states that rule them continue to suffer because of a lack of recognition of their situation and the lack of legal means to gain basic human rights. The value of present procedures in the UN and through international law – treaties, rapporteurs and the like – to address human rights issues is marred by firstly, a lack of enforcement mechanisms (there is no international police force or appropriate court of law for non state actors) and secondly that states often ignore adverse conclusions.

In the future, the greatest challenge will be for governments, corporations and lawyers to develop mechanisms to address social injustice and human rights abuses, and ultimately to establish mechanisms to prevent wars and genocide. It will be at the world's peril not to do so, because the world's global economy is as vulnerable as it is interconnected. People like the Kurds have diaspora on every continent and now they have access to the internet. Genocide can no

longer be hidden. Nor can Australians afford to think the Kurdish situation has nothing to do with them. Aus Care took over from US Care in Iraqi Kurdistan in 1992 and was the main aid organisation operating in the no-fly zone until 1995. The Australian Navy is now policing the International Trade Embargo against Iraq in the Gulf and Australian forces will be involved in any war with Iraq. Asylum seekers and refugees seeking refuge in Australia mainly come from Iraq, Iran and Afghanistan, while Iran and Iraq are significant trading partners.

As Madame Danielle Mitterrand writes in the foreword of *Fire, Snow and Honey* – “Finding a political and peaceful solution to the Kurdish problem now is necessary more than ever. We have a large population, with a very high birth rate, living in an area, which has the largest reserves of water in the region.” As a result, she argues, “I believe that the Kurdish problem outstripping its regional framework has become a global problem, best dealt with by the international community.”

Most Kurds dream of an independent state, although many Kurds and non-Kurds say this is unrealistic. But as I say in my introduction to the book, who knows which is harder to achieve – an independent Kurdistan or democracy in Turkey, Iraq, Iran and Syria? There is no question that the world is undergoing great changes. Present borders are still changing with many nation states having formed since the 1940s. Who could have predicted a European Union in World War II? It is anybody’s guess what the world will be like in 30 years time. It has to shape it.

## Note

---

*Fire, Snow and Honey* is available at the discounted price of \$53 (GST and postage included) from:

Fire, Snow and Honey  
46 William Street  
Redfern NSW 2016

Fax: (02) 9319 74728

email: [kurdconference@optusnet.com.au](mailto:kurdconference@optusnet.com.au)

# AUSTRALIA

## A TRADING NATION

**THE HON.  
MARK  
VAILE**

**MP**

Minister for Trade

**VENUE:**  
Clayton Utz  
Seminar Room,  
Level 25,  
1 O'Connell St,  
Sydney

**DATE:**  
Monday 18  
November  
2002



**TIME:**  
5.30 for 6.00 pm



**RSVP:**  
(02) 9252 3366



Photo – David Karonidis

*Alistair McAlpine*

Lord McAlpine is an avid collector and traveller as well as being a regular contributor to *The Spectator* and *The Mail on Sunday*. He has been actively involved in the Arts for many years and is the author of *Once a Jolly Swagman* (1994) and *Bagman to Swagman* (1999). He has been both Treasurer and Deputy Chairman of the British Conservative Party and has been the director of the family-run construction firm, Sir Robert McAlpine and Sons for more than 30 years. In Australia to promote his latest book, *Adventures of a Collector* (Allen & Unwin), Lord McAlpine addressed The Sydney Institute on Wednesday 15 May 2002.

# ON THE ROAD WITH

*LORD McALPINE*

**Alistair McAlpine**

For some years now the politics of Europe have tested the boredom threshold of the electorate. European politics have found their epicentre in Brussels. An unelected group of commissioners rule Europe. Members of the European Parliament seldom communicate with their vast electorates, spending a large amount of time on “fact finding” missions, they do little with the “facts” that they find.

In a number of cases a seat in the European Parliament is a sinecure for politicians whose aims are elsewhere. As a result of European lethargy national parliaments play a smaller part in the affairs of their nation states.

Europe prepares for the day that it becomes a super state. Its every thought, its every deed, takes this ambition into account. In Britain parliament is poorly attended. The opposition, since new Labour was elected, has varied from the lack lustre to the totally pathetic, with only occasional but unsustained bursts of intelligent activity. One might be tempted to believe that this would be an advantage to the New Labour government. Far from it, the prime ministerial style in Britain has become presidential. The cabinet, when they discuss a British issue, are first faced with a briefing on the actions that they are allowed to take under the various Treaties that tie Britain into the European Union. Legislation from Europe, far from debated in parliament, is largely passed in Britain by an order in council. The roles of prime minister, cabinet and parliament are, under these new circumstances, changing.

These changes are not fully explained to the electorate. Indeed the electorate is put to sleep by a combination of popularist politics and Euro propaganda. The electorate is learning not to think for itself and like Pavlov’s dog is being taught to react instead. The new presidential prime minister comes over to the electorate as a champion of British Rights in Europe, a man who can do a deal with the French, Germans and Italians. No one else matters much in Europe these days. This image of the prime minister is unlike most images, the truth. Europe is

about deals, deals between politicians. The electorate is patronised, the matters of policy in hand are too hard for them to understand, they are told. "Trust me" – this is the political watchword of today; the men in Brussels know best and if they don't our Prime Minister will put it right the electorate are told. The electorate feels disenfranchised and if people don't like what they hear it appears that they can do precious little about their doubts.

The railways in Britain seem in a desperate state; no one seems to do anything. Law and order appears in some areas not to exist. However, the Prime Minister has announced that law and order will be restored by the end of September – a statement of heroic courage or total political folly. It leaves the electorate bemused; they doubt that this will happen. Regardless of the Prime Minister's success or failure with law and order, the voters of Britain already are equipped with a sense of indecision; and when they vote, they opt for the devil they know.

