

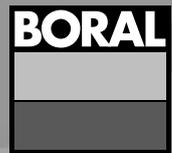
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Photo – David Karonidis

Jennifer Horsfield

Jennifer Horsfield is a teacher and historian and author of *Mary Cunningham: An Australian Life* [Ginninderra Press]). Mary Cunningham (nee Twynam) belonged to the prosperous pastoralist class of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in Australia. Even so, her life was dogged by tragedy and loneliness. Cunningham's story of Mary Twynam is a chapter of Australian history. On Tuesday 15 February 2005, Jennifer Horsfield addressed The Sydney Institute to evaluate how isolation in those pioneering years, especially for women, left a scar on Australia's proud history.

ISOLATION AND

DEPRESSION IN RURAL AUSTRALIA: THE STORY OF MARY CUNNINGHAM

Jennifer Horsfield

This is the story of a woman who lived in the Canberra region 100 years ago. Mary Cunningham married into a wealthy squatter's family, raised eight children at the isolated sheep station of Tuggeranong and left us, in a bundle of family letters, a poignant record of her life and unfulfilled aspirations.

Mary Cunningham was born Mary Emily Twynam, the eldest surviving daughter of Edward and Emily Rose Twynam, who lived at Riversdale in Goulburn. During Mary's childhood Edward Twynam held the position of District Surveyor in Goulburn, but by the time Mary was reaching adulthood the family had moved to Sydney where Edward became Acting Surveyor-General for the colony of NSW. A significant peak in the southern Alps, Mt Twynam, bears his name in recognition of his pioneering surveying work in that region. Mary's mother was an accomplished artist and woodcarver, whose work won an award at the Columbian International Exposition in Chicago in 1893.

Mary grew up in a stable and secure Victorian household. She was educated at home and, from her parents, gained a respect for the life of the intellect and creative endeavour. Her father, who had a degree in the science of surveying from a German university and was Mary's chief correspondent throughout 25 years of her marriage; they shared not only family interests and affections, but a love of poetry, history and literature, and a devotion to gardens and the varied and peaceful pursuits of gardening.

Mary was only 19 when she married the wealthy landowner Jim Cunningham, who was 20 years older than her. Jim's Scottish father, Andrew Cunningham, had established a pastoral empire in southern NSW. His two largest properties, Lanyon and Tuggeranong, together covered over 20,000 acres of rich grazing land along the Murrumbidgee River, in the valley which is now covered by the sprawling suburbs of southern Canberra. Here Andrew Cunningham made his name and his fortune in the latter part of the nineteenth

century through breeding racehorses for the Indian army, and through breeding the merino sheep whose remarkably fine but sturdy wool was in such high demand in the textile mills of England and North America. Jim Cunningham and his brother inherited the bulk of the estate, and after a honeymoon spent in England and on the Continent, Jim brought his young bride home to the sheep station of Tuggeranong in January 1890. They travelled in a blazing inland summer to the wide, mountain-ringed valley which was to be Mary's new home. She was already pregnant with her first child.

Jane Cynthia Cunningham was born in June 1890, in a private nursing home in North Sydney. Seven more babies followed over the next twelve years. They were all born at the Tuggeranong homestead with a midwife and the family doctor, Dr Sidney Richardson, in attendance. Dr Richardson travelled from Queanbeyan, the closest township, for each delivery. Upon being summoned to a distant property like Tuggeranong, the doctor would get one of his sons to harness the horse and get the cart ready for the eight-mile ride. If there were complications in the delivery he would stay the night.

The loneliness that Mary, a young, inexperienced mother must have felt in her new home, with Jim away for long hours on the property, was kept at bay by regular visits from her own family or train trips to Sydney with a young infant, leaving the growing family in the care of the nurse. During the early years of her marriage, Mary's sisters, Phoebe and Edith, often came to stay, as did her mother. And her youngest sister, Joan, still a schoolgirl at Sydney Church of England Grammar School, came in the holidays. Joan and Phoebe later became two of Mary's closest points of contact with the wider world, as both travelled extensively and adventurously and wrote long letters to their elder sister during the Great War. A circle of friendship and affection built up around the young bride; she seemed to have the capacity to nurture friends and inspire loyalty. Servants held Mrs Cunningham in high regard and thought her a kindly lady. Nevertheless it wasn't easy to acquire or keep staff unless they were locals. Sydneysiders were reluctant to leave their home territory; they considered Tuggeranong too far away.

One of the children's most devoted nurses was Mrs Mabel Pike, a newly married young woman whose husband farmed a small block to the north-west of the Tuggeranong property. Mabel lavished all her maternal feelings on Mary's young ones, as well as acting as cook for the Cunningham family. Mary already had five lively children under ten when her latest infant, James Edward Twynam, was born in February 1899, just a month after Mabel's own marriage. Mary spent some time after Twynam's birth staying with her mother and father in Sydney, and Mabel welcomed Mary home with a loving note: 'to my darling mistress, the dearest mistress in the world'.

Martha Harman went to work at Tuggeranong as a parlour maid when she was seventeen, around 1905. Mary Cunningham was very fond of the young girl and Martha regarded Mary as her second mother. Mary cried and kissed her goodbye when Martha left to get married to a local lad, Henry Thomas Oldfield. After the marriage, Martha and Henry lived in a cottage on Tuggeranong, about a mile north of the homestead, and Martha continued to work for the family. In Martha's recollections a poignant image stands out. Mary, in her evening finery, came to visit Martha the night before her first baby was born and stayed to comfort her during the delivery. All her life Mary sought out and treasured friendship and female companionship.

By the early years of the century Tuggeranong had become the centre of a busy community, with up to fifty workers staying for the shearing season and staff that included a gardener, an overseer and five or six domestic servants. The railway was nearby and visitors from Goulburn and Sydney often came to stay. The local landed families, all of whom Mary regarded as good friends, were also regular visitors. And by 1901 seven active little children had the house and property as their playground.

In the midst of all this cheerful community and family life, a dark cloud of depression closed in on Mary. We would now identify it, in part, as post-natal depression. But it was complicated by Mary's isolation from any sources of culture or learning, which her active intelligence seemed to crave.

In late 1902, after the birth of her eighth child, Mary had a severe breakdown, withdrawing into silence and refusing food. She was sent by train at night to Goulburn, where her parents arranged for her to be nursed at nearby Kenmore Hospital. It is unlikely that the surroundings of an asylum would aid the recovery of her mental health. In January 1903 Edward Twynam wrote to his brother-in-law, Con Bolton, conveying the doctor's hopes for her recovery:

Of course that is some relief to the intense anxiety and poignant grief of my dear wife. [Emily] went to Kenmore Hospital today to lunch with Miss Wilson the Matron, and I expect that she will be sitting with Mary this afternoon.

But the time spent in Goulburn only aggravated Mary's sense of isolation and depression. In April 1903 she was sent to Sydney for further treatment.

A young friend of the family, Pierce Smith, the rector's son, spent much of his time working and travelling in the Northern Territory. On hearing of Mary's illness, he wrote with sympathetic insight to his father:

Poor Mrs Cunningham, give her my love and tell her how sorry I have been to hear of her continual confinement to her room, and trust that she may be about ere this letter reaches its destination.

What a great blow it must be to poor Jim, this [sickness] of his wife. Do you know I think it was brought on by the quiet, hermit life she lived at Tuggeranong (sic). I think with her wonderful spirits she wanted more life and society, and if she never complained still I believe privately she fretted, and having so many children must have been a trial and source of anxiety.

While Mary was in Sydney, her sister Edith went down to Tuggeranong to look after the eight young children. She seems to have taken on the role cheerfully and energetically. She wrote to Mary:

Darling Mary

Your letter received this morning. The family very bonny, playing in their gardens. They invite me every morning to come and see their roses. Twynam is immensely proud of his roses and he shows me which are being kept for Mrs Pike. I expect you will feel so well and strong after the operation. Peggy Dalgleish looked a different woman after her operation. I know how you must be longing to get home, but the time will soon pass, and I expect you will have plenty of visitors to pass the time.

From evidence in this letter it is likely that Mary may have had a hysterectomy in Sydney. Certainly, there were no more pregnancies from this date. By October 1903 she was back at Tuggeranong with her family. There was plenty of loving sisterly support and a trip with Jim to New Zealand, leaving the children in the care of a nurse and a governess. But it is unlikely that the operation and the rest cure abroad really got to the heart of the problem.

If, as Pierce Smith suggested, Mary was worn down by eight pregnancies and the stresses of motherhood, and if she fretted for a life with more stimulation and challenge than was available at the time, she kept these frustrations to herself. The dark times of her depression and illness were never referred to in her letters and remain a closed book to us. An agreement was made with surviving members of the family not to seek access to Mary's medical records. However, a descendent of the Boltons, her mother's side of the family, recalls hearing a conversation in her youth about Mrs Cunningham and her "silences" which were taken to be symptoms of some deep withdrawal from life. Domestic staff at Tuggeranong and Lanyon, where Mary lived from 1914, were aware that Mary had suffered a breakdown in 1902. But the tone of her letters, in the years leading up to the Great War, were those of a woman warmly engaging with family and friends, and welcoming life's challenges. Perhaps her encounter with a serious mental or emotional illness made her more aware of the fragility of human happiness and the need to cultivate it whenever the

chance arose. In a letter Mary wrote to her father in January 1915, she exclaimed:

What lucky people we are to have such a father. Like all the good and pleasant things of life, one becomes so accustomed to them. Have you ever noticed how quickly people become accustomed to comforts and never to discomforts?

The only reference in family letters to this dark period in Mary's life, is found in a letter from her sister, Edith. In October 1903 Edith wrote to her young writer friend, Stella Miles Franklin, to express her sympathy at the recent death of Stella's young sister, Laurel:

I was so sorry to hear of your trouble. How dreadful for you all, and your poor mother.

I am so glad to be able to tell you the dreadful trouble we were in is over, and my dearly loved sister has been restored to us as from the dead. This seems to have been a year of sorrows...

The years before the war saw Mary absorbed in the lives of her growing children. They had the kind of education which only money and privilege could provide. The three boys attended Geelong Grammar School in Victoria. At least two of the girls had a private tutor for a year or two, and then attended Ascham and Frensham, both enlightened schools with a serious emphasis on progressive education for girls. Photographs of the Cunningham children show a group of confident, active and outgoing individuals. A family relative who knew the Cunningham girls well, thought of them as "golden girls" – products of a golden age of security, privilege and wealth, for whom the unfolding years of the young century offered endless scope and opportunities. Yet tragedy and loss lay not far away.

In 1910, a year after she left Ascham, Mary's beloved eldest child, 20-year-old Jane Cynthia, was struck down by an acute attack of appendicitis and died of toxæmia after an operation carried out at Tuggeranong Homestead. There are no references, anywhere in the family letters to the tragedy of Jane's death. The protocol of the times demanded black mourning dress and other public acknowledgement of grief such as withdrawal from social events and the use of black-edged stationery. But Mary seems to have had little opportunity to share and express her grief in a way that would have been meaningful to her: an outpouring from the heart to a dear friend. Her grieving was done in silence and solitude, and only found expression many years later when she dedicated a corner of her coastal garden to her daughter, planting maidenhair fern and the fragrant guelder rose in memory of Jane. Her second daughter, Mary Paule, in talking to her own niece many years later, recalled taking trays of supper to her mother in her room, where at times, "Mother wanted to talk about Jane, but we were young, and

didn't want to listen." In a letter written to her father in 1915, Mary mentioned a local family whose son had died suddenly of influenza. Referring to the bereaved mother, she said, "My heart aches for her; it is always so terribly sad when the young go first."

Other partings took place in the years leading up to the war. Mary's youngest sister, Joan Twynam, applied, at the age of 29, to join the new Bush Nursing Scheme, and in this pioneering role, went out to serve near Walgett in 1912. In June 1914, she applied for the post at Jindabyne, from where she wrote to Mary of the long freezing night rides visiting her scattered patients.

Another departure took place in June 1914. Jim and Mary left Tuggeranong and moved to Lanyon, which Jim had purchased in 1913 after the death of his brother Andrew. The move was prompted by events surrounding the establishment of the new federal capital, which meant that sooner or later all the landowners in the district would be required to give up their properties to the Commonwealth. This, as is always the case when long-standing attachments to the land are broken, caused much bitterness and heartache among the families so dispossessed. Frederick Campbell of Yarralumla station, wrote to Charles Scrivener the Commonwealth Surveyor in 1912, stating forcefully, "I note the Commonwealth by notification has resumed my land and wish they had gone elsewhere for their capital." The Commonwealth Valuer made a full valuation of the Tuggeranong estate in 1913 with a view to its acquisition by the government and though it was not acquired till 1916, the continuing uncertainty about its future prompted Jim and Mary to move to Lanyon. Something of the wrench of saying goodbye to her old home, where she had raised 8 children and lived for the past 25 years, is evident in a letter Mary wrote in 1921, when she returned to the property to visit its new incumbents, the war historian Dr Charles Bean and his wife. She wrote to her father:

They have added to and improved the garden there so much, it was looking quite a picture with tall Delphiniums growing in the lawn and all the waste pieces they have replaced with lawns of Kentucky Blue Grass. Mr Bean says that visitors from Melbourne are impressed with it, and it is considered quite a feature of the place, and they always call it Mrs Cunningham's garden, isn't it a pretty compliment when they have done so much of it themselves. I am so glad Tugg [sic] is in such good hands, and so well kept, it would trouble me to see it neglected, for I was so fond of it, the garden of my own and my children's youth. I walked home after spending a very happy hour with my kind neighbours, and enjoyed the walk in the cool evening air.

The years of the Great War, even in the midst of stress and grief, provided many middle-class women, of whom Mary was one, with a new independence and freedom, and gave them a wider scope for

their interests and talents, in work supporting the community's war efforts. Edward Twynam and his daughter shared a sense of pride at the part their family was playing in support of the Empire. One of Edward's sons, Ned, served in Gallipoli and France; his daughter Joan, was a nurse on the hospital ship the *HMS Gascon* and later served at a Casualty Clearing Station on the Western Front. At least four of Edward's nephews were serving with the AIF, including Mary's eldest son Andrew Twynam Cunningham. Andrew sent back vivid, laconic letters from Gallipoli, where the barrage of guns before the battle of Lone Pine sounded like "a thousand sheets of galvanised iron being torn to shreds". A letter scrawled in pencil tells of watching from his gun post as the German reconnaissance aircraft flew overhead. In Palestine with the Light Horse Andrew was involved in the long, arduous campaign that saw the Turks driven back from the Suez Canal and the Sinai desert. He received the Military Cross for bravery at the first battle of Gaza.