Suddenly, however, only because we have not paid attention to politics for the past ten years, there is another devil on offer in Britain. An apprentice devil brought out of darkness in the flair of light that surrounds M. le Pen, the French extreme right wing candidate for the French presidency. For the first time in Britain two National Front Candidates have won seats in Burnley's local elections. To a lethargic and unthinking electorate, trained to respond to emotion rather than serious thought, the slogan of one of these National Front candidates appeals to their common sense; "We are expected to understand the ways of immigrants, they are not expected to understand the ways of the people who live in Burnley".

Dislike of immigration and the growth of the extreme right are now going hand in hand across in Europe. In France, M. le Pen won considerable support in the recent French presidential election. Not only the UK and France, however, have a formidable extreme right wing but also Norway with 15 per cent of the electorate, Denmark with 18 per cent, Belgium with 9 per cent, Italy with 9 per cent, Switzerland with 22 per cent, Austria with 30 per cent, Holland with 20 per cent – a figure that is likely to grow rather than wane with the assassination of Pym Fortuyn, the extreme leader.

Even in Spain there is a 1 per cent support for the far right. In Germany there is a considerable far right vote with a new far right party. While the far right vote at the moment is split between several other parties its strength is hard to identify. The reaction to the success of the extreme right in Britain by the government is to regulate immigration. To regulate immigration in an already overcrowded island seems not unreasonable, indeed it seems totally sensible. One measure before parliament, however, is that immigrants must speak English. Personally I find this objectionable for the simple reason that I have

lived in countries where I do not speak their languages and would be horrified if I was forced to learn them. For the British who are famous for imposing their language on others, to suggest such a thing of strangers coming to their country seems to be the height of hypocrisy. Immigration is a manifestation of liberty and while being forced to learn another language maybe sensible it denies the principles of liberty.

Now I have for some time spoken of Europe and you may perhaps wonder at the relevance of my words. Far be it from me to assume that what is good for gander is good for the goose, that what happens in Europe will happen in Australia.

There is however an extreme right wing movement in Australia. There is an Australia resistance to certain types of immigration. Let me for a moment be candid, people who object to immigration or even people who are uncertain about immigration come from all races and all classes, all levels of education, all sorts of backgrounds.

These people usually have no problem with affluent white immigration. However, they shudder at the thought of poor coloured immigration as they shudder at the thought of intelligent, entrepreneurial immigration from Asia. At the beginning of the twentieth century in Australia a small white population dominated a vast land and a native population. With time there has been a change in the balance between the white and native populations. Other migrants have come to Australia from all over the world and Australia has benefited from their coming.

Now a woman in Queensland has given voice to the baser instincts of the electorate, Pauline Hanson does not in herself count for a row of beans. The authorities' handling of Pauline Hanson has, however, given her and her views the oxygen of publicity. The government's use of Pauline Hanson's political initiative has been pusillanimous. The current government picked up the unease that Hanson raised, catching this idea in their minds they perceived it as an advantage. An advantage increased by an appearance off the Australian coastline of a boatload of refugees. Taking this advantage they ran with it and won an election by a considerable margin.

Very likely the Australian government would argue that they have dealt with racism, Hanson does not have a parliamentary base and her party is a minority. In this view they would be wrong, wrong because you defeat racism with intellectual argument not with overwhelming majority support. Germany in the 1930s is a prime example of this. A small minority used the natural grievances of the citizens to gain power in a democratic system, the Nazis were a democratically elected party. The consequences of their election were devastating. In the early years of the twentieth century the Bolsheviks rose to power.

Bolshevik means majority – in fact they were a small minority. The warning is in a thousand books on this subject.

The reasons why people can move from country to country must be protected, sensible controls must be humanely operated, and those who have changed country must not be the victims of political advantage. The political parties of Australia must provide a moral base for all Australians and those who would be Australian.

The examples of oppressed minorities are a thousand fold, but let me only draw attention to the irony that Afghan refugees have been refused succour in Australia, of all places, for it was Afghans and their camels who helped open up the deserts and far places of Australia, to build railways and service distant townships. Australia is an open space, it has no excuse to refuse immigration it has no real excuse to turn away refugees from terror. It's only reason, apart from political advantage for doing this, is that its politicians cannot imagine what a powerful and humanitarian country Australia could become.

Let us however set imagination aside for a moment and deal with reality. A recent government report shows, without doubt, Australia's birth rate record in 1999 is amongst the lowest – in comparison to Western nations it was 1.75. Immigration at its present level is not replacing those who die. Both immigration and the natural birth rate of Australia are barely able to keep the current population stable quite apart from the fact that people now live longer.

The result of this is a lack of young people coming into the work force and an aging population who are living longer coming out of it. The cost of this situation is forecast as some \$200 billion to the economy. To stabilise Australia's economy in the light of these figures, which the report believes will get worse, there is a need for considerably more immigration. Therefore, given the fact that an increase in immigration is likely to be forced on the nation anyway, why not have a real increase in population, combined with the extending of people's horizons in terms of where they live in Australia. This would, in the long term, be a thoroughly good thing for Australia, increasing her wealth and her influence in the world.

Paying a bonus for having babies will not do this trick. The opening up of Australia's vast lost areas, using taxation advantages and privatised infrastructure, along with intelligent immigration on a large scale will undoubtedly give the old people of Australia a better deal than they are likely to get under the present arrangements.

For the first time it seems to have been made clear that Australia actually needs a new working population to support the population who have worked and now seek a leisurely retirement. If a government both enlightened enough, and brave enough to grasp this truth appears, they had best first set about reviving the electorate's interest in elections, engaging them in the debate of politics and cease appealing to their

support by appeasing their baser instincts and offering them bribes. A lethargic, unthinking electorate will otherwise neither understand nor approve of the actions that need to be taken. The situations in Europe both past and present are warnings of what can happen and what might well happen again.