As she awaited news of her family serving overseas, Mary, like many other women of her generation, sought out opportunities to engage in voluntary war work. She threw herself into the task of raising money for the Red Cross, and also initiated a plan to encourage people to use wholemeal flour in bread and thus save the wheat stocks of the Empire. In 1916 she joined a committee which was working locally to support the national campaign in favour of conscription. This action met with disapproval from some of the conservative folk in the local community, who saw such public action as improper for women. She attended a large rally at the Power House in Canberra and spoke at a number of meetings in the district. At Mary's instigation, Edward Twynam inscribed the Horatian phrase, *Pro Patria*, on her Red Cross collection boxes. The words had a Latin solemnity that thrilled the hearts of loyalists and instilled a sense of ardent and patriotic pride. But later generations, who lived in the aftermath of the war with its shell-shocked and maimed survivors, denounced this rhetoric. Wilfred Owen, the young British officer and poet who was killed in France one week before the Armistice, wrote of "The old Lie: Dulce et Decorum est / Pro patria mori".

Owen's major poems, all written in the year before his death, distilled the horror of his own experience of war. His poems described the slaughter and misery of the trenches and the hopelessness of men who knew that the civilian populations at home had no concept of what the front line was suffering.

In October 1916 the Anzac troops, still reeling from the dreadful casualties of the Somme, were bracing themselves for their first European winter. In the quiet Lanyon valley, enclosed within its splendid circle of hills, the arrival of spring brought its own seasonal demands on the landowners, hired workers and families who lived

there. These rural inhabitants remained as ignorant as the rest of Australia of the conditions under which their beloved sons fought and died. Mary's understanding of war, like that of many of her compatriots, was purely theoretical. She referred to her family serving overseas as her "beloved warriors", and wrote trenchant letters to *The Sydney Morning Herald*, urging all mothers to support conscription and treasure the honour that war service would bring to their sons. It is easy for us, from the distance of nearly 100 years, to scorn these sentiments. But the anguish and sense of loss in Mary's community were real, even while the survivors clung to the rhetoric of Empire. There are many black-edged letters in Mary's collection, and they express an elemental grief that transcends that age and time: "It was so cruel my darling boy was taken from us, he was everything to us..."; "There was never a better son...each day my loss seems harder to bear..."

And one from her dear friend Jean Rutledge, of Bungendore:

You understand what it is to me to lose my priceless boy. Somehow I knew he would never come back, and I think he knew it himself. He wrote long but cheerful letters, but I think the iron had entered his soul and he dreaded the bitter winters, my dear sun-warmed boy. I can't write much dear Mary, but want you to know how much your love and kindness help me.

During the later years of the war, Mary took over the management of the War Chest Flower Shop in Sydney. Jim at this stage was suffering from constant bouts of ill-health that required him to spend time in Sydney away from the cold climate of Lanyon. Mary's circle of like-minded friends at this time included Jean Williamson, a sub-editor on the *Sydney Morning Herald*, and Florence Foudrinier, secretary of the War Chest Fund and another campaigner in support of conscription.

During the war years, a remarkable young woman opened her heart to Mary Cunningham in an extraordinary series of letters. Her name was Grace Cossington Smith and she went on to become one of Australia's leading Modernist artists. This intensely charged, creative young woman brought a new vividness and energy into Mary's life at a time when much seemed sad and desolate. There were constant anxieties about dear ones caught up in the turmoil of war and her husband was struggling with an illness that seemed to have no end and no cure. Drusilla Modjeska, in her book *Stravinsky's Lunch*, suggests that Grace's six-year correspondence with Mary provides evidence of sexual longing and possibly a secretive affair between the two women. I took some care in my book to address this charge, which I think is misguided.

For Mary, the later years of the war were marked by another significant friendship, with Vivian Miles, Professor of Classics and

Literature at the new Royal Military College in Canberra. One of the interests they shared was the writing of poetry. In 1917 Mary wrote to her father:

You will be interested to hear Professor Miles' criticism. He asked me if I wanted to know exactly what he thought of the verses. I said yes, that was why I was asking him. Well, he read them through and pointed out a lot of faults, then he told me, they were beautiful, but full of technical errors, the rhyme was poor in some, and there was a good deal of awkward phrasing; but that they were too good to print without working on them. So I am to practise, polish and alter until I get them right, and he will help me; isn't it delightful, to think I may produce something worthwhile. The work delights me, words are always so interesting. I feel like a child, who has been given a box of beads for the first time, with so many beautiful colours to arrange, and when I know more of the rules for arrangement, writing will become easier to me.

Mary's poems seem stilted and forced to us today, while her letters contain more wit and liveliness and give a truer sense of her personality and character. But without doubt she saw this art as an important way to express the deep concerns of her generation and to communicate with other people. When so many of her dear friends lost sons during the war, Mary wrote to them, enclosing verses she had composed.

Among the ephemera sold at the War Chest Flower Shop were small cards printed with patriotic verse and appropriate illustrations. These were popular with the women who frequented the shop. Mary had a signed copy of one affecting little poem called *Your Boy and My Boy*. It was actually a song, with words composed by E. Beaufils Lamb and music by H A Jacques, "dedicated to the Mothers of the Empire". The song was published at the time of the departure of the AIF. At Easter 1917 Beaufils Lamb published another song, *Who Rides Today?* on behalf of the NSW Recruiting Committee.

Inspired by this example, Mary decided to publish some of her own poems for sale at the shop and appealed to her father for editorial advice. She even approached a Sydney publisher with the aim of having a small volume of her verses in print, but did not pursue the matter after the war and the file was eventually closed.

The years after the war were marked by much dislocation and sadness for Mary, with the deaths of her husband and father, the sale of Lanyon and anxieties about two of her children, Andrew and Dorothea, whose lives had both been deeply affected by the Great War. Andrew, returning from Palestine in 1919, took over the management of Lanyon, but he lacked the single-minded focus of his Scottish grandfather. He was secretly supporting a wife – a liaison he had developed with the housekeeper at Lanyon – and he had begun drinking heavily and had a taste for fast, expensive cars. The property

of Lanyon deteriorated under his mismanagement and was put up for public auction in September 1926.

At this stage Mary was living with her sister Edith at Riversdale but visited Lanyon briefly before the auction. It was another sad goodbye, to a property which contained so many memories. But this departure, unlike that from Tuggeranong, was complicated by the painful and very public knowledge of her son's part in the loss of the estate. His drinking escapades were the talk of the district. Shortly after the sale of Lanyon he was arrested for drunken and aggressive behaviour in a Queanbeyan pub and the case was reported in detail in the *Queanbeyan Age*. He was also reported to have taken part in a drunken brawl in the streets and antagonised a local Greek shop-keeper.

In 1928 Andrew obtained his pilot's licence through the Sydney Aero Club and purchased his own aircraft. In 1930 he set out on a long-distance overseas flight in an attempt to beat Bert Hinkler's record of a solo flight between Australia and England.

The adventurous flying career of her eldest son brought many anxieties to Mary, not least the ever-present fear of a fatal accident. His elaborate efforts at secrecy in preparing for the solo flight to England were undertaken at least partly because he knew his mother was opposed to the trip. Meanwhile Andrew's younger sister, Dorothea, was also learning to fly. After the sale of Lanyon, Dorothea lived in Sydney but the desire to gain her pilot's licence took her back to Goulburn, to the local aero club. She leased a block of land called Fairvale, in the northern part of the Federal Capital Territory, and Mary often came to stay on the property, cultivating a little vegetable garden in her times of solitude.

The Brown family who farmed the next property would have kept an eye on their gentle neighbour and exchanged courtesies and kind words, even brought over gifts of produce from their farm. They may have sensed that Mary was struggling with ill health and depression. By this stage her other daughters had married and moved away; Andrew was out of touch as he battled storms and engine trouble over the East Indies; Twynam and Pax were occupied on their own properties. An overwhelming sense of solitude and vulnerability must have assailed Mary at this time. She retreated into the silences which had become her prison after childbirth in 1902. She died on 15 November 1930 and is buried at the family cemetery at Lanyon. Her death certificate refers to "asthenia" or refusal to talk; and "of unsound mind" because she refused food and drink.

Mary's surviving grandchildren, all now in their eighties or thereabouts, visit Lanyon whenever they have the opportunity. To them, Mary Cunningham is the subject of half-remembered anecdotes passed down from their own parents, and of vague, childish

memories of a “kindly woman in black”. They place flowers on her grave and walk through the gardens she loved. They try to visualise her years on this prosperous, beautiful property which represented a pastoral enterprise, a family heritage and a way of life that came to an end with the Great War. They also visit the Tuggeranong property where their parents were born and grew up. There the rambling homestead surrounded by paddocks still shelters in its copse of old trees, and the water tank and stone barn are still landmarks visible from a distance, as they were when Mary lived there 100 years ago. Such visits help them understand their heritage. Their grandmother’s letters reveal a great deal about this intelligent, enigmatic woman. They show her strong convictions, her love of friends and family, her passion for learning and her struggles to reach out from intellectual isolation. Many of her convictions we find foreign now and the faith that sustained them has largely disappeared from our society, as have the social constraints that limited the roles that women could adopt. The illness and depression that cast their shadows on Mary’s life may well have been better understood and promptly treated if she were alive now. Yet her yearning for friendship, connection and community is one that still motivates people, and that claims our attention, 100 years on.



Photo – David Karonidis

Marion Sawyer

For a decade now the term “elites” has been thrown around with little thought to the social realities. The phrase has also been used to isolate middle class leftists in an era of conservative governments and market driven economies. Dr Marion Sawyer is a political scientist based at the Australian National University and leader of the Democratic Audit of Australia <http://democratic.audit.anu.edu.au>. She is also the author of *Us and Them: Anti-Elitism in Australia*. To discuss the implications of a decade of anti-elitism, Marion Sawyer addressed The Sydney Institute on Tuesday 22 February 2005.

THE ELITES: WHO ARE

THEY REALLY?

Marion Sawer

I expect that most of you here tonight will have heard a great deal in recent years about the sins of inner city elites. They are the “bleeding hearts, the politically correct, who control everything we do” as a One Nation supporter wrote to *The Australian* during the 2004 election.¹ In my talk tonight I want to do three things. First to remind you of the anti-elitism that has become such a feature of Australian political and policy debate. Then to tell you a little about where this anti-elitism comes from, which is not just from traditional Australian populism by any means. And lastly to examine how elites became predominantly female, which is perhaps the strangest feature of contemporary anti-elitism and has extraordinary implications. All of these issues are explored more fully in *Us and Them: Anti-Elitism in Australia* the book I have recently edited together with Barry Hindess.²

First, what do elites do, according to today’s anti-elitists? Elites are held responsible first for imposing political correctness on the Australian people and then for disputing the people’s verdict at elections and continuing to harp on about human rights, social justice and honesty in government. As the anti-elitist columnist, Angela Shanahan, describes them, these are non-issues – “no-one in the suburbs actually cares about stuff like the bizarrre children overboard saga”³. No doubt she would now add no-one in the suburbs really cares about stuff like government accountability or the treatment of those held in detention centres.

Many of you here tonight may have been numbered among the elite – the sins of the elite include reading Fairfax newspapers such as *The Sydney Morning Herald* and listening to the ABC. If you engage in such activities and, worse, talk to others about them over coffee, you will certainly have earned labels such as being a member of the chattering class, the latté set, the macchiato mob, bleeding hearts, the moral middle class or, most recently, doctors’ wives. (One must be careful where one puts the apostrophe in this label, even David Flint does not go so far as to accuse the elites of polygamy, among their many other sins).

The drawing of a dividing line between city-dwelling and untrustworthy elites on the one side and the virtuous and homogenous people on the other comes from traditional populism. There has been a significant upsurge of populism in Western democracies in the 1990s – political parties and leaders seeking to mobilise and speak for the people through denouncing cosmopolitan elites for betraying the national interest. But the grammar of populism involves more than denouncing elites as privileged and untrustworthy. After all, self-seeking is regarded as natural and universal in the market populist view of the world. To really mobilise political emotion along the us/them divide, elites have to be shown to have contempt for ordinary people and their values. You will remember that during the French revolution Marie Antoinette was not only depicted as part of the blood-sucking aristocracy of France but also as someone who had contempt for the common people and their hunger—“let them eat cake”. This attribution of contempt is central to populist strategies and can be seen again and again in political speech in Australia.

An example of Australian political speech which very skilfully deploys populist techniques is a song called “Son, You’re Australian”:

Never mind the fancy dancers
Plain-thinking men know their right from wrong
Don’t deal with silver tongues and chancers
Keep your vision clear and hold it strong.⁴

Populism has traditionally been a form of “outsider” politics practised by those who come from outside existing political elites. This kind of traditional populism was at the heart of Pauline Hanson’s One Nation. Traditional rural populism rallies the people against the fast-talking city-based elites who are inclined to sell out the interests of the bush to the interests of corporate finance. Pauline Hanson tapped into all the traditional themes of populist politics in Australia, including fears of non-European immigration and desires for protection against the banks and global economic competition.

But this song “Son you’re Australian” predates Pauline Hanson and is by no means articulating an “outsider populism”. This is not the naive composition of someone from rural Australia protesting against corrupting city ways and foreign influences. In fact it was commissioned by the leadership of a mainstream political party and written by one of Australia’s most commercially successful writers. In this case, anti-elitist discourse is being used by members of elites themselves in order to promote or to consolidate their own positions.

The insider elitism of “Son you’re Australian” does not seek to overturn an elite commitment to economic globalisation and competition, as did Pauline Hanson. For Pauline Hanson, economic rationalists were part of the elite. For others who are practising

populist politics more successfully than Pauline Hanson, economic rationalists are by definition part of the people rather than part of the elite. They want to ensure that the people are able to make democratic choices through the market, without interference from welfare-state busybodies. So where do these definitions of the elite come from, that exclude corporate lions and international bankers?

The components of today's populism

The insider populism being practised by major political parties in Australia does deploy traditional populist themes, as did Pauline Hanson. Its exclusion of the traditional target of populist denunciations, the economic elite, can only be explained, however, by where this new anti-elitism comes from. In part it comes from the concept of the "new class", developed in the 1970s by American neoconservatives like Daniel Bell and Irving Kristol.

The new class identified by American neo-conservatives in the 1970s consists of university-educated intellectuals radicalised by the social movements of the previous decade. These arts and humanities graduates allegedly have a vested interest in expanding the public sector, in which they will have privileged roles, thanks to their cultural capital. They have a class interest in maximising redistribution, at the expense of wealth creators. The new class speaks a language of public interest and equal opportunity, but this is a mask for their own self-seeking. Economists Milton and Rose Friedman helped popularise the concept in their best-selling 1980 book *Free to Choose*, which depicts the new class as acquiring high incomes for itself through preaching equality and promoting and administering the resulting legislation.

The neo-conservatives associated the new class with values such as environmentalism, feminism, multiculturalism and minority rights more generally. These values were not regarded as having any authentic ethical content; rather they were elite "fashions" which received the collective label "political correctness". These values were cosmopolitan in nature and led to the new class subordinating the national interest to international standards of human rights or environmental protection or to interference with business interests.

Needless to say, the new class had to be shown not only to be hypocritical and self-seeking, but also to be contemptuous of the values of ordinary people. The new class sneers at, has contempt for, looks down on or winces at the values of ordinary people – although no empirical evidence is ever provided of such behaviour. The columnist Janet Albrechtsen is word perfect in the way she reproduces this neo-conservative anti-elitism: "When they [electoral losers, gay rights activists] do not get their way, they sneer at dowdy, unsophisticated Australia for falling behind swank social fashions paraded on the international stage."⁵ The idea of contempt is necessary to discredit

the values being upheld by the new class – who would want someone contemptuous of them spending their taxes?

These ideas were introduced into Australia through the magazine *Quadrant* and were given a wide airing through the book *The Great Divide* by sociologist Katharine Betts. This book positioned the author on the right side of the “great divide” between the world of ordinary people and the cosmopolitan world of the elite. She warned that while new class advocacy of increased welfare expenditure might make it appear sympathetic, “at bottom” the new class was contemptuous of the materialism and parochialism of the working class. This view of a new class elite lecturing the electorate to accept asylum seekers and wincing at “basic Australian values” has been taken up with enthusiasm in free-market journals and in the Murdoch press.⁶

The Murdoch press has also been particularly involved in promoting another component of contemporary anti-elitism, the concept of “special interests”. This concept comes from public choice theory developed in the 1960s by American economists James Buchanan and Gordon Tullock. This theory is based on rational actor premises, whereby both individual and collective action are motivated by the desire to maximise returns. The term “special interests” debunks the idea that groups that purport to be pursuing the public interest are in fact motivated any differently. It is particularly applied to groups such as environmentalists or equality seekers that invoke state interference with the market. The activity of such groups, whether seeking to protect workers, consumers or the environment or to promote equal opportunity, will invariably be revealed by public choice analyses to benefit the new class. As we have seen, the latter supposedly thrives on the growth of state intervention in the private sector.

Public choice theory has been very successfully popularised in the English-speaking democracies, both through think tanks created for this purpose and through means such as the *Yes, Minister* television series devised by a disciple of Milton Friedman. The think tanks have enjoyed exceptional access to the mainstream media, particularly papers owned by Conrad Black and by Rupert Murdoch. A glance at the Opinion page of *The Australian* will confirm this. Their own publications specialise in exposing the cosy conspiracy between rent-seeking “special interests” and bureaucrats seeking to maximise their budgets. For example, they unmask environmental activists as the special interests that manipulate public opinion into accepting more powerful regulatory agencies to protect the environment. In return they receive large contracts to research environmental threats.

Another example used of a rent-seeking special interest consists of single mothers who have supposedly calculated they can obtain a better “rent” through the state than they can through the market or

through marriage. Femocrats, or women who have taken positions in government to monitor policy for gender impact, are accused of promoting the dependency of sole parents, while at the same time ensuring good jobs for themselves. Unfortunately femocrats in the Commonwealth government hardly exist any more; changes to social policy and child support formulae are made without any preceding analysis of impact on sole parent poverty. Even the work and family unit that was supposed to promote family-friendly work arrangements was abolished in 2003.

In this new and confusing era of social policy, dependency on husbands is a virtue, and rewarded by tax privileges, but once husbands have disappeared then dependency is both culpable and a major social problem. It is perhaps salutary to reflect on the changing way that dependency has been constructed over time. For democratic theorists of the eighteenth century it was dependence on employers that was morally suspect, unfitting people for the independence of thought required of democratic citizens.

The discourse of special interests is usually found in company with anti-elitist discourse, so it is new class elites and their associated special interests who are responsible for spending hard-earned taxpayers money on wasteful social welfare, environmental or equal opportunity projects. Bankers and international corporations, on the other hand, are on the side of the people, to say nothing of millionaire talk-back radio hosts. The “tsars of talk”, like other ordinary Australians, are persecuted by the all-powerful thought police who object to racial and homosexual vilification and waste tax-payers’ money on ramps for the disabled.⁷

The elites – who are they really?

Gerard Henderson wrote an incisive article in 2001 about how Malcolm Turnbull had ceased to be a member of the elite, despite being a merchant banker educated at Sydney and Oxford Universities and member of the Australian and Athenaeum Clubs, because he had come out in support of the government’s position on asylum seekers:

These days, apparently, to move from the elite you do not have to divest property, change professions or even resign from gentlemen’s clubs. That’s because a so-called elitist is now judged according to a range of opinions on social issues. Not on inheritance, or wealth or even education.⁸

Indeed, although rarely made explicit, one of strangest features of this supposedly privileged new class, defined by its concern with the environment, human rights and equal opportunity, is how feminised and poorly paid it tends to be. Its core members work in the human services and in education – hardly a recipe for riches. Many of them

are women and would not even have been granted access to the kind of clubs traditionally associated with the elite. They have been trained in the humanities and social sciences and work as teachers, librarians and social workers or sometimes as public servants or public lawyers. It is these groups (apart from that new psephological category doctors' wives) that are most likely to express values that put them into the elite category. While Mr Fat, or the money power, was once the target of political populism now the target is Ms Bleeding Heart.

These groups may have cultural capital and some influence in the formation of public opinion, but they are hardly a rich and powerful elite in the sense that term is usually understood and certainly not in comparison with their critics. They may have international connections, and this is one of the many complaints brought against them – that they refuse to accept the verdict of the Australian people and are in league with United Nations bureaucrats in New York and Geneva. They allegedly invoke interference with elected governments to impose norms and standards that the electorate has rejected, for example on the treatment of asylum seekers. It must be remembered that democratically elected Australian governments played an important role in the development of the international human rights norms, and that Australians also play an important role in the UN committees that oversight them.

Apart from this propensity to sell out Australian interests in the name of international human rights standards, new class elites also, as we have seen, need to be characterised as having contempt for ordinary Australians. It may seem odd to you that workers in human services and helping professions, such as teachers and social workers, would display such contempt, but empirical evidence is neither required nor produced on this subject. It must be so. Elites writing “black-armband history” (expressing sorrow at the treatment of Indigenous peoples) are showing contempt for, and sneering at, the national pride felt by ordinary Australians. Feminists promoting equal opportunity are showing contempt for the values of ordinary women. The Prime Minister has talked of the “stridency of the ultra-feminist groups in the community” who sneer at and look down on women choosing to provide full-time care for their children.⁹

In fact, of course, it was feminists who campaigned for national time-use surveys to measure the volume and distribution of unpaid work and to calculate its value to the national economy. Without the attachment of a money value, such work is too easily overlooked or trivialised rather than being recognised as contributing 58 per cent of the value of GDP.¹⁰ Without measuring unpaid work you get a quite unrealistic view of the national economy – a paradox summed up by the economist Arthur Pigou as the deleterious effect on the GDP of marrying one's housekeeper. In Australia it was the Howard

government and not feminists who postponed indefinitely any further surveys of the work done by women in the home. The last national time-use survey was conducted in 1997, the next was due in 2002.

As we have seen, the attribution of contempt for ordinary Australians plays an important role in discrediting the values expressed by coffee-drinking inner-city elites. Why would you listen to people who had contempt for you and whose voicing of ethical issues is really just a form of moral vanity? Indeed this attempt to deride any concerns over civil liberties, human rights and equal opportunity as simply an elite agenda without any authentic moral content is one of the most worrying aspects of current anti-elitism. It is part of a broader agenda whereby any collective pursuit of the public good is derided and virtue is seen only to reside in private market choices. Indeed one columnist in *The Australian* recently remarked that while corruption in local government was unfortunate and robbed ratepayers, at least the councillors were only pursuing personal profit rather than being engaged in social engineering!¹¹

All of this contributes to a decline in confidence in public institutions, such as universities, where liberal values have been fostered. It also contributes to a decline in confidence in courts, tribunals and other watchdog agencies whose role it is to protect individual rights and uphold standards in public life. In doing so it contributes to a decline in public morality, leaving us all the poorer for it.

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Photo – David Karonidis

Allison Henry

Debate over constitutional change and whether it's time for Australia to become a republic reached a climax at the Constitutional referendum in 1999. While the "No" vote prevailed at the time, many do not believe a majority of Australians will be satisfied to have a British monarch as their Head of State after the death of Queen Elizabeth II. So debate continues, if in more muted tones, on just when and how Australia may become a republic and embrace a system where an Australian can be Australia's Head of State. Allison Henry is the National Director of the Australian Republican Movement. In an address to The Sydney Institute on Wednesday 2 March 2005, she set out the republican argument for constitutional change.

AN AUSTRALIAN HEAD

OF STATE: WHERE ARE WE AT?

Allison Henry

Thank you for the invitation to address The Sydney Institute this evening. When we organised tonight we weren't yet aware that Prince Charles would be visiting Australia this week, but given that confluence of dates, it is a timely opportunity to explore where we are at in the campaign for an Australian Head of State.

As you know the Australian people were last asked about the move to an Australian republic in the November 1999 referendum. As with the preamble question simultaneously put, the referendum did not carry, by a national margin of 55 per cent to 45 per cent, with only the Australian Capital Territory voting in favour of the change.

Many opposed to constitutional change like to argue that the 1999 referendum was the end of the story and the issue of an Australian Head of State is resolved. Not surprisingly, given my own role with the ARM, this is not a view I subscribe to!

Not unlike federation, this campaign for change is a journey that will take time. Australia's constitutional and political system has evolved over the past century to fit with changing circumstances. The move to an Australian Head of State is a natural and, we in the ARM believe, highly necessary next step in this evolution.

Tonight I am going to focus on the topic given to me: an overview of the current state of play in the republican debate, rather than the grounds for and against a change to an Australian republic.

Suffice to say that republicans believe that our current constitutional arrangements are unsatisfactory, inherently undemocratic and irrelevant to most Australians. Republicans believe that a constitutional monarch is anathema to our national pride and cannot possibly embody our contemporary national identity of a vibrant multi-ethnic and multi-religious society. Republicans believe that our Head of State is an important symbolic role that should be unambiguously filled by an Australian, representing only Australia.

Australia's Head of State

I'll start by discussing the central issue of an Australian Head of State. This has been the singular aim of the Australian Republican Movement since its inception in 1991 and was a key theme in the 1999 republican referendum.

Anyone with even cursory interest in this debate would be aware that our opposition have sought to obfuscate with a smoke and mirrors campaign that we already have an Australian Head of State in the person of the Governor-General.

Professor David Flint from Australians for Constitutional Monarchy has argued that we have a *resident* Australian Head of State. Sir David Smith, official secretary to five Governors-General from 1973 to 1990, at one time argued that we had two Heads of State but now appears to consider that the Queen is the Sovereign and the Governor-General is Head of State. Federal Minister and committed monarchist Senator Nick Minchin, argues, if I read him correctly, that the GG is our *de facto* Head of State.

This has been an incredibly cynical and I would suggest dishonest effort to divert the public's attention from the central issue in the republican campaign: putting an Australian at the apex of our constitutional system.

It has also provided a means by which monarchists have attempted to avoid mention of the royal family in their defence of the constitutional status quo in Australia. From our opponent's point of view, this is an entirely necessary approach: while Queen Elizabeth retains widespread respect and affection from her Australian subjects, the lacklustre reception to Prince Charles this week, not to mention the string of recent polls, has certainly demonstrated that her heirs and successors are not held in the same high esteem.

So to deal with these Head of State arguments first...

"Head of State" is not a term or position that appears in the Australian Constitution, nor in any of Australia's state constitutions; the term Head of State is primarily a term used by international lawyers and diplomats to denote the highest officer in any nation-state.

The Constitutional Centenary Foundation, an independent and non-partisan body established in 1991 for the purposes of encouraging and promoting public discussion, understanding and review of the Australian constitutional system in the decade leading to the centenary of the Constitution in 2001, said this about Heads of State:

All countries have a head of state. This person represents the country as a whole, especially when visiting overseas countries. In some countries, the same person is both head of state and leader of the government. In others, including Australia, there is a separate head of state. Many

federal countries, again including Australia, also provide a head of state at the second level.

The head of state may play a number of roles. These include ensuring the smooth running of parliamentary government by, for example, appointing a new government after an election; participation in ceremonial and social occasions and representation of a country internationally, promoting its diplomatic, cultural or economic interests.

Opponents of an Australian republic would like us all to believe that the Governor-General, in representing the monarch, and in undertaking constitutional tasks on her behalf, already constitutes an Australian Head of State.

They are wrong.

A quick review of our Constitution supports the contention that the Queen is Australia's Head of State. Section 1, for example, defines the Parliament as "the Queen, a Senate, and a House of Representatives" and vests the Federal legislative power in the Parliament. While the Queen is a part of Parliament, the Governor General is not.

Section 2 states that the Governor-General is appointed by the Queen to be her "representative in the Commonwealth". The Governor-General represents the Queen, not Australia, and only holds office "during the Queen's pleasure" which means that s/he can be dismissed by the Queen at any time. By section 59 the Queen has the power to disallow any law within one year of it being made even after the Governor-General has given assent.

Australians are described in the Constitution as subjects of the Queen and not as subjects of the Governor-General, and the Schedule to the Constitution requires that all Federal Parliamentarians swear an oath or declare an affirmation of allegiance to the Queen. No Oath of Allegiance is required to the Governor-General by any member of Parliament or official.