*Michael Sexton*



*Robert Sutter*



Photo – David Karonidis

*Joel Shin*

In a discussion of the US–Australian relationship from Vietnam to the current war on terror, The Sydney Institute brought together scholars from both sides of the Pacific on Tuesday 28 May 2002. Joel L Shin, an Adviser to George W Bush during the 2000 Presidential campaign, is also a specialist in international trade matters, government and national defence. Michael Sexton SC is the New South Wales Solicitor General and also the author of several books, including his most recent – *War for the Asking: How Australia Invited Itself to Vietnam* (New Holland 2002). Professor Robert Sutter is a Visiting Professor in the School of Foreign Service at Georgetown University and also worked for thirty years with the US Government as a specialist in Asian and Pacific Affairs and US foreign policy.

# THE UNITED STATES

---

## *AND FOREIGN AID AFTER 11 SEPTEMBER*

**Joel Shin**

My subject this evening is the role of foreign aid in U.S. foreign policy, particularly in the context of the world after 11 September. I would like to approach this subject by addressing what has become a common criticism of America's foreign policy – namely, that it is unilateral. This criticism ignores a number of groundbreaking developments over the past year that have hinged upon the participation of the United States and that are profoundly multilateral in character, such as the recent Nato-Russia agreement, increasing international coordination in the search for peace in the Middle East, and the creation of a global fund to combat HIV/aids and other infectious diseases. However, the initiative with perhaps the greatest potential for advancing international cooperation relates to foreign aid.

In March 2002, President George W. Bush announced a new proposal for foreign aid – a proposal that includes an additional \$10 billion in assistance for developing nations that have adopted political and economic reforms. The president's New Compact for Development responds to the need for greater funding to help the poorest nations achieve the most basic health standards and other development goals, as embodied by the U.N.'s Millennium Declaration. Those are intrinsically worthy aims, made increasingly realistic by the availability of cost-effective preventive health measures, such as vaccines.

But President Bush's initiative also has significant extrinsic value insofar as it defines the fight against global poverty as an important front in the war on terrorism. Many in the development community – oftentimes liberals – have contended that poverty breeds terrorism. Critics of this argument in the United States – many of them conservatives – have pointed out that most of the 11 September hijackers were from Saudi Arabia – hardly a poor country. Squaring the circle in a way that may have seemed surprising for a conservative, President Bush judged that:

“Poverty doesn’t cause terrorism. Being poor doesn’t make you a murderer. Most of the plotters of September 11th were raised in comfort. Yet persistent poverty and oppression can lead to hopelessness and despair. And when governments fail to meet the most basic needs of their people, these failed states can become havens for terror.”

Now, to return to the issue of unilateralism, the president’s new foreign aid initiative is also important insofar as it is likely to promote political unity among the United States and its friends and allies – by emphasizing an additional basis for international cooperation, beyond eradicating terrorism. It should help further to rally the worldwide coalition that the president has so skillfully assembled and maintained since 11 September – by clarifying what we are fighting for as much as what we are fighting against.

In 1960 – during the height of the Cold War, as the Soviet Union appeared to be winning hearts and minds in the developing world – the American essayist E. B. White observed:

“Must we in the West leave the marching to our opponent? I hope not. Not until free men get up in the morning with the feeling that they, too, are on the march will the danger to Western society begin to subside.”

White meant “march” in a figurative sense – arguing for the need to supplement military containment of the Soviet threat with a political destination that would lead to more unity in the West and greater order in the international system. A generation later – in the aftermath of 11 September, when freedom’s adversary is not totalitarianism but terrorism with a global reach – White’s proposition is equally valid.

Militarily, the United States and its allies, such as Australia, have been on the march since they began to dispense justice to al Qaeda and the Taliban. But through his new foreign aid proposal, President Bush has made clear that America and the coalition it leads are on the march politically as well.

It is worth remembering that while the coalition is an instrument to an end – combating terrorism – it is also valuable in and of itself. Looking back on the Cold War, the grand prize was as much a political revolution in the international system – the emergence of a Europe whole, free, and secure – as it was the liquidation of the Soviet and Warsaw Pact conventional threat. In the present era, reinforcing the habit of cooperation among free nations through a common cause – to promote what President Bush has called “the permanent hopes of humanity” – would be its own reward.

It is not the usual historical course for a nation’s leadership to define the shape of a post-war world a few months after a war’s commencement. To put what President Bush has proposed into perspective, it is as if Franklin Roosevelt had announced elements of the Marshall Plan after the Battle of the Coral Sea in May 1942. That

should provide no small comfort to the America and its allies, for there can be no stronger evidence of a commander-in-chief's confidence about ultimate victory on the battlefield than that he has begun to address how to reinforce that outcome in the politics among nations.

Over time, President Bush's renewed commitment to developing nations should help to assuage fears about American unilateralism. Will it satisfy the most ardent advocates of increased foreign aid? That remains to be seen. The president has tasked the state and treasury departments with developing criteria for measuring progress. Their efforts to implement his intentions will be crucial to the success of the administration's new development strategy.

But it should already be clear that President Bush has taken an important first step by providing a vision of the way to make globalization work for everyone. In doing so, he has further reinvigorated the debate about foreign aid.

Because of the economic and geopolitical importance of the Asia-Pacific region – and Australia's leadership role in it – there is much that Australia can bring to the increasingly rich debate about foreign aid. True, the development community is continuing to focus on Africa – and justifiably so, given that that is where some of the greatest suffering is occurring, especially as a result of the HIV/Aids pandemic.

Yet clearly there is much work that needs to be done in the Asia-Pacific region, as well. China, for example, does not currently face the pandemic levels of HIV infection that Africa does. But it could be on the cusp of an epidemic, with incalculable consequences. Moreover, what Australia has done – and continues to do – in East Timor provides important lessons to the international community about the best use of foreign aid and proper design and implementation of development strategies. The world will continue to pay keen attention to both East Timor and Afghanistan as gauges of how Western nations can best allocate foreign aid and ensure that it is used effectively and efficiently.