Given that the Governor-General's constitutional role is circumscribed in this way, and that the Governor-General makes an Oath of Allegiance and an Oath of Office to Her Majesty – not to the Australian people – it seems plainly obvious to many people that the Governor-General cannot possibly be the role at the top of our constitutional system, our Head of State.

Authoritative legal opinion also supports the view that Australia's Head of State is Queen Elizabeth II. The Constitutional Centenary Foundation declared on its website that Queen Elizabeth II is Australia's Head of State, with the Governor-General and the State Governors representing her in Australia. Former Chief Justice of the High Court of Australia Sir Anthony Mason, in a 1997 Four Corners interview, clearly stated that Queen Elizabeth II, rather than the Governor-General, is Australia's Head of State and dismissed the two heads argument propagated by Sir David Smith as "arrant nonsense".

Daryl Williams, Liberal Attorney-General for Australia 1996-2003, in September 1999 similarly stated that “the head of state of Australia is, and always has been, the person who, for the time being, is the King or Queen of the United Kingdom”.

The Queen and Governor-General themselves seem pretty clear on the issue. As recently as 1997, the Buckingham Palace website declared: “A Commonwealth realm is a country where the Queen is the Head of State. The Queen is Queen not only of Britain and its dependent territories but also of the following realms.” Included in the list was Australia. In the lead up to the 1999 referendum Buckingham Palace bowed to pressure from Australian monarchists and the website was changed so that the Queen is now described as Australia’s Sovereign. However, the website provides no support for the proposition that the Governor-General is Australia’s Head of State.

Our current Governor-General, His Excellency Major General Michael Jeffery, understands that he is not Head of State.

In an extensive Canberra Times interview last November he clearly stated that Australia’s Head of State was Queen Elizabeth II. He said:

Her Majesty is Australia’s Head of State, but I am her representative and to all intents and purposes I carry out the full role. The Queen does not intervene in any way. Her only function is to approve the appointment, or the dismissal of Governors-General and Governors on the advice of the Prime Minister and Cabinet of the day... My own view is that we are extremely fortunate in having a Head of State with the tremendous knowledge and wisdom that the Queen has accumulated having been on the throne for over 50 years.

In stating their case our opponents like to point to a range of government literature, stating that the Governor-General is Head of State; republicans in turn gather up an alternative pile of government literature stating that the Queen is Head of State. Rather than continuing to engage in this futile debate, I’d like to suggest a common sense approach to the question of Australia’s Head of State: if you want to work out who’s the head honcho in Australia just take a look in your wallet at a 20 cent piece – its not the Governor-General’s head depicted on our coins.

Ultimately, to all but a handful of constitutional junkies, I’d suggest these arguments are a boring and irrelevant distraction from the main game. Whether Elizabeth is Sovereign/Monarch as our opponents argue or Head of State it doesn’t change the case for a republic. We still want to cut the foreign connection. The fundamental question remains: Who should be at the apex of our constitutional system: a member of the British royal family who lives on the other side of the world and drops by every now and then for a whirlwind tour, or a fellow Australian?

So where are we at?

Since the disappointing 1999 referendum the Australian Republican Movement has regrouped and reinvigorated its organisation. We continue to work towards an Australian Head of State and have spent the past few years promoting community discussion and developing various options for an Australian Republic.

There is no denying that the republican issue has been off the mainstream national agenda in recent years. That's not to say it has disappeared: latent republicanism in the Australian community has been regularly sparked: controversy surrounding who would open the Sydney Olympics in 2000, the Corowa Conference in 2001, the Hollingworth debacle during 2003 and 2004, Prince Harry's visit to Australia in 2003, Mark Latham's active promotion of the issue upon becoming federal Opposition Leader in late 2003, and the recent announcement of Prince Charles' forthcoming marriage have all renewed interest at various times.

Things have been quiet, but don't be fooled into thinking the issue has died for lack of political leadership. It's one of the great sleeper issues of the Howard Government... and once this Prime Minister, an ardent monarchist, has moved on, we're confident that the issue will again move to centre stage. It may even happen before Mr Howard moves on.

Polls

Polling on the issue of a republic waxes and wanes, but republicans retain a consistent and considerable lead over our opponents.

The two most recent poll results suggest that the issue of an Australian republic is by no means dead. The Morgan poll last week demonstrated 51 per cent support for an Australian republic, rising to 61 per cent if Prince Charles were King. The Galaxy poll published in News Ltd papers last weekend found support for a republic rose from 53 per cent to 57 per cent when people considered Charles becoming Australia's next Head of State.

Australia Day 2005 saw *The Australian* newspaper publishing the most recent Newspoll on the republic. Asking respondents whether they were personally in favour or against Australia becoming a republic, the poll indicated a drop in support for the republic to 46 per cent, with opposition at 35 per cent and those uncommitted at 19 per cent.

While disappointing, this result was by no means disastrous for republicans. Newspoll utilises two streams of questions on the republican issue: one set focuses on a choice between an Australian Head of State or retention of the Queen as Australia's Head of State, and the second asks respondents whether they are personally in favour

or against Australia becoming a republic. Results from the questions contrasting an Australia Head of State with the status quo consistently rate more favourably for the republican campaign than whether people are in favour of the republic. Newpoll's Australia Day survey in 2004, for example, found that 64 per cent of respondents wanted an Australian to be Head of State, with support for the Queen remaining as Australia's Head of State dropping to 30 per cent.

Plainly there is still some resistance to the R word.

No matter the level of support for constitutional change, there is a fundamental truth about all of these polls: support for the constitutional status quo rarely rises above 35 per cent.

And in the 1999 republican referendum, with the challenges of a divided republican movement, political opposition from the Prime Minister of the day, and an effective scare campaign by our opponents, some 45.1 per cent – more than 5.3 million Australians – registered an effective vote of “no confidence” in the current system. That's an awful lot of people not happy with the status quo.

Models & process

As I referred to earlier, the ARM has spent the past few years promoting community discussion and developing various options for an Australian Republic. Our policy work has focussed on two key fronts: possible models for an Australian republic and the best process to move towards an Australian republic.

Since the 1999 referendum, the ARM has not advocated one model over others, nor does it suggest that the models it has developed are exhaustive. Our position remains that it is for the Australian people to decide what kind of republic Australia should have, as determined through a plebiscite and referendum process.

In 2001 the ARM's Constitutional Issues Committee launched its *6 Models for an Australian Republic* Discussion Paper. It was designed to initiate public discussion and test support for various approaches. The paper outlined the features of six different republican models, which represent the broad range of republican opinion, from the most minimal change through to a US style executive presidency.

The six models were:

1. Prime Minister appoints the President
2. People nominate, Parliament appoints the President
3. Presidential Assembly appoints the President
4. People elect the President
5. People Elect from Parliament's List
6. Executive President

We have since moved away from the executive presidency model, as we have detected little public support for a US style system. This would, of course, represent a major departure from our parliamentary

system and traditions and most republicans remain committed to the Westminster system.

In recent years the ARM has also focused on developing a more deliberative and democratic process to achieve a republic with an Australian Head of State.

Many consider that the process that led up to the 1999 referendum was unsatisfactory: too rushed and not consultative enough. The Australian people were given a say just twice: in the election of half the delegates to the 1998 Constitutional Convention, and then at the referendum. It has frequently been observed that if you give the Australian people a 'take it or leave it' proposition, they'll most likely leave it.

The ARM developed our preferred process to resolve the Head of State issue after widespread consultation with the ARM membership and the wider Australian community in 2003.

We propose that the first, essential, step is a thorough information campaign prepared by a multi-partisan parliamentary committee. We then advocate several plebiscites to test the public's views, followed by an elected Convention to draft the preferred model, concluding with a referendum under s.128 of the Constitution.

A plebiscite is like an official opinion poll of valid electors. Plebiscites are advisory and not constitutionally binding like referendums. They are a means to gauge the electorate's view on a particular issue. Historically, Australia has held two plebiscites, both concerning conscription during World War I. A national poll similar to a plebiscite was undertaken in 1977, eventually resulting in Advance Australia Fair replacing God Save the Queen as Australia's national anthem. We advocate the use of plebiscites to ensure that we are on the right track before going to the expense of another referendum.

Taking our preferred process step by step, we advocate a threshold plebiscite that asks

"Should we become a republic with an Australian Head of State?" OR
"Should we remain as a monarchy with the Queen as our Head of State?"

If a simple majority of voters support the change to a republic, we believe two other plebiscite questions should be asked together, either concurrently with the threshold plebiscite or at a later date. One question should put a range of models to the people and ask them to indicate a preferred model through a preferential vote. A third question, reflecting widespread discussion during the 1999 referendum, would ask voters to indicate a preferred title for an Australian Head of State.

An elected convention would then draft an amendment to the Constitution, guided by the results of the plebiscites. The bill is put

to the Commonwealth parliament and, if passed, a referendum is held under s. 128 of the Constitution.

Senate Inquiry into an Australian republic

The ARM's policy positions on models and process provided the basis for our submission to the 2004 Senate Inquiry into an Australian Republic. This Inquiry, established by Labor and the Democrats in mid 2003, represents the most significant development in the republican campaign since the 1999 referendum.

The terms of reference of the Inquiry recognised that there was majority support in the community for a republic, while also acknowledging that there was considerable debate regarding what steps should be taken to move towards an Australian republic, and what type of republican model Australians want.

The cross-party Legal and Constitutional References Committee, chaired by Labor's Senator Nick Bolkus and deputy chair Liberal Senator Marise Payne issued a thorough discussion paper in late 2003 and received more than 600 submissions. The committee conducted public hearings throughout Australia and released its report, *The road to the republic*, on 31 August 2004. I recommend both the Committee's discussion paper, and the final report, to anyone interested in improving their understanding of the republic issue. Both are available on the Parliament's website, and can be accessed through the ARM's site www.republic.org.au

The Senate Committee recommended a three stage process that would ask the Australian people whether they would prefer Australia to be a republic, or to continue as a monarchy. The committee didn't endorse a preferred republican model, but recommended that the people should decide on a model by a preferential vote.

The Committee recommended that voting in these plebiscites should be compulsory and that wherever possible, the plebiscites and referendum should be held in conjunction with Federal elections to alleviate costs.

Constitutional education

The Senate Committee also examined the issue of Australia's constitutional awareness and education. The importance of constitutional education cannot be underestimated. Unfortunately our opponents have shown no sign of retreating from the dishonest and cynical approach they adopted during the 1990s. I fully expect them to crank up more scare campaigns about national disasters, imminent dictatorships and the sky falling in when we again examine the move to a republic. Without an improvement in Australians' constitutional awareness and education amongst the Australian community, a slogan

such as the 1999 ripper, “If you don’t know, vote No” may yet be repeated.

In the 1990s the Constitutional Centenary Foundation, which I referred to earlier, did a fine job preparing and disseminating materials to schools and community groups regarding the operation of Australia’s constitutional system. The CCF provided impartial materials prior to the 1999 republican referendum and coordinated Constitutional Convention programs through schools and local councils. Unfortunately, funding for the CCF ran out with Australia’s Centenary of Federation in 2001, and little has emerged in its place.

The Australian Government granted rare tax deductibility status to the Constitutional Education Fund of Australia in 2003. According to its website, CEF-A “has been established to help all Australians gain a better understanding of the Australian Constitution and the Constitutions of the States of Australia.” The Governor-General is the Patron-in-Chief of CEF-A, which financially supports an annual Governor-General’s prize for undergraduate students.

In fact, it’s a monarchist front organisation. CEF-A shares its Executive Director, Kerry Jones, with Australians for Constitutional Monarchy (ACM), and is run from the ACM’s Sydney office. The ACM regularly appeals to its members to contribute to CEF-A. Despite the inclusion of several token republican academics on its advisory board, the Australian Republican Movement and its members have not been approached to be involved in their program or activities, not do we expect that CEF-A will start promoting constitutional reform anytime soon.

While the ARM welcomes all initiatives to improve Australians’ constitutional awareness, we are sceptical that CEF-A – with its links to an organisation dedicated to the preservation of Australia’s constitutional monarchy – can possibly do this in an impartial manner. We also question whether CEF-A is an appropriately independent organisation for the Governor-General to be involved with.

The ARM supports the establishment of an impartial body like the Constitutional Centenary Foundation to oversee ongoing education and awareness programs to improve Australians’ understanding of the Constitution and our system of government. We particularly support the recommendation by the Senate Legal and Constitutional References Committee that a fully resourced parliamentary committee be established to oversee and facilitate education programs on constitutional matters. The proposed Parliamentary Joint Standing Committee on Constitutional Education and Awareness would be responsible (after amendments to the (Referendum (Machinery Provisions) Act 1984) for the preparation and dissemination to voters of independent information, rather than partisan arguments for the Yes and No cases, in the lead-up to any future republican referendum.

Within our resource constraints, the ARM is also doing its bit on this front. On our website *www.republic.org.au* you can find a series of fact sheets on our models and preferred process towards an Australian republic, together with fact sheets on associated issues such as plebiscites, Australia and the Commonwealth and who is Australia's Head of State. We're also finalising an education kit for use by senior high schools students.

Like all forms of government, republics of course come in different shapes and sizes, some better than others. Our opponents have frequently resorted to hyperbole concerning the apparent inherent evil of republican forms of government, all the while ignoring any number of dysfunctional monarchies. To try and counter the bad press that our opponents sometimes give republics, the ARM has begun preparing profiles of republics around the world, such as the United States, France, Ireland, India and Germany. Again, these can be found on our website.

Political and public engagement

In addition to our education role, the ARM continues to engage with both the public and our parliaments on the issue of an Australian Head of State. In recent years we have taken an active role in the Corowa Conference of 2001 and the Constitutional Futures Conference in Brisbane in 2002.

In 2003 we launched our Preamble Project, bringing together six of Australia's leading writers, who each created their own republican preamble to the Australian Constitution. Last year we announced some 50 republican ambassadors from across the country, including Australian netball captain Liz Ellis, entertainer Rove McManus, AFL legend Ron Barrasi and writer Nick Earls.

We have held regular ARM conferences around the country. Whenever possible we hold stalls at local community fairs and participate in community debates.

On the political front, we continue to liaise with the many passionate republicans found in all political parties and parliaments around the country. Last year during the federal election campaign we surveyed some 976 federal candidates from across the political spectrum, asking whether they supported Australia becoming a republic with an Australian Head of State, and if they were committed to a second referendum about Australia becoming a republic being put to the Australian people by 2010 or earlier. We had just over a third of candidates respond, with 80 per cent being in favour of both propositions.

While the ARM considers the move to a republic to be a people's movement, it will always remain necessary for our federal parliamen-

tarians to sponsor constitutional change and for that reason we will continue to work closely with our elected representatives.

It is of course conventional wisdom that our next PM will be a republican, and no matter how that transpires, it will be a positive development for the move to an Australian Head of State.

Republicans united

The 1999 referendum demonstrated that disunity is death. Republican infighting was one of the most significant causes for our defeat in the 1999 campaign.

We in the ARM have taken this lesson to heart and have worked over the past five years to improve relations among republicans. In the wake of the '99 referendum a number of prominent direct electionists joined ranks with the ARM. Since then we have sought to cooperate with those republicans remaining outside of the organisation. Later this year we will be hosting a republican gathering in Canberra. We hope that republicans of all hues and from all around the country will attend, to focus on the issues that unite us, and plan our campaigns for the future.

There has also been the development of solidarity among republicans internationally. The Australian Republican Movement, along with Citizens for a Canadian Republic, Republic in the UK and the Republican Movement of Aotearoa New Zealand, has formed an informal coalition of republican campaigns in Commonwealth countries called Common Cause. Our aim is to develop more regular communication, share ideas and resources, coordinate our campaigns and perhaps create a common website of some sort.

Conclusion

In conclusion I'd like to offer a few optimistic thoughts. In the late nineteenth century it took more than a decade for the colonies of this land to form as one as the Commonwealth of Australia. In Sir Edmund Barton's words, we became 'a nation for a continent and a continent for a nation'. In doing so Australia became the only country on earth born peacefully, without war or revolution.

We are one of the longest standing continuous democracies in history, and have a proud tradition of democratic reforms: we introduced the secret ballot in the 1850s, decades before other countries; South Australia was among the first places in the world to give women the vote in 1894 and we value voting enough to make it compulsory. We are now recognised internationally as front-runners in advising on the democratic process and regularly send electoral advisors around the world.

Australia's democratic tradition is not founded in the text of our constitution – most Australians have never sighted, let alone read it!

It's drawn not only from the democratic institutions and the rule of law we inherited from other countries, but also lies in the hearts and minds of the Australian people... those born here and those who have come from all parts of the globe to be part of this unique nation and all that this country offers. It's in the spirit of the Australian people and in our commitment to a free, open and tolerant society that our democracy thrives.

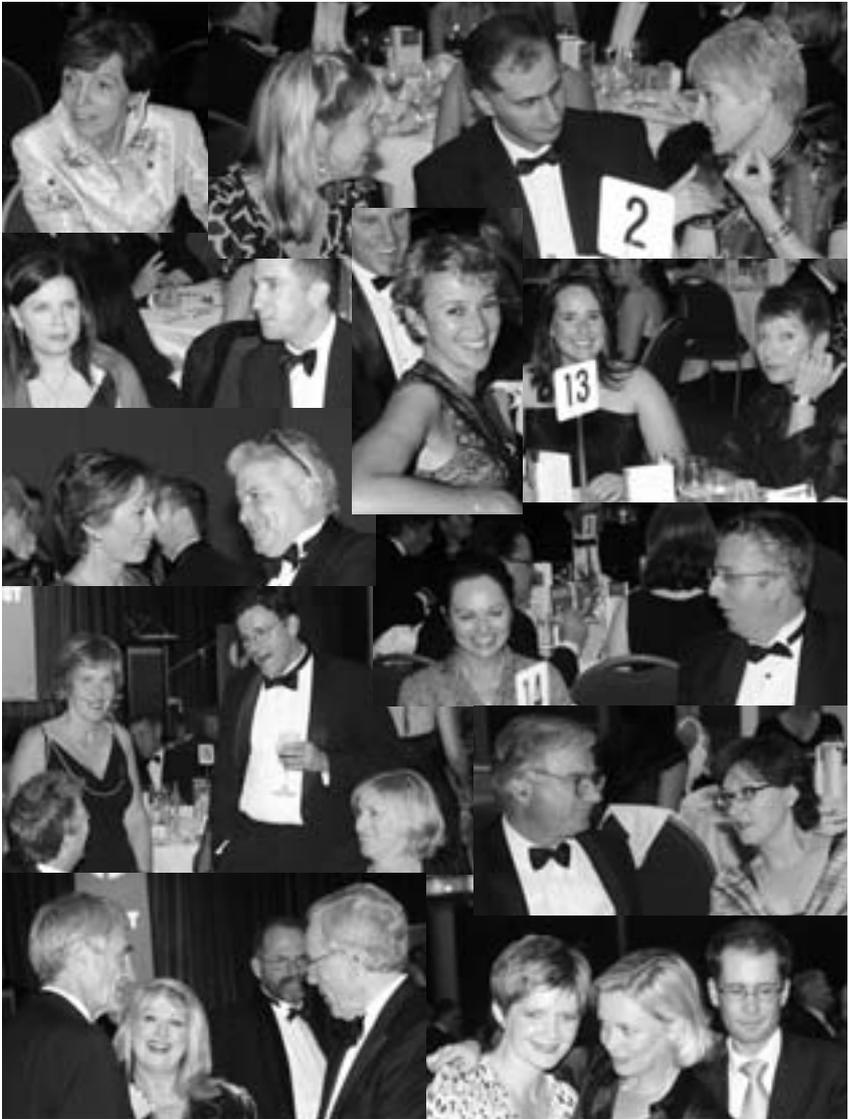
Since Federation in 1901 we have grown into a mature and confident nation. And during that time our institutions have evolved and adapted to fit changing circumstances. While constitutional monarchy was at one time an appropriate reflection of this nation; it is no longer. Nor does it represent our aspirations for the future.

It is time for us to progress from the undemocratic and increasingly irrelevant system of an absentee hereditary British monarch at the apex of our system of government to an Australian in the top job, chosen by us, from amongst us.

Every Australian child should have the opportunity to be our Head of State, and republicans are not about to give up, or go away, until that is achieved. However long it takes.

Over the past 104 years Australians have achieved amazing feats and stoically survived all kinds of adversity. The challenge of an Australian Head of State is not beyond us. There is nothing stopping us from becoming the first republic in the world created without conflict. Indeed our democratic heritage provides us with the perfect launching pad.

ANNUAL DINNER – 2005



Photographer: David Karonidis



Photo – David Karonidis

Nell Schofield

Nell Schofield presents films on the television channel Showtime and writes about classic movies for Melbourne's *Sunday Herald Sun*. A graduate of the National Institute of Dramatic Art, she has worked as an actor, as well as broadcaster for ABC TV where she is the female voice for *Media Watch*. She has also worked for ABC Radio National, and CNN International. Her most recent book, *Puberty Blues* (Currency Press/Screen Sound), was published in 2004. Nell Schofield addressed The Sydney Institute on 7 March 2005.

AUSTRALIAN BEACH

CULTURE – PUBERTY BLUES REVISITED

Nell Schofield

Thanks for inviting me to speak to you all about a subject that I've unwittingly become something of a figurehead for over the best part of quarter of a century; Australian Beach Culture. I'm going to explain how I first got lured into the sexy sandy salty world of the beach and how, when I was just 17, I took on the role of the most iconic surfie chick in our national screen heritage – Debbie Vickers in the film *Puberty Blues*. I'll also talk about the resurgence of interest in this cult film and how beach culture has changed since it was made back in 1981.

For those of you who haven't seen it, the film starts out with two young school girls, Debbie and Sue, trying to break in to the Greenhills Gang, the top surfie gang at Cronulla Beach. After much brown-nosing and crawling the girls are accepted in to the Gang, basically because they don't dob in the other gang members when they're busted for cheating in their exams. They take the rap themselves ... and membership is the prize for their loyalty.

In an early scene we see the extent to which Debbie and Sue are prepared to make themselves doormats for the Greenhills boys. After walking for a whole hour up the beach, "*melting their tits off*" as they say, Debbie and Sue arrive at the gang's beach territory. Debbie dutifully folds her new boyfriend Bruce's clothes and admires his surfing prowess. The girls sunbake in "melanomaland" while the boys surf. Back on the beach, Bruce berates Debbie for not watching him then orders her to get him a ridiculously long list of junk food – Chiko Rolls, those disgusting deep fried fat spring rolls, chocolate thick shakes, dim sims. Debbie and Sue oblige and set off on the hour long walk back down the beach at the boys' bidding, enthusing, "Isn't this great?" But a voice-over from Debbie at this point, taken word for word from the book, tells us what else was going on: Girls never ate in front of their boyfriends, It was unladylike to open your mouth and shove something into it. We were also busting to go to the dunny, but that was too rude for girls. Our stomachs rumbled and our bladders burst.

In my recent monograph on the film, part of the Australian Screen Classics series for Currency Press and the National Film and Sound Archive, I pick up the story :

Being a surfie chick might have been the be all and end all at Cronulla Beach but in reality it was agony. It was a form of slavery.

At least Debbie has Sue who volunteers to accompany her gal pal on the hour-long trek back down the beach and then up again – two hours in all! If their tits haven't melted off by then, then they never will. This is true friendship. In fact, theirs is the most important relationship in the whole film. At its core, this is a buddy flick, a bosom buddy flick. No matter what happens, these two have each other.

From this subservience, the natural progression in a Greenhills Gang relationship is sexual intercourse and Debbie's first go at it occurs at the local drive-in. To the teenagers it hardly matters what movie is playing. In the book it's Dennis Hopper's 1969 cult youth rebellion movie *Easy Rider*, but here it's the B-grade horror flick, *Thirst*. Our surfie Gang arrives just at the point where a woman or 'blood cow' is being milked from the jugular in some twisted clinic. The horror component is no accident. Impending sex is presented as a horrific prospect for our heroine as it will be again when we see her preparing for it next to a ghoulish poster for *The Rocky Horror Picture Show*. Initially the filmmakers had planned to shoot their own horror film for this particular sequence and Leslie Caron had even expressed interest in starring in it, but budget restrictions proved prohibitive. With its mind-numbing commentary and increasingly ominous soundtrack, *Thirst* provides a suitable substitute and for many, this scene is the most memorable of the entire film. It's usually the first thing people comment on when they meet me: 'Was that you in the panel van?' I'm afraid it was. And [director Bruce] Beresford has a ball with it too, turning a very uncomfortable situation into comedy. It's this touch throughout that makes the more confronting material so accessible and the film is often labelled a comedy as a result. In the back of the panel van Debbie is submissively following Bruce's lead and removing her clothes. Glenn (Michael Shearman) and Vicki go to the shops to get some "eats" while Danny impresses Sue with a cigarette trick. Meanwhile Bruce, now in his leopard print undies, is delving into his "Tool Box" for a condom. He gives Debbie a dirty look for watching him put on the contraceptive and she nervously turns away. Not a word has been spoken between them but the body language says it all. Deb is huddled up at one end of the van while Bruce occupies the other edge of the frame. From outside we see Deb part the purple curtains to witness a couple going for it hammer and tongs in the next car. It does nothing to allay her fear.

"Move down" Bruce instructs. It's the first thing he's said to her in the entire scene and she obeys just as the *Thirst* soundtrack shifts into an even more spooky gear. Suddenly we cut to an extreme close-up of a hot dog. The shot gets a huge laugh whenever audiences see it, especially from the blokes.

The film *Puberty Blues*, was based on an autobiographical book of the same name written by Kathy Lette and Gabrielle Carey. Published in 1979 it has been reprinted many times since, the last being in 2002 with forewords by the unlikely double act of Germaine Greer and Kylie Minogue. It was the story of their real life experiences growing up in Cronulla. They were just 13 years old when it all took place which sets the scene in about 1974 although the film doesn't specify any particular year. It was certainly still relevant in 1981, when the film came out and, perhaps surprisingly, it still resonates today. The DVD which was released in 2002 made the film accessible to a whole new generation, and constantly I'm being approached by people who tell me they absolutely love it and say it reflects their own teenage experience. Some things never change and growing up is one of them.

What *Puberty Blues* did was expose the realities of an Australian sub-culture that had hitherto been hidden. The world of the beach, especially for young people, had a code of practice all to itself, a secret code that parents and educators knew absolutely nothing about. When they read the book they were horrified; here were tales of 13 year old girls getting so drunk they could hardly walk; smoking marijuana till they could barely think; loosing their virginity in the back of panel vans at the local drive-in; and basically being sex slaves to gang rapists. It wasn't a pretty picture.

I was shocked too when I read it. Not because I was unaware that this sort of thing was going on but because these authors had broken the cone of silence. You see, I was a surfie chick too and had experienced a lot of the same stuff at Bondi that Kathy and Gabrielle had at Cronulla: the drunken binges, the underage sex, the general all-round rebellion against the education system and parental control. And just like them, I broke another unspoken rule – that girls don't surf – and, with my first surfboard tucked firmly under my arm, crossed the gender divide between the sand and the sea.

I often wonder why I did this. Maybe it was because I'd been on some Women's Liberation marches, one headed up by my good friend's godmother, Germaine Greer. I must have been about ten at that time and clearly remember the thrill of being with all those feminists in Hyde Park chanting for equal opportunity. Three years later I assumed we'd won it and had no hesitation in doing exactly what all the boys were doing and getting out there amongst the waves.

I certainly wasn't one to bow to peer group pressure like Debbie and Sue do in the film in order to gain acceptance from any gang. All that bullying seemed to wash over me. But bullying, I notice, is as rampant today as it ever was, if not more so. One in six kids at school these days falls victim to it once a week and so prevalent is it that 3000 schools across New South Wales are participating in a "Speak

Up Day” on 30 March which is being organised to help a million kids have a say on it.

Of course, it’s easier to keep the bullies at bay if you have a buddy to back you up. I had a bosom buddy, just like Debbie does in the film, who spurred me on and who took to the waves herself. Surfing became an obsession for us and most mornings we’d be out there, getting stronger and better by the day. It was a powerful place to be, pitting ourselves against nature in a space devoid of adults; a place where we could express some of our massive teenage energy and gain confidence in ourselves as individuals.