# AUSTRALIAN-US

## *RELATIONS AND THE SHADOW OF VIETNAM*

**Michael Sexton**

The Vietnam War has cast a long shadow over American foreign policy and, if only for that reason, still has significance for Australia, given the importance of its relationship with the United States.

Before looking at some of the contemporary issues in the Australian-American relationship, however, it may be useful to consider some of the myths that have grown up about Australia's involvement in Vietnam. Despite the fact that Australia's real involvement in Vietnam started only a little over 40 years ago and concluded just over 30 years ago, some of these myths seemed to have assumed a high degree of potency.

### **Myth No. 1**

The Australian Government was coerced into its Vietnam commitment by the United States. The facts are that in late 1964 and early 1965 the Australian Government pressed the American administration to escalate the conflict of Vietnam and to accept an offer of Australian combat troops. At this stage, shortly after the re-election of Lyndon Johnson as President in November, 1964, the Americans had not committed combat troops as such to South Vietnam and were debating in Washington the question of large-scale bombing of North Vietnam.

The Australian Government argued for the commencement of bombing but also actively sought an opportunity to send combat troops. It is important to note that the failure of military capacity in Vietnam is not a judgment of hindsight. There were a number of persons inside the Johnson administration, including Under Secretary of State, George Ball, who pointed out graphically what would happen during the course of the debate within the administration as to the choices in Vietnam. In 1961 Charles de Gaulle had made the same point to President Kennedy in the light of the French experience from the late 1940s and the early 1950s.

## **Myth No. 2**

The Australian community did not support the commitment of troops to Vietnam or the use of conscription to maintain that commitment. What opinion polls consistently indicated in the years following the decision of April, 1965, was that approximately two-thirds of the community supported these decisions and approximately one-third opposed them. It should be pointed out that an opposition level of one person in three was without precedent in Australian history for a military commitment by the nation. But it was obviously not a majority and in 1966 the margin of victory for the government, then led by Harold Holt, in the election for the House of Representatives was the largest for any party since Federation. This was an election in which Vietnam was a central issue and the result speaks for itself. It was not until the end of the 1960s, when it became clear that the conflict in Vietnam could not be resolved in a short period of time and, moreover, was going badly for the Americans and their allies, that polls indicated fading support for the war and Australia's involvement in it.

## **Myth No. 3**

The Labor Party was unanimously opposed to Australian participation in the war. This myth was the subject of analysis some years ago by Kim Beazley in his days as an academic before entering politics. Beazley noted that after the 1966 election debacle a number of Labor's strategists, including the new leader, Gough Whitlam, took the view that it would be electoral suicide to take the Vietnam issue head-on. They concentrated on domestic questions and seldom referred to the war. When Dr Cairns led moratorium marches, neither Whitlam nor most members of the Shadow Cabinet attended. Labor did not put Vietnam forward as a central issue of the 1969 campaign in which it gained a 7 per cent swing and 17 seats in the House of Representatives, almost toppling the Gorton Government.

## **Myth No. 4**

Australian universities in the late 1960s were hotbeds of radicalism and united in their opposition to conscription and the commitment of troops to Vietnam. It is probably true that there was a higher proportion of staff and students in universities opposed to the war than in the Australian population overall. But this view was far from universal. The existence of active Liberal Clubs on every campus at this time indicates that universities remained to a great extent a reflection of the general community. The number of radical activists was very small, although some of these displayed considerable organisational skill and appreciated that Vietnam provided them with one issue with which they could appeal to a wider audience.

### **Myth No. 5**

Opposition to the war was a factor in the election of the Whitlam Government in 1972. In fact all Australian troops had been withdrawn from Vietnam by the end of 1971 and the war was not one of the issues on which the 1972 campaign was fought. As it happened, Whitlam did not win a crushing victory but came to office with a margin of nine seats in the House of Representatives. This narrow win was achieved against a government that had been in office for 23 years and was led by a politician – Sir William McMahon – who had become a subject of public ridicule.

### **Myth No. 6**

Australian soldiers who went to Vietnam were ostracised on their return home. As it happened, most opponents of the war were careful, if only for political reasons, to avoid any criticism of the soldiers themselves, as opposed to the government which had made the decision to send the troops. The level of community support for the government's decision up until the late 1960s would hardly support the suggestion that veterans of the war were subjected to a campaign of denigration. It is true that over the last 20 years the war has become an unpopular memory and those who fought in it may well feel they have been treated differently from veterans of earlier wars. The reality is that Vietnam will never be considered a just cause in the same way as World War II and this inevitably affects the community's attitude towards veterans of Vietnam and the veterans' own view of themselves.

### **Australia and the US three decades on**

Nearly three decades on from the fall of Saigon, what is the current context of the Australian-American relationship? Perhaps the most dramatic change in international relations in the post-Vietnam period, was the replacement of the relatively uncomplicated system of Cold War alliances with a more complex series of shifting relationships. The start of this new era was probably initiated by President Nixon's visit to China in 1972 which marked the effective return to the world's political community of its most populous nation. Then followed in the 1980s the disintegration of the Soviet block in Eastern Europe and, ultimately, the division of the Soviet Union itself into a series of disparate nation states. These entities are obviously still very much within the sphere of influence of Russia but that country's own political and economic affairs are far from stable.

The threat of a nuclear exchange between superpowers has been largely replaced by the prospect of regional conflict, particularly in the Balkans, Central Asia and parts of Africa. One recurring problem is the issue of self-determination. The NATO bombing campaign against Serbia was essentially designed to halt the oppression of ethnic

Albanians in the Serbian province of Kosovo. Serbia was, of course, a surviving segment of the dismembered Yugoslavia but, taken by itself, Kosovo was an area where Serbs were in a minority. The Albanians in Kosovo sought, and still seek, an independent state (or possibly amalgamation with Albania). Questions of secession have given rise to numerous conflicts in the course of history. Often other nations have stood back from them, as Europe did in the US Civil War when the Confederacy wished to secede in the 1860s. More recently there was no attempt from outside to interfere with the Russian assault on Chechnya. Nor did Britain's concern for events in Kosovo extend to the Unionist majority in Northern Ireland who were, paradoxically, forced to adopt a course that would ultimately take them out of the United Kingdom. It is this kind of conflict, however, that is likely to pose some of the most difficult questions for the international community in the immediate future.