Okay, so it was also a great place to check out the surfie spunks and interact with them up close but we were also gaining their respect and that felt good. We weren’t like the other girls, basking in the sun and rubbing sun tan lotion into their boyfriends’ backs. We were tomboys, I guess, and risk takers.

Surfing was not part of the mainstream back then as it is today with surf companies like Mambo, Quicksilver and Billabong making untold fortunes out of selling the surf lifestyle. It was part of a counter-culture that rejected most things mainstream society had to offer.

What was so remarkable about *Puberty Blues*, the book and what was captured so well in the film, was the surfie vernacular; “deadest”, “unreal” and “fish-faced moll” – these terms were all part of our language back then, and they seem to be making a comeback too. A moll, the book explains, is “an easy root”: – to root, of course, meaning to have sexual intercourse. The film added other memorable words to the list such as “rootable”, “nerd”, and “slops” – the latter being a description of the last in line for a gangbang.

I might just focus on the gangbang scene in the film for a moment: with gangbangers being a subject much talked about in the press of late, it warrants examination. Part of the whole surfie culture back in the 1970s was the heterosexual pairing of young people and their sexual initiation into gangs. But some kids just didn’t cut the mustard and were excluded by their peer groups for a number of reasons, some of which probably still have currency today. In the book, the authors explain it like this:

If you were pimply, a migrant, or just plain ugly you couldn’t get a boyfriend. If you couldn’t get a boyfriend there were two options. You could be a prude or a moll. Being a prude was too boring. At least if you were a moll people knew who you were.

That excerpt is also used as part of Debbie’s narration in the film and it immediately precedes the gangbang scene. The sacrificial moll in *Puberty Blues* is a freckly redhead called Freda Cummins. We meet her in the opening credit sequence. In fact, practically the first word

we hear in the film is Debbie's derogatory put down of her; "moll", she says meanly. And the verbal abuse continues all the way through until one night in the mall three of the surfies offer to give her a lift home. She nervously accepts and is taken to a dark back road near the Kurnell oil refinery where the boys trick her into "rooting" them all. The smallest of the three is designated "slops" which he protests about while the other two get stuck into the poor unfortunate young woman in the back of the panel van. It's a dark and confronting moment but as Kathy Lette later explained, the boys that she hung out with as a kid saw women simply as "life support systems to a vagina".

We didn't really know about *this* sort of activity at Bondi but I've no doubt that it was going on. In fact, when researching my book I found an article in the latest edition of "the surfer's bible", *Tracks Magazine*, recalling the heyday of surf culture between 1963 (the year that I was born) and 1972, called "The Mongrel – tracing the bastard bloodlines of the Australian surf animal". In it was a tale of 40 Bondi boys gangbanging a girl from Collaroy in the sand dunes. This, the writer implied, was considered pretty cool behaviour and the perpetrators went on to become "role models".

Role models like that we can do without. When I started surfing we didn't really have anyone to model ourself on. There weren't even any women surfers featured in any of the surf movies that we went along to see. We certainly didn't have anyone like Layne Beachley, the current six times world champion Australian female surfer, to look up to. That's one huge change over the past 24 years. Not only is Beachley a role model for all young women surfers, she's also a competent television presenter with the *Getaway* program and a prominent advocate for recycling. Like that other Aussie sporting hero, Ian Thorpe, she is not one thing but many, and to all people too.

But back to this gangbang thing. Just last year we had the case of those six senior members of the Bulldogs rugby league team who allegedly gang-banged a woman in Coffs Harbour. "Gang-bang culture all in the game" was the headline in *The Australian* on March 6, 2004. "Footballers of all descriptions are more than capable of turning on displays of 'men behaving badly'", the article explained, "Women were there to be used as part of a celebration of a good win or for that matter, to help you get over a bad loss."

That incident was followed by a second allegation of rape by a member of the Melbourne Storm club, and in another article posted in *ON LINE opinion*, journalists Jessica Halloran and Jacqueline Magnay wrote: "The gang-bang has almost been a rite of passage in Rugby League. One League coach encouraged his team to indulge in it to enhance the male bonding process." According to the writers, men "become animals when drunk and in a pack situation". Pity the poor victims because often they have no means of redress. In her Sir

Ninian Stephen Lecture at the University of Newcastle, Margaret Cunneen recently referred to the trial involving a victim known only as Ms C who was raped 25 times by 14 men over six hours in one of Sydney's worst gang rapes. The trial, she said, had been hijacked by technicalities in her attackers' favour. But at least by talking about it like *Puberty Blues* did, the issue was brought out into the light of day for discussion, a necessary precursor to achieving change.

Another shocking incident, and one explicitly linked to a specific beach culture, was the murder of Anthony Hines a couple of years ago. He was a founding member of a fiercely territorial gang known as the "Bra Boys" – "Bra", being short for Maroubra where they live and surf. Hines was shot four times by fellow Bra Boy, top surfer Jai Abberton and according to an old surfer mate of mine, "died hard". It is common knowledge among the surfer community that Hines was renowned for his habit of raping women – they used to call him "scotch tape". Apparently he had been taunting Jai with threats that he was going to rape his girlfriend next. It appears that Jai, who just happened to have access to a gun, whacked Hines then threw his body over the cliff where it was lodged in an underwater cave for a couple of days before coming back to haunt him.

Jai's brother Koby, another proud Bra Boy and a radical big wave rider, was also charged with, amongst other things, being an accessory after the fact to murder. It was a big year, last year, for Koby. He beat six times world champion surfer Kelly Slater as well as having to front up in court to face his charges and the media frenzy surrounding him.

A young local filmmaker named Marcario (or "Macca") de Souza captured Koby Abberton's wild, wild year in a short frenetic film that won a surfing film competition that I recently helped judge. The competition was held at the Beach Road Hotel in Bondi, better known to me from my pre-*Pubes* days as The Bondi Regis – scene, I confess, of many a drunken disco episode – Harvey Wallbangers, as I recall, were the *drink de jour* back then. But this night, apart from being full of old local surfies and their kids, all running amok in the beer garden, the place was invaded by the Bra Boys themselves with their spunky surfer chicks in tow. When Macca won, the place exploded – beer cans erupted all over the place and a war cry was sung as the gang claimed what was perceived to be a victory in the face of society's contempt for their widely publicised antisocial behaviour. An older Maroubra surfer sitting beside me denied that this was a tribal response preferring to call it community based. It was certainly a lot more pumped than anything I'd ever witnessed in my youth.

Back then, we were more interested in soul surfing and eating macrobiotic food. We were inspired by Albie Falzon's classic surf movie *Morning of the Earth* which played right into our hearts. It spoke of freedom and nature and surfing as a means of connecting into

some kind of higher spirituality. Our philosophy was that the best surfer on the day was the one having the most fun, not the one being the most aggro. Obviously I was sheltered from the darker goings on. My insider surfer buddy, who incidentally is now an award winning surf cinematographer, remembers them, though and describes the anarchic, primal behaviour as almost homosexual. Like other gangs of heterosexual, often homophobic, men these surfies would get drunk and drugged up and rip off their tops and rub up against each other at parties and feel amazingly connected and alive. Not that they'd ever confess to such feelings.

If male bonding sessions that turn violent towards women still occur in society a quarter of a century after *Puberty Blues* first revealed them to us then what exactly has changed?

Just two years after I began surfing here in Sydney, a phenomenon started up that would have an interesting flow-on effect on beach culture – the Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras. It began in 1978 as a protest march and some of my older friends who participated were caught up in the ensuing battle with police. They were marching, like we had been in the Women's Liberation marches, for equal rights but soon the community would also be marching to raise awareness of a disease that affected it more than any other – HIV/AIDS.

The first case of AIDS was recorded in America in 1981 – the same year that *Puberty Blues* came out. This changed the whole picture – suddenly sex was potentially fatal and not just for same sex couples. Girls and women might have previously been concerned that they could end up with an unwanted pregnancy after a sexual encounter but now they realised could potentially die as well.

In the film, Debbie has a pregnancy scare. It happens after the first time she has sex with her new boyfriend, even though they use a condom. This scenario in particular has been used ever since the film came out to educate young school students about sex and its ramifications. Even today kids and their teachers come up to me and say that they're watching and analysing it in school. While the film doesn't mention AIDS or HIV, it does show some safe sex practices, and by doing so performs a useful sex education role. Safe Sex, of course, is still a big message today, especially for the gay and lesbian community although according to recent reports, it is a message that's not getting through as loudly or clearly as it once did.

I was out there with my queer brothers and sisters last Saturday night, celebrating our difference and, at the same time, our right to equality, at Mardi Gras, or should I say "New Mardi Gras". The old Mardi Gras got bogged down in definitions of sexuality. It wanted everyone to tick a box on their membership forms indicating exactly how they identified themselves and this pigeon-holing got on the nerves of the younger members – I know I was pissed off. My friends

and I wanted to tick every box (or no box at all) and be accepted for our individuality. For those who didn't fit a box precisely, this policy excluded them, especially from the party which is held after the parade. This is a place where poofs and dykes and transsexuals and bisexuals and friends of Dorothy and their friends are all supposed to be welcome equally. "Queer" is the all encompassing term used now for those who fly the rainbow flag and according to Cardinal Chartay of the Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence (a Mardi Gras institution), the term means "polymorphous perversity".

As usual there was a colourful display of it at the parade. Interestingly, apart from identifying as queer, many of the marchers were also proud to call themselves surfers. Later, at the party, I bumped into some lesbian surfer chicks from Cronulla. They spotted me first and we had a good boogie together. I met them last year at an all girls surf camp at Greenhills – the notorious location for the surfies in *Pubes*. They bill themselves as "Australia's only lesbian owned and operated surf school and surf tour company" and refer, with irony, to that "classic Australian Surf film" in which "Chicks don't surf". This is what Debbie and Sue are told repeatedly throughout the film whenever they express an interest in doing anything other than folding the boys clothes and fetching them junk food. But, as we know, they defy that gang rule and hit the surf anyway.

In fact, what makes the film so powerful, even today, is this finale. In the book, the two bosom buddies are no longer prepared to stay stuck on the sand and left out of the surf. So bravely – incredibly bravely in those days – they buy a second hand surfboard and take to the waves, making total fools of themselves but having a fabulous time anyway.

But because I could surf, we used my skill to create an awesome feminist screen moment. I noticed that the press release for this talk states that I got the role because I could surf. This isn't true. None of the boys in the film could surf and yet they were all cast as top surfies. All except one had a body double for their surfing shots and Beresford could have easily used one for Debbie as well. Instead we created movie magic.

It's widely thought that the final scene of the film has been responsible for a radical shift in Australian beach culture. In it we see Debbie and Sue buy a board and, despite the derision of their old gang, take to the waves with a big splash. This time when they pass Freda as they walk up the beach they pause and say "Hi!" They are finally redeeming themselves by rejecting the sexist Greenhills code and supporting the sisterhood instead. This scene inspired girls and women to get out there and claim their right alongside the blokes to surf, or, at the very least, gave them an option to do so. When Debbie

gets up and surfs in front of the gang members their jaws drop. It is she that is the cool one now.

I was one of the early birds, a bit of a freak of nature perhaps, but today there are over 200,000 female surfers carving up the waves all around the country's coastline. This is having a huge impact on beach life. Before, guys would hang out the back waiting for waves and boast about their latest sexual conquest. Now, with girls out there too, they are being forced to change their behaviour. They might not like it, but it's a fact and they have to face it.

Young women are learning from our generation and pushing the boundaries even further. My partner's 17 year old daughter surfs as par for the course. She is a happy-go-lucky girl who likes partying with her friends and hanging out on the beach but she's saving herself for the right guy – a nice “clean punk” – who, she predicts, she'll meet when she's about 26. In the meantime, she's going for gold in her Higher School Certificate, as it happens, at the same school I went to – Sydney Girls High. She hopes to get into medicine and has a very good chance of doing so too. Then she'll take a “gap” year off and travel overseas with an exchange program before knuckling down at uni until that perfect partner steps into her life. Then she'll have three children by him and juggle kids and career.

It's a fine plan and one that never entered my mind. We were all for the present when we were young, and I guess a lot of us still are. But kids today can see that our way of life doesn't necessarily provide security. We ran wild in our youth. Teen babes today are much more conservative. We smoked cigarettes because advertisements told us that it was ultra cool. Kids today know the reality – cigarette packets are emblazoned with warnings about the health risks of smoking and it is even prohibited on a lot of beaches now. They wear sun-block whereas we oiled ourselves up and ignorantly fried ourselves to a crisp.

These young girls are setting themselves new road maps which are yet to be tested. In her book *The End of Equality*, Anne Summers writes that:

School-age girls today might look forward to a world that will confer on them power and opportunity, but most young women are sooner or later confronted by a reality that is sadly different. The discrimination is still there, in jobs, in salaries, in promotions and, for all too many women, the crunch comes once they decide to have children. Then, as we have seen, women who have grown up expecting (quite rightly) that they could combine motherhood with having a career, find that they are expected to make tough choices about which has priority.

Maybe my partner's daughter will be part of a new wave of women doing it all, regardless of Ms Summer's learned opinion. I really hope so, for her sake and for ours too. Because only by acknowledging the

important part that women play in society and supporting them so that they can be the very best that they can, and have an equal say in how society is run, will we have a culture that also nurtures the natural systems that support it. I truly believe that women have the power to do this. You might've guessed by now that I am a feminist. I'm also an environmentalist and I have a revolutionary vision for a scheme that would not only improve Australian beach culture but would enrich our inland areas as well. At the risk of sounding like a maniac I'd like to share this idea with you: I'd like to see a massive scheme whereby workers are mobilised to build a pipeline to carry all the effluent and fresh water used to flush it, not out to sea, where we all love to frolic – surfers and swimmers alike – but inland where it can be used to fertilize and water our poor, depleted land.

I'm sure some young girl in the future will make it happen in-between her surfing, her kids and her career. In the meantime, I've taken up surfing again as a way of regaining some of my old physical confidence. Just last Saturday I signed up with the Bondi Girls Surf Riders – another new phenomenon that certainly wasn't there 24 years ago – and found myself in a surf competition with tiny tots, lesbians and mothers alike. I'm also working on a film script for another beach movie, tentatively titled *The Revenge of Freda the Moll* – a story I believe to be long overdue.