The conflict over Kosovo also illustrates an important change in Australia's relationship with the United States since the Vietnam era. To a large extent the decision to become involved in Vietnam on Australia's part reflected the long-held view by its foreign policy-makers of its role as a satellite to a powerful protector. But the whole purpose of the bombing campaign against Serbia was to avoid the commitment of ground troops and this was a particularly strong view in Washington. There can be little doubt that Australia will continue to have an important relationship with the United States for the foreseeable future but it is clear that this relationship does not – and cannot – guarantee American military intervention in the case of regional conflict involving Australia. Even if the Executive and the Congress in Washington had a different view on the exercise of American power, neither is immune to domestic political opinion. Vietnam itself is a sufficiently sharp memory to raise doubts about any proposal to send significant combat forces outside the United States.

These political realities are not altered by the ANZUS Treaty which continues to be a formal reflection of the close political ties between Australia and the United States. But its carefully worded proposal for mutual action in the event of an attack on either party in the Pacific area would inevitably be subject to any limitations imposed by the domestic political process in Washington. That said, however, the relationship has been an enduring one and there are substantial economic as well as political links. The United States is:

- Australia's second largest export market;
- the largest source of imports into Australia;
- the largest source of investment funds;
- the largest destination for Australian investment abroad.

This aspect of Australian foreign policy is essentially a bi-partisan one in a way that would have seemed impossible in the 1950s and 1960s

when the ruling Liberal Party constantly used the American alliance as a means of destabilising the Labor Party.

It will be necessary, of course, for Australia – and other American allies – to take account of some of the changes in American priorities following the destruction of the World Trade Centre and the attack on the Pentagon on 11 September 2001. The Bush Administration's campaign against international terrorism has received strong support from the Australian government but it is a campaign against an elusive enemy and one that will inevitably encounter difficulties and frustrations. It has taken some time for policy-makers in Washington to appreciate that a number of Islamic regimes – and numerous Islamic groups based in the Middle East and Central Asia – have as their clear objective the destruction of the United States in particular and the West in general. This may seem an ambitious aim but any increased availability of biological, chemical and nuclear weapons would make it far from fanciful.

The most tangible aspect of the American alliance is the presence in Australia of a number of surveillance stations that supply important information to United States defence forces. The most significant of these is located at Pine Gap – near Alice Springs. Its major function is to receive information from and transmit instructions to American satellites. In this way the satellites can provide an advance warning of the launching of a nuclear missile against the United States. They also take photographs of military installations and missile launching sites in different parts of the world and intercept a wide range of telephone and radio communications. Once this information is received by the base station, it is relayed to defence centres in the United States, including CIA headquarters at Langley, Virginia and the National Security Agency at Fort Meade Maryland.

Pine Gap is now the only establishment strictly described as a joint facility, in the sense that it is operated jointly by the CIA and, on the Australian side, by the Defence Signals Directorate. North West Cape – the subject of so much controversy in the 1960s – became a sole Australian facility in 1999, although as a radio relay station. It passes communications between Australian and US command centres and their respective ships and submarines in the Indian Ocean and the Western Pacific. Other communications stations that provide information that is used by the American defence system are Kojarena – near Geraldton – which intercepts satellite traffic and Shoal Bay, which monitors telephone conversations across the South East Asian region.

One potential area of disagreement in the immediate future between the United States and many of its allies is the proposal by the Bush administration to proceed with the development of a national missile defence system. Apart from considerations as to cost and

workability, this would entail the need to amend or abandon the 1972 Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty which was based on the premise that a nuclear exchange between the United States and what was then the Soviet Union was less likely if neither side had any real protection against such an attack. Some allies have also expressed concern that the proposal may also undermine the basis of the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty under which states with nuclear weapons, including the United States, agreed to work towards their elimination and states without these weapons agreed never to acquire them. Since that treaty was signed in 1968, the only apparent additions to the nuclear club have been Israel, India and Pakistan (none of whom signed the treaty).

This debate raises the question of Australia's own policies in the area of defence. In many ways Australia's choices are sharply limited. Realistically an independent defence capability may well be impractical for a country of Australia's size and population, given the cost of meeting such an objective. And it might be argued that this kind of capability is unnecessary in view of the absence of any tangible threat from other nations in the region. This is the view that has been taken by recent New Zealand governments and maintained despite New Zealand's effective exclusion from ANZUS since 1985. In the case of Australia, however, both major parties – and its American ally – would support the existence of defence forces that can play at least a limited role in the region.

Two countries in the region which have encountered increasing instability over recent years are Fiji and Papua New Guinea. The elected government of Fiji has been removed by military coups twice in the last 15 years – in 1987 and 2000. In a nation divided almost evenly between the Indian and Fijian communities but with little integration between them, the long-term prospects for power-sharing between these groups do not appear promising. Australia has expressed its disapproval of the events of 1987 and 2000 but stopped short of economic sanctions, on the basis that they would be unlikely to change the political situation and have their chief impact on the general population. Elections in 2001 restored a parliamentary system of government but there appears to be no obvious solution to Fiji's political and economic divisions.

In the case of Papua New Guinea, the breakdown of a number of traditional political alignments has led to a weaker central government and sometimes serious problems of law and order. In addition to the protection of what is substantial Australian investment in Papua New Guinea, all Australian governments have taken a keen interest in its political stability, while recognising that their influence is ultimately limited by domestic political considerations in Port Moresby.