ANNUAL DINNER – 2005



Photographer: David Karonidis



Photo – David Karonidis

Ross McMullin

Chris Watson was Labor's first prime minister – but he split with Labor in 1916 over conscription and joined the political conservatives. Pompey Elliott was one of Australia's finest military leaders in World War I – but he returned to Australia a disillusioned man and committed suicide in 1931. Ross McMullin is the author of the award-winning biography *Pompey Elliott and So Monstrous a Travesty: Chris Watson and the world's first national labour government* (Scribe Publications) and has brought together the lives of these two men in an evaluation of Australia in the early twentieth century. Their stories tell us much about early Australia – in war and peace. Ross McMullin addressed The Sydney Institute on Tuesday 22 March 2005.

EARLY AUSTRALIA IN

WAR AND PEACE: PRIME MINISTER CHRIS WATSON AND BRIGADIER- GENERAL POMPEY ELLIOTT

Ross McMullin

When Chris Watson and his ministers were sworn in on 27 April 1904, they were forming not just Australia's first national Labor government. It was the first national labour government in the world.

We were leading the world. It might be hard to imagine now, but the advent of the Watson Government confirmed that a century ago Australia was leading the world in progressive government, in pioneering measures benefiting the working class. Remarkable as it may seem today, curious visitors crossed the globe to scrutinise this advanced social laboratory for themselves.

The Labor Party's rise was astonishing. Labor had only been formed 13 years earlier. It was a new party, with not just different policies but a different look and feel, a different way of *doing* politics with novel features like party control of MPs and policy, caucus control of the parliamentary party, a pledge to enforce solidarity. This new party rose so swiftly that merely 13 years after its formation it was not just picking up a Senate seat or two, but actually forming a national government.

Moreover, it achieved this before any equivalent party overseas had become remotely close to doing so. For example, in 1904 there were 670 MPs in the House of Commons, but the number representing the British Labour Party was the grand total of four. In 1904 a British Labour government was still decades away.

The novelty of this first national labour government in the world under Chris Watson inevitably influenced what people thought of it. At that time the gaining of power through the democratic process by representatives of the working class was unknown. It just didn't happen. The working class got hold of political power rarely, and only by force.

This prompted some alarmist observers in 1904 to start thinking anxiously about precedents like the French Revolution. Analogies

between Watson and Robespierre might well seem grotesque to us now, but just as we look back a hundred years to the Watson Government, when Australians in 1904 looked back an equivalent period, a hundred years or so earlier, what some of them saw in their historical rear vision mirror was the French Revolution.

This led to the extraordinary barrage of sledging that Watson and his government had to put up with from the conservative press. It started even before the government took office. Even before it was sworn in, the press hostility was virulent. The title of my book on the Watson government, *So Monstrous a Travesty*, is one of many quotable examples.

The famous Sydney weekly, the *Bulletin*, denounced “those lying papers and persons that always explained to the public how the first Democratic government would take office with a flaming torch in one hand, and a gory dagger in the other, and a newly-severed head trailing behind it at the end of a bit of string”. In fact, said the *Bulletin*, what the new government “mostly wants is time ... to show that a Labor Ministry isn’t anything like a shindy of the larrikin sons of the upper classes at a university function, and that it doesn’t drink or break things, or start revolutions.”

In 1904, Labor was one of three parties of similar numerical strength in federal parliament. Besides Labor under Watson, there were the Protectionists under Alfred Deakin and the Free Traders under George Reid. Labor was closer to Deakin and his Protectionists, who were generally more progressive than Reid’s Free Traders. Throughout the first decade of federal politics, no party had a majority in either the House of Representatives or the Senate. That significant fact underpins the whole historical context. From 1901 to 1910, no party had a majority in either chamber of federal parliament. The Watson Government of 1904 was a minority government.

The composition of Watson’s cabinet was interesting. It included two future prime ministers in Andrew Fisher and Billy Hughes. There was also Labor’s Senate leader, the remarkable Gregor McGregor, a beefy, rough and tough former labourer and wrestler who was virtually blind. McGregor could distinguish objects only in the best possible light, and had to have documents read to him. Caucus colleagues had to shepherd him around parliament, saying mind the step, look out for the swinging door, and so on. McGregor got by because he had an extraordinary memory. He was able to buttress his speeches with heaps of statistics, and frequently amazed onlookers with his capacity to memorise them.

The other senator in Watson’s ministry was Andy Dawson. He had already acquired a measure of fame as leader of the brief Queensland Labor government of December 1899. In 1904 Dawson was Watson’s minister for Defence. He too was a fascinating character.

A hard-drinking radical who had been orphaned in the most tragic circumstances, Dawson was an associate of John Wren, and his stint as Defence minister was dominated by his bitter feud in office with the autocratic British commander of Australia's defence forces.

What was implicit in the rabid press hostility that the Watson Government had to put up with — and sometimes explicit — was the notion that people from genuine working class backgrounds couldn't run the country. And they did have genuine working class backgrounds: Watson the compositor, McGregor the blind ex-labourer, Fisher and Dawson both formerly miners, Billy Hughes the umbrella mender and odd-job-man.

Also in Watson's cabinet were two ministers with unique attainments. H.B. Higgins (later to become best known as the judge who delivered the Harvester judgment that ushered in the basic wage in Australia) remains the only MP to have been a minister in an Australian federal Labor government without being a member of the ALP. And Watson's Postmaster-General Hugh Mahon remains the only MP ever to have been expelled from our federal parliament. He was not just put in the sin-bin for 24 hours, but thrown right out of parliament in a controversy that occurred well after 1904.

Watson and his pioneering government did well. Their administration was creditable, and so was the way the government ended, when Watson showed he was prepared to relinquish office on a policy principle. Their performance ensured that Australia's Labor Party continued to progress much more rapidly than any equivalent overseas party.

When Chris Watson was sworn in as prime minister, he had just turned 37. Australia has never had a younger prime minister. Watson was an accomplished party leader, and during his time in office he led the nation capably too. Yet he resigned the leadership three years later, and within a further three years he was out of parliament altogether. That is, one of Labor's finest national leaders relinquished the leadership when he was only 40.

I've included in the book some glowing assessments of Watson. To cite one example, a top-level defence strategist named Alfred Buchanan made a discerning study in 1940 of Australian prime ministers in the first 40 years since Federation. "Thirty years ago people wondered [about Watson's resignation]", Buchanan wrote, "and they still wonder. There have been a number of Labor leaders since Watson, but not one of them has shown the combination of qualities that distinguished him. He had poise, tact, foresight, firmness, judgment, and self-control. He had along with everything else a natural unforced dignity, which everyone recognised and respected."

Despite Chris Watson's proficiency as a leader, his significance in his time, and his special place in history as Labor's first national leader and first prime minister, and as Australia's youngest prime minister, he is little known today. He long ago slipped into obscurity, and has remained there for decades.

Watson's first speech in parliament as prime minister challenged the false "impression [that] has got abroad in the past that the Labour Party are opposed to any adequate provision being made for defence". In other words, the notion that Labor was soft on defence and national security was simply not true, as Watson himself proved by actions he took as prime minister.

So that furphy is over a century old. As long ago as 1904, it was already hackneyed and trite. A decade later, when the First World War began in 1914, Australia was in the middle of a federal election campaign. Labor won that election, and a significant factor in that victory was that Labor under Chris Watson and Andrew Fisher had a clearly better record on defence and national security than their opponents.

During that 1914 election campaign, Pompey Elliott was appointed to command Australia's 7th Battalion. He led it brilliantly at Gallipoli, and was then promoted to command the 15th Brigade at the Western Front. He was an exceptional character, a household name.

Imagine a hefty, fleshy bloke, 36 years of age in mid-1914, married with two kids. A solicitor conscientious about his legal firm, but passionately interested in soldiering. Someone who was a fierce disciplinarian, who openly declared that he subjected his men to more rigorous and demanding training than any other battalion endured. Someone who frequently roared at officers and men under his command because they weren't doing what he thought they ought to be doing. Someone who was frank, forthright, controversial, often in trouble with his superiors because he called a spade a bloody shovel.

And someone who despite the best efforts of his wife and his staff tended to look untidy, sloppy, dishevelled – the sort of commander who would be criticising the standard of some unfortunate private's buttons or puttees on parade while blissfully unaware that he had forgotten to hook up his own braces that were hanging down incongruously. Stylish dress was never a Pompey priority. On one leave in London some military policemen concluded that there was no way such a scruffily dressed man could really be a brigadier, and he was arrested for impersonating an officer.

All this does not seem to be a promising basis for immense popularity. How, then, did he acquire such a revered reputation as a leader? There are three key factors, it seems to me, the three Cs – courage, character and capacity.

Taking the last one first, his capacity. Pompey was a brilliant tactician as well as a fierce fighter. For any private soldier, it's important to have faith in your superior's competence. If you're putting your life on the line, you obviously want to feel you're being competently led while you're doing it. Pompey's men had that faith, which stemmed from the way he treated his responsibilities with passionate seriousness – they knew that he knew his stuff. Two of the most brilliant Australian victories were Polygon Wood and Villers-Bretonneux, and in each battle no-one was more instrumental than Pompey in turning looming disaster into stunning triumph.

As for courage, Pompey was remarkably brave. He was Australia's most famous fighting general. He placed himself in perilous situations so often that his survival was one of the minor miracles of the war. His reputation for extraordinary courage was established early at Gallipoli, notably when he was notified that Turks had captured an Australian-held tunnel and he immediately went forward himself to investigate the situation and had a celebrated duel with a Turk in that murky tunnel. From that time on, it was an article of faith among his men that Pompey would never send anyone anywhere he was not prepared to go himself.

And the third of those three Cs that had so much to do with the exceptional esteem, even reverence, that so many of his men regarded him with, was character. I mean character in both senses. His men knew that he would say what he thought about proposed operations, that if he thought his superiors had given his men an ill-conceived task that was an exercise in futility, he had the character to say so. He would object vehemently. And in the other sense of the word Pompey *was* a great character, a real character. Stories about him grew and grew, amusing his men and disconcerting his superiors.

Numerous commanders tried to be exacting disciplinarians during the Great War, and ended up being despised as callous, vindictive martinets. But there was nothing austere or aloof about Pompey. He was a larger-than-life character, full of exuberance and vitality, with idiosyncrasies that appealed to his men and boosted their anecdotal repertoire. There are heaps of these diverting Pompey anecdotes in the book.

It was the combination of his wholeheartedness, his absolute dedication to duty, coupled with his tempestuous personality, that generated these anecdotes. There was another ingredient too, his loyalty, his profound regard and commitment, to the officers and men he led. He spent his time on leave visiting hospitals to see those of his men who had been wounded, and he never stopped trying to think of ways his men could be better looked after in or out of the trenches. Most of them came to realise that he had a genuine and profound regard for them despite his gruff, volatile exterior.

For example, J.D. Schroder was directed to report with his section to Pompey in Egypt. In Schroder's own words this is what happened:

[After journeying across the desert we] arrived at 3am in the morning, and naturally did not turn out for physical jerks that day. I was awakened from a very deep sleep by a roar which resembled that of a bull at large thirsting for gore. Standing in the doorway of the bell tent was a huge figure, riding breeches on, no leggings, boots unlaced, a flannel shirt with one brace over the shoulder and one dangling down the side. Not wishing to be outdone in the roaring line, I did a little myself, with the result that within five minutes I was sojourning in the guard-tent and my section was at physical jerks ... I was released later in the day ... and I realised that the tales of Pompey's exploits and discipline ... had not been overrated.

Despite such an inauspicious start to Lieutenant Schroder's relationship with his new commander, Schroder was later to write this assessment of Pompey: "in my estimation no greater soldier or gentleman ever lived". Schroder went right through the Western Front, survived the war, and lived a long and fulfilling life after it, so that's a very big statement.

In March 1916, when Pompey had just been promoted to brigadier, Australian formations including his brigade were directed to take over the task of safeguarding the Suez Canal. There were no available trains. Top-level British commanders directed that the Australians had to get there on foot. That is, by marching 35 miles across the desert.

It was not Pompey's brigade that had to go first. The 14th Australian Brigade set off first. They endured a terrible ordeal. Baked by intense heat, their water bottles soon empty and their feet blistering painfully in new boots, they sank into the heavy, burning sand up to their knees. A cloud of dust and flies added to their misery. The brigade disintegrated into a rabble. Men fell out all over the place. Many, delirious with thirst and exhaustion, were barely alive. Medical and other units were rushed to the rescue, and encountered scenes of dreadful suffering. There were reputedly a number of deaths. The brigade commander was sacked. He was less culpable than the senior British commanders, but he was sent home to Australia.

The 15th Brigade followed two days later. Pompey's distinctive leadership was very evident. To minimise the ordeal he chose a different route after personally inspecting the various options and consulting officers familiar with them. He also adopted a different march timetable, arranging for short halts at regular intervals, together with a long break in the middle of the day when the heat was at its worst. A carefully selected rearguard attended to stragglers. During the march itself the driving force of his tempestuous leader-

ship was more evident than ever, enriching the ever-growing fund of Pompey anecdotes.

Probably his biggest challenge was to ensure that men overwhelmed with raging thirst did not drink the tempting but disease-ridden liquid in the nearby sweetwater canal. Pompey roamed far and wide on his famous black horse, ranting and roaring. As he wrote, “when one man gave me cheek and refused to fall in ... I drew my pistol and pointed it at his head and swore I would blow his brains out on the spot if he didn’t obey orders. The pistol wasn’t loaded, but I frowned at him and he concluded he’d better march”.

Another man forgot the ban on smoking and unthinkingly lit a cigarette. Pompey pounced on this infringement immediately. “*Who lit that?*” he bellowed. Having identified the offender, he added ominously “I should *shoot* you”. “If you shoot him, *I’ll shoot you*”, came a voice from the ranks, just as menacing. The owner of that voice was arrested. Pompey demanded an explanation from this private, who replied that he would respond like that to anyone intimidating his brother (who was the smoker). Pompey arranged for this private to be sent forthwith to a school for NCOs, reasoning that anyone who could stand up to him in full flight was a man of mettle with leadership potential.

Some men fell out along the way, but Pompey’s brigade reached its destination as a cohesive formation. It was, in the circumstances, an impressive achievement, especially after the disastrous precedent of the 14th Brigade. But the drama was not yet over. Elliott and his thirsty men had been told that water would be ready for them when they arrived. But when they arrived there was no water. Pompey asked where it was. It’s coming, he was assured. When it had still failed to materialise hours later, Pompey issued a vigorous protest. It was outrageous to deprive men of water in the desert, he thundered, and their understandable fury could escalate into mutiny. He threatened to march them back across the Suez Canal to get them a drink. After further late-night inquiries he was assured that the precious liquid would be available at 5.30 the following morning.