Slightly further afield lies Canberra's greatest pre-occupation in the area of foreign policy from the 1960s to the 1990s – Indonesia.

During the first half of the 1960s, as Indonesia pursued its policy of confrontation with Malaysia, Australia regarded this northern neighbour with great concern. After the military took power in 1965 – and killed more than half a million political opponents – successive governments in Canberra spent the next 30 years trying desperately to ingratiate themselves with Jakarta. One consequence of this policy – which became an article of faith in the Department of Foreign Affairs – was the encouragement of Indonesia in its takeover of East Timor in 1975. This in turn led to more than two decades of repression and bloodshed until the collapse of the Soeharto regime in 1998 finally led to East Timor's emergence as an independent nation. Since then, the geographic and ethnic diversities that have always raised a question as to Indonesia's political stability have caused increasing problems for all governments in Jakarta.

The dominant political force in Asia will, of course, continue to be China. Australia has had generally cordial relations with China since its readmission to the international community in the mid 1970s. The Chinese have little tolerance for criticism of their domestic affairs by foreign governments or international organisations and they will no doubt continue to reject allegations of suppression of political dissent and human rights violations. It is something of an irony that Australian governments, whose record in these areas is very good by any standards, have been much more tolerant of criticism, particularly from United Nations bodies that are largely comprised of countries with appalling records on the same subjects.

This is not to say, of course, that there is not a role for Australia in UN activities. One of the most important of these activities in recent years has been the international peace-keeping role, highlighted in the Gulf War against Iraq in 1991. It is true that this exercise was largely dependent on American military and economic resources but its political effectiveness depended to a large extent on its being a UN operation. Australia, of course, took the lead role in the UN force that supervised the transition to independence in East Timor.

Some of the strengths and weaknesses of the UN were demonstrated by the operations of its Special Commission (UNSCOM) to investigate the manufacture and stock-piling of nuclear, biological and chemical weapons in Iraq during the second half of the 1990s. UNSCOM – headed for much of this time by Australia's Richard Butler – destroyed considerable quantities of biological and chemical weapons despite the fact that the Iraqis normally had advanced warning of inspections. But UNSCOM was finally undermined by UN bureaucrats, including Secretary-General Kofi Annan, in order to placate various UN members and was ultimately dissolved by the Security Council in 1998.

Over the last 50 years the United States has been the most important single factor in Australian foreign policy and that will continue to be so in the foreseeable future. After the issue of protecting its own homeland against terrorist actions, the big question for the United States in the immediate future is to what extent it intervenes in regional conflicts – like Bosnia or Kosovo – where civilian lives are threatened by civil conflict. Obviously any rational person would like to halt such conflicts but one of the costs for any intervenor may be significant loss of life on the part of its own forces. America's long-standing allies – including Australia – have a real role to play in contributing to the debate on this profound moral and political question.

# US-ASIA PACIFIC

## *RELATIONS – AN UPDATE*

**Robert Sutter**

It's a great pleasure for me to be here and I want to thank the Sydney Institute for inviting me. My focus is going to be on change. And what might be useful to add to the very illuminating presentations up to this point, is a perspective on changes that have taken place in US policy toward Asia and the Pacific as a result of recent developments in the United States. Basically there are two developments I would like to focus on. One has to do with the Bush Administration and the other is the changes that took place after 11 September and how significant they have been.

The Bush administration came to power and caused a lot of controversy in many quarters in the United States. Even in Australia, some people might have been very worried about what the "axis of evil" meant for North Korea, or the policy toward China with the attitude "we'll do whatever it takes to defend Taiwan". Then there was ballistic missile defence. In the United States, too, there's controversy, not with Washington's focus on terrorism, but at times when we deal with East Asia and the Pacific.

But I'm pretty optimistic that the United States is going to manage this situation pretty well. The Bush Administration is really an improvement overall and certainly is an improvement in the American posture towards Asia and the Pacific. So I'd like to share with you the reasons I think that's the case. And as I look at the changes after 11 September bear in mind that this is coming from a Democrat – I vote Democrat in the United States. But I had the chance to work pretty closely with the people in the Clinton Administration who dealt with the Asia Pacific as well as the people in the Bush Administration. And they're both very good people. For all that, I believe that the Bush Administration has improved the situation to some degree. And this is why I think so.

First there's an underlying element here that makes me optimistic, which I think is very important. Asia and the Pacific very much wants the United States to remain around Asia and the Pacific.

They want the US security presence, for the most part. China maybe is an exception, but the others want the United States to stick around, from a security point of view. The United States, by far, is the economic partner of choice, and in both of these regards the United States is compatible with Asia and the Pacific – we want to stick around, from a security point of view, in Asia and the Pacific. What's more, there's no dissent on this in the United States in post-Cold War period. The United States wants to keep its markets open and to move forward in economic interaction with all of East Asia and the Pacific. And all these fundamentals are very important to keep in mind. They are a glue that keeps the United States and the region very close together.

When the Bush Administration came on board, the top-level people were very seasoned individuals. One thing about Colin Powell is that he doesn't have to prove himself to anybody. He's a very accomplished individual. I once had to brief him on Asia, and I came back to the car and was going back to the office and the driver said what did you think? I said, "I think I've met the guy who should be the President of the United States." Many in the Bush team are very impressive people. They look at issues on the basis of issues. They don't look at issues on the basis of how can they might advance themselves politically, or how can they accomplish something. This comes into play when you make foreign policy in a variety of settings, in US politics and in other politics.

So that level of leadership, is good. Below that you have a lot of expertise on Asia and Pacific – the deputy level people are also very good. And with this, the administration has shifted its approach from the emphasis on global trends and globalisation, of the Clinton Administration, to national power. They are much more focused on national power: states, governments and power are very important. They have gone about making sure the United States is powerful by keeping US economic and military power strong, by emphasising the relationship with allies and giving them top priority in the region, particularly with Japan, but also with South Korea and Australia getting very top billing from the administration's point of view. With this, they develop ties pretty adroitly with other power centres. I'm talking about the improvement of US relations with India. This was underway well before 11 September. And the improvement of relations with Russia, which was also underway very much before 11 September. This is a very important matrix through which you can look at the region.

Now, this leaves out China. How do you deal with China in this type of situation? Well they were wary of China. They didn't see China necessarily as a strategic competitor – that's gotten way too much emphasis in the US media, but they were not sure where China was going to wind up. And so they felt, on the one hand, that they wanted

to cooperate with China on economics and other issues, without question, but had reservations at China's building up military forces, particularly in the Taiwan area and designed to intimidate Taiwan. These are also designed to attack US forces if US forces enter. China is the only large power in the world today building a military force that's directed against the United States. This is a fact that American policy-makers have to deal with. And so, the Bush Administration is wary of China.

But the upside here is in the change on Japan. This administration gives Japan top-priority. They have encouraged a closer alliance relationship; they follow the guidelines of a so-called Nye/Armitage Report which came out in the year 2000. Japan isn't going to reform rapidly economically, but the US is not so critical of Japan. We are working with Japan, encouraging them and working to develop a closer security relationship.

With China, while the Bush Administration is unsure of China, it's not hostile to China. They want to cooperate with the PRC, but they're concerned about the military differences we have with China. So to deal with it the idea is to build up American power in the region and strongly deter the PRC regarding the use of force against Taiwan. The goal here is to make the PRC understand that the use of force is not an option that will work for them. In this China's importance has been downgraded. The Clinton Administration had difficulties here. They had to move their relationship with China forward and get PNTR through to the Congress. For a variety of reasons they didn't want instability or swings in the US-China relationship. To avoid that, they had to show Americans that they were making progress in their relationship with China. As a result, in the last years of the administration, they were constantly negotiating with the Chinese.

President Bush, on the other hand, would like that progress in relations with China, but he doesn't have to have it, he doesn't need it for his political base, which in the congress and the media is basically wary or sceptical of China. Clinton was out in front of the country to a considerable degree in his China policy. Bush, in this context, doesn't ask China for anything. He doesn't go to China and say we want this, we want that because then the Chinese come back and say we want this, we want that, we want the other thing – and maybe they want Taiwan. That would be a big problem for the United States. So we've avoided that problem by not asking them for anything. They are at present being placed on a lower level of diplomatic priority while Japan always gets top billing, then South Korea, then Australia and other allies get better billing.

These days Russia is a friend but China is not a friend of the United States. India has a much closer relationship. And the understanding is that China seems to know that (a) the US recognises

it has a lot more power than China and (b) the US recognises that if the relationship somehow sours because China downgrades the relationship, that's acceptable to the United States. They can live with that, it's not a disaster. It would have been a disaster for Clinton but it's not a disaster for Bush. So it's up to the Chinese whether the relationship improves. And you know it's working, because the Chinese have toned down their rhetoric against the United States. The Chinese are bending over backwards to be nice to the United States. When Clinton was in power, there were negotiations while the Chinese called the US hegemonists all the time. They're not calling us hegemonists anymore. They were trying to push us out of East Asia, and now they're trying to finesse that issue.

In this, the Bush Administration has been very effective. They give the Chinese lots of respect but they don't change on substantive issues. We have high level meetings, we have back and forth, and Jiang Zemin is going to come to the United States in the fall and he's going to Crawford. Crawford is George Bush's ranch. All the senior leaders go to Crawford. I understand John Howard hasn't been to Crawford. He may be upset about that.

Then there's Korea – the axis of evil, that is not working so well, because you basically have a fundamental competition. The Bush Administration is tougher on the North Koreans. At the same time, they want to maintain a good relationship with the South which has the Sunshine policy toward the North Koreans and it's very hard to put the two together. After 11 September, most people aren't paying much attention to Korea and therefore you can sort of get away with a contradictory policy. But every time Bush meets with Kim Dae-jung it gets awkward, because on the one hand he has to say that the North Koreans are evil while on the other hand he has to say he supports Kim Dae-jung and his Sunshine policy.

Initially the administration was interested in South-East Asia, but recognised what could happen there. They recognised that the political, economic and military situation in South-East Asia is pretty unstable. The prospects for a fruitful interaction between the United States and the region are not terribly good. So they wanted to pay attention to the region but there wasn't a lot of hope that the United States would make great gains there. After 11 September the region has become a secondary focus for US interests. What 11 September did was still the domestic debate in the United States over issues in East Asia. One of the big problems for the United States in the post-Cold War period in managing its relations in East Asia is that it's constantly influenced by domestic politics in the United States. This is particularly so in key areas such as China and North Korea, as well as with single-issue areas like East Timor, Burma and Cambodia. After 11 September it has been difficult for special interests to push through the agenda and force US

policy to move and give any new direction. As a result, South-East Asia has a higher profile even if US advances in South-East Asian interests have only marginally increased as a result of the war on terrorism.

So why am I cautiously optimistic? First of all there is that common ground I talked about in the beginning of the talk, that economic and security presence. And second, US power is preeminent. The United States has never looked so powerful in East Asia in my experience. We have gone through various cycles where Americans and others have said the US is on the decline, the US is on the way out. But look at the US today – amazing power it seems to me. Thirdly, East-Asian powers, by and large, even rising ones, are domestically focused. Look at China – its agenda is focused internally. It's the same for Japan. These countries have a lot to do and are not in any position to confront the United States and they don't want to confront the United States if they can avoid it.

The East Asian powers are manoeuvring; there's a lot of hedging going on and uncertainty in the region. And sometimes they link up in various ways, but it's very unlikely they'll link up in a way that will be fundamentally at odds with US interests. Japan and China are too wary of one another to allow it to happen.

The final point I would make is that the difficulties that the US had in its policy toward East Asia in the post Cold-War came from domestic politics in the United States – the difficulty over China policy, the difficulty with North Korea policy. But it's getting better in the United States now after 11 September. Clearly the Clinton policy, at the end of its administration toward China, was a lot better than at the beginning of his administration, because Clinton tried to control domestic forces that were pushing the United States to be tougher on China in a variety of ways. Those forces are still there, but the administration is in a better position to control them, and 11 September helps because it makes the American people realise that they have more fundamental interests, that these domestic forces are really not that important and shouldn't be followed.

## GUEST SPEAKERS AT THE SYDNEY INSTITUTE MARCH 2002 – MAY 2002

**Kenneth De Voskin** (Partner, PricewaterhouseCoopers, China)

*The New China in Asia and the World*

**Michael Ondaatje** (author *Anil's Ghost* and *The English Patient*)

**Thomas Keneally** (author *Schindler's Ark* and *American Scoundrel*)

**Andrea Stretton** (Arts presenter)

*Running in The Family – Novels Films and Nations*

**Sir William Deane AC KBE**

*Launch of "The Killing of Sister McCormack"*

**Mike Richards** (Author, *The Hanged Man* [Scribe 2002])

*Ronald Ryan & Ned Kelly*

**Ian Hancock** (Author *Sir John Gorton: He Did It His Way* [Hodder 2002])

**Ainsley Gotto** (Former Principal Private Secretary to Prime Minister John Gorton)

*John Gorton – He Did it His Way*

**Tahmeena Faryal** (Revolutionary Association of the Women of Afghanistan)

*Human Rights and the Women of Afghanistan*

**Anna Funder** (Author, *Stasiland* [Text 2002])

*Stasiland: Writing a World Gone Wrong*

**The Hon Brendan Nelson MP** (Minister for Education, Science and Training)

*The Vision of education – Higher Education Reform*

**Nicola Roxon MP** (Shadow Minister for Children and Youth)

**Christopher Pyne MP** (Member for Sturt)

*Politics and the Young*

**Neil McDonald** (Author & historian)

*Getting It Right – Damien Parer, Osmar White & Chester Wilmot on The Kokoda Track*

**The Hon Clare Martin** (Chief Minister, Northern Territory)

*Northern Gateway – NT Finds the Future*

**HE Susan Boyd** (Australian High Commissioner, Fiji)

*Fiji – Social and Political Upheaval*

**Dr Judith Keene** (Author, *Fighting For Franco* [NY Continuum 2001])

*Fighting For Franco – In The Spanish Civil War*

**Gina Lennox** (Author, *Fire Snow and Honey – Voices from Kurdistan*

[Halstead Press 2001])

*Fire Snow and Honey – Voices from Kurdistan*

**Lord McAlpine** (Author, *Adventures of a Collector* [Allen & Unwin 2002])

*On The Road With Lord McAlpine*

**Joel L Shin** (Adviser to George W Bush, 2000 Presidential campaign)

**Michael Sexton SC** (NSW Solicitor General & author,

*War for the Asking – How Australia Invited Itself To Vietnam* [New Holland 2002])

**Professor Robert Sutter** (Visiting Professor, School of Foreign Service,

Georgetown University)

*Australia-US Relations: From Vietnam to George W Bush*



**ripe**  
the NEW media for the NEW age

<http://www.ripepublications.com.au>

# The new media for the new age



**Ripe** is media dedicated to the baby boomers and retirees, dealing with issues relevant to the over 40s.

Become a Member of the **Ripe Website** for free and you will have access to online information and updates on a variety of exciting and relevant issues such as travel, leisure interests, sexuality, films, gossip, health, diet, finance and breakthrough technologies.

<http://www.ripepublications.com.au>

**Ripe** Members will have free access to event discounts, online shopping and the latest news!

Look out for **Ripe Super Events** where some of the most distinguished and con-

troversial celebrities over of the over 40s era will get up close and personal. Barbara Eden, Joan Collins and

Suzanne Somers are the first of a series of **Ripe** luncheons and VIP events.

**Ripe Expos** and **Conferences** relay the latest on exciting topics with a unique focus on the needs and concerns of the over 40s. Look out for the **Ripe Plastic Surgery Expo** to be held mid 2002. Industry experts will relay the most current facts and procedures and outline the risks and myths of plastic surgery options.

For free **Ripe** membership log on to the Member's section of the **Ripe** website

<http://www.ripepublications.com.au>



Michelle Downes,  
Consulting Director

If you don't have Internet access and you would love to know more about Ripe Super Events and Expos, please contact: Maryanne O'Sullivan, Content Editor  
Main Phone: (02) 9955 6299, Fax Line: (02) 9957 1512  
[ripe@charlton.com.au](mailto:ripe@charlton.com.au)

# AUSTRALIA'S FIRST SUCCESSFUL MONETARY TRANSACTION GAVE US A GOOD NAME

Nearly 200 years ago Governor Lachlan Macquarie picked up a Spanish silver dollar, the stable international currency of the day, and saw unlimited possibilities for a new Australian economy.

By punching out the centre of that coin (then worth five shillings) Macquarie created two new coins: the Holey Dollar, valued at five shillings, and the Dump, valued at one shilling and three pence. With a single punch he overcame an extreme currency shortage, doubled the number of coins in circulation and increased their total worth by 25 percent.

This economic miracle is the inspiration for Australia's leading investment bank, Macquarie.

The Holey Dollar forms Macquarie Bank's logo. The innovative spirit behind its creation is the spirit that drives the Bank today.

If you'd like to know how Macquarie could bring this spirit to your interests - be they in corporate or structured finance, property, equities or investment management please call us on (02) 9237 3333 or visit us at [www.macquarie.com.au](http://www.macquarie.com.au).

 **ASK MACQUARIE**



MACQUARIE  
BANK