Pompey was up at five o’clock. He found that “men were actually licking the taps to moisten their lips, and many of them had been sleepless all night from the torments of thirst”. Half an hour later there was still no water. Pompey galloped away in search of the local chief engineer in charge of the pumps. He deflected Elliott’s wrath by explaining that the Egyptians did not provide him with enough water for the soldiers in camp, and he was under strict orders anyway not to start the pumps before eight o’clock because the noise interrupted the sleep of the British Corps commander and his staff. This was the same British Corps commander who had approved the decision to march the Australians across the desert.

Pompey remounted his horse and raced off to Corps headquarters. When he got there, he wrote, he eventually “unearthed a young pink-faced British staff officer clad in blue silk pyjamas, who came out yawning and looking very cross at being thus unceremoniously disturbed from his slumbers”. Pompey’s message was blunt. He told the staff officer that if the water was not turned on in five minutes he would be marching his men to the Corps commander’s headquarters to tell him precisely how they felt about the situation. If there was any problem about obtaining the co-operation of the Egyptian civil authorities, he would be delighted to provide a firing squad to deal with them. The staff officer in the blue silk pyjamas was immediately galvanised. He issued the necessary directives, phoned the chief engineer to instruct him to start the pumps, and the water was flowing within Pompey’s stipulated deadline. Afterwards Pompey’s superiors told him that any repetition of such conduct was bound to get him into serious trouble. Pompey was unfazed. He said he would always do what was necessary to look after his men, as he did throughout the war—and after it as well.

Part of Pompey Elliott’s distinctiveness was the mystique he created around his big black horse, Darkie. During inspections Darkie consistently seemed to demonstrate an astounding ability to detect even infinitesimal irregularities. He would draw the colonel’s attention to unshavenness, unsteadiness or improper attire by stopping, throwing back his ears, and stretching out his neck. In fact it was Pompey, an accomplished horseman, who was directing his well-trained horse by subtly nudging Darkie’s neck. He would then pretend that Darkie had spotted the irregularity. During my research I spoke to men who had served under Pompey and were still convinced, all those decades later, that his horse had extraordinary powers.

In 1918 Pompey was wounded when well forward, talking to the commander of a tank. He was positioned well forward, but the position of his wound was well behind – in his left buttock. It was uncomfortably sore but not a serious wound, and he was contemptuous of suggestions that he should be evacuated to the rear for treatment. He did allow his own rear to be attended to as long as it did not interfere with his direction of the fight. The upshot was an unforgettable spectacle – the brigadier perched on a prominent mound, surveying the battlefield intently and dictating messages uninhibitedly, with his trousers round his ankles and underlings fussing over his behind. Onlookers were appreciatively amused by this further confirmation of his wholehearted commitment; there were also ribald remarks about the massive magnitude of his posterior. According to one of his colonels, seeing “Pompey with his tailboard down having his wound dressed” was one of the sights of the war.

Later in 1918, irrepressible as ever, he became frustrated that his men were not pursuing the Germans across the Somme vigorously enough, and he went forward to invigorate his battalion commanders. But they were satisfied that all that could be done was being done. “Damn it, I’ll take them over myself”, Pompey snorted, and proceeded to hazard his way – under fire – across a damaged bridge that was no certainty to support his hefty frame. Sure enough, he eventually fell in with a spectacular splash. Signallers amused themselves spreading the diverting message far and wide that “Pompey’s fallen in the Somme” with such gusto that the entire 5th Division communications were blocked. Once again there was a memorable sequel—the arresting sight of Pompey clad only in a shirt while his other clothes were drying, strutting about uninhibitedly, directing developments and dictating messages. Quite a character was Pompey.

Pompey is a superb subject for a biographer not just because he was such a vibrant character, but also because he expressed himself so vividly. He is irresistibly quotable. Take Lone Pine at Gallipoli for example. Pompey and his 7th Battalion were in the thick of it at Lone Pine, where the Turks attacked repeatedly. Amid savage fighting there were heavy casualties. No fewer than four of Pompey’s men won the VC at Lone Pine, one after Pompey sent him to a vulnerable spot, where numerous others had been hit, with these heartfelt words: “Goodbye Symons, I don’t expect to see you again, but we must not lose that post”. Symons and his men retained control of that post, Symons was awarded the VC, and Pompey did see him again because Symons survived Lone Pine, unlike many others in Pompey’s battalion. Afterwards Pompey described what it was like to be at Lone Pine in a private letter to a friend:

The weather was hot and the flies pestilential. When anyone speaks to you of the glory of war, picture to yourself a narrow line of trenches two and sometimes three deep with bodies (and think too of your best friends, for that is what these boys become by long association with you) mangled and torn beyond description by the bombs, and bloated and blackened by decay and crawling with maggots. Live amongst this for days ... This is war and such is glory—whatever the novelists may say.

Irresistibly quotable.

After his promotion to the command of the 15th Brigade and his transfer with his brigade to France, Pompey had just arrived at the Western Front when he experienced the calamity of Fromelles. In this disaster 5,533 Australians became casualties in one night. That is, in one night the Australian casualty toll was equivalent to the combined Australian casualties in the *whole* of the Boer War, the Korean War and Vietnam War *put together*. It’s the worst 24 hours in Australia’s entire history. And about 1,800 of these Fromelles casualties were sustained in Pompey Elliott’s brigade.

Pompey had only been at the Western Front five minutes when this hairbrained operation was foisted on him by his superiors. To his immense credit, he realised despite his inexperience of Western Front conditions that it was doomed to fail, and he tried to prevent it from proceeding. He even went so far as to get hold of a visiting staff officer from the Commander-in-Chief's headquarters, taking this officer forward and *showing* him why it was certain to fail. Having successfully persuaded this officer, Pompey urged him to go back to his chief, Sir Douglas Haig, and tell him. But whatever that staff officer did made no difference. The attack was not cancelled. Disaster loomed with a terrible inevitability.

This is what Lieutenant Schroder wrote about Pompey at Fromelles:

Pompey got tired of sitting in advanced brigade headquarters, and took me up the line with him. What had been ordinary sandbagged trenches were now heaps of debris, and it was impossible to walk far without falling over dead men. Although the Hun had a barrage down and there must have been dozens of [enemy] machine guns operating [as well], Pompey never thought of ducking, but went from battalion to company headquarters and so on right along the line. A word for a wounded man here, a pat of approbation to a bleary-eyed digger there, he missed nobody. He never spoke a word all the way back to advanced brigade [headquarters] but went straight inside, put his head in his hands, and sobbed his heart out.

Later in 1916 Australia was polarised by the first of two conscription referenda. Among the motives influencing some Australian soldiers to vote "No" was their disinclination to serve with conscripts who had not voluntarily enlisted, but Pompey Elliott had no misgivings of that kind. He was an ardent conscriptionist, confident that his vigorous methods could turn even the most unpromising raw material into effective soldiers.

Chris Watson also sided with conscription, and left the ALP as a result. But he was not subjected to the venom Labor has traditionally reserved for its notorious "rats". By 1916 Watson was no longer publicly prominent, having been out of parliament for over six years, and the way he conducted himself during the controversy contrasted sharply with the provocative, boots-and-all abrasiveness of Hughes and some of his colleagues who followed him out of the ALP. Watson's attitude was very different: having ended up accepting that conscription was necessary, he said that if this was unpalatable to majority sentiment in the party and he was no longer welcome in it, well so be it, but he would depart and did depart with minimal rancour.

In tackling the biography of Pompey I always had multiple aims in mind. The main objective was to tell the previously untold story of Pompey Elliott's life as comprehensively, accurately and vividly as

I could. But at the same time I also wanted to use Pompey's story as a vehicle for telling the bigger collective story of how the Great War devastated Australia. Its life and times. And the story of Pompey, by virtue of his exceptional vibrancy, quotability and highs and lows, is a marvellous vehicle for telling the national story. There is a great deal of fresh material in the book about the impact on Australia of its participation in World War I, including the aftermath period in the 1920s when Pompey was elected to parliament and fought the war all over again in the Senate in characteristically cantankerous and forthright fashion. During the 1920s Pompey Elliott was, with General Monash and Jacka VC, one of the three most famous AIF household names.

Another priority of mine was to write a book about Pompey that would interest the general reader, not just military history buffs. I wanted to make the accounts of battles and other specialised stuff accessible to non-specialists, to make it flow smoothly for the general reader. And as far as Pompey himself is concerned, this is a whole-of-life study featuring all facets of his character. For example, I wanted to ensure that there was appropriate coverage of Pompey as a parent.

Pompey's two children, Violet and Neil, were born in 1911 and 1912, so they were still toddlers when he went away to war. The remarkable letters Pompey wrote to his children underlined how unfortunate it was for Violet and Neil that he was not around for the next five years that were such crucial formative years for them. He had a marvellous talent for communicating with children, as shown by the following letter that he sent from the Western Front at the end of 1916 to Neil, who was then four years of age. In it he describes Western Front developments including the unveiling of the latest military novelty, the tank, and refers to himself as "Dida", which his young children called him. Surely no commander in any combatant nation in this war regularly described military developments like this:

Since I wrote to you before we got a lot of big waggons like traction engines and put guns in them and ran them "bumpety bump" up against the old Kaiser's wall and knocked a great big hole in it and caught thousands and thousands of the Kaiser's naughty soldier men and we killed a lot of them and more we put in jail so they couldn't be naughty any more, but then it started to rain and rain and snow and hail and the ground got all boggy and the waggons got stuck in the mud and the old Kaiser has such heaps and heaps of soldiers that he sent up a lot more and thinned them out where the wall wasn't broken and started to build another big wall to stop us going any further ... it is very very cold here and the Jack Frost here is not a nice Jack Frost who just pinches your fingers so you can run to a fire to warm them but a great big bitey Jack Frost and he pinches the toes and fingers of some of Dida's poor soldiers so terribly that he pinches them right off. Isn't that terrible ... And the naughty old Kaiser burnt down every little house all round here and

Dida's soldiers have to sleep out in the mud or dig holes in the ground like rabbits to sleep in. And all the trees are blown to pieces by the big guns and there is no wood to make fires and Dida's soldiers have to make fires of coal and the waggons are all stuck in the mud so Dida's soldiers have to carry it through all the mud and everything they eat and wear has to be carried too. And Dida's soldiers get so dreadfully tired they can hardly work or walk at all. Isn't that old Kaiser a naughty old man to cause all this trouble. Now goodbye dear little laddie. Give dear old mum a kiss and tell her Dida's coming home soon and that you will grow up soon and you won't let any old Kaiser come near her.

In connection with life *and times*, using Pompey as a vehicle for telling the bigger collective story about the impact of the war on Australia, he received a remarkable letter from a stranger in 1916.

With the 7th Battalion's VC-winners at Lone Pine was Corporal Fred Wright, a 26-year-old labourer. In the desperate fighting at Lone Pine, where Pompey's men were vastly outnumbered in men and the crucial weapon in this fighting – bombs – Fred Wright was allocated the task of dealing with the deluge of Turkish bombs. He had to either smother them with an overcoat, or throw the bombs back before they exploded, and the best way to do that was to catch them first. It was as if he was at cricket practice and working on his slip fielding with live bombs. Eventually one blew up in his face and he was killed. He might have got a VC himself, but he didn't. He was mentioned in dispatches.

It was the announcement of this distinction that resulted in Pompey receiving a letter from Rose Taylor, who was Fred Wright's sister. This letter evokes a different Australia with such artlessness and poignancy that it could have been written by Bert Facey, author of the Australian classic *A Fortunate Life*. The letter also underlines what the war was like for so many women back home. Rose Taylor wrote this letter in March 1916, *seven months* after Lone Pine.

Dear Sir

I beg that you will pardon the liberty that I am taking in writing to you, but I had a very dear brother under your command in the 7th Battalion, 1062 Corporal Fred Wright ... I do not suppose for one moment that you remember him, but as I see by the newspaper a Cpl Wright 7th Battn mentioned in Sir Ian Hamilton's Despatch ... I thought I would write and ask you if it was my bonny boy that had been honoured. He was killed on Lone Pine, 9th August.

If you could let me know any particulars of his death I shall be so thankful. You will perhaps think it strange that I should ask you these things, but Fred so often mentioned you when he wrote from Egypt, and in one letter said "*My Colonel is the whitest man I know. I would follow him anywhere, even to certain death. He is my ideal soldier, the best loved man in the battalion. God bless him.*"

So now you will understand why it is I write to you. Two of my brothers joined the AIF. One with the 7th, the other with the 15th Battalion.

Both have paid the price of a widowed mother's sacrifice. One killed, the other missing since May [i.e. for 10 months]. It is hard to bear, but it would be harder still to have had them stay at home when King and duty called them.

I do not say we do not suffer, because we do. My mother is, as I said before, a widow, 61 years of age, and it is a severe blow to her. But oh, I am as proud of my mother as of my boys. She is as brave and true as they were.

For instance, she received the news of Fred's death, when the clergyman brought it, like this. She only faltered one moment – "My son! My son!"—then, drawing her hand over her eyes which were blinded with tears, said "Your mother will be as brave as you were, my son" – just as though she was speaking to him – and quoted that beautiful passage of scripture that seems such a true one and fits our fallen men so well: "Greater love hath no man than this, that he gaveth his life for his friends". I felt so small and mean at the side of her, and realised that she was a mother worthy of the soldier sons she had lost.

I do not know why I have told you all this, unless it is to let you know that while our boys are playing the game the women they leave behind will all do the same. We honour and respect every one of them, and are so proud of all our bonny Australian boys and of the officers in command over them. They have all had a very rough hard time of it. I trust that before long the struggle will be over, we shall win the day, and each one of us will be kinder to the other because of the anxiety of mind and suffering we have had to share.

Again asking you to forgive the liberty I have taken and wishing you and your men a safe and speedy return,

Yours very sincerely, R. Taylor

Pompey replied to Rose's letter with a detailed account of what Fred did and how he died. Rose wrote back gratefully. She said she had "spoken to so many of your old Boys", and the way they talk about their commander would make him "a very proud man indeed". There was more. "My mother wishes me to add that an old woman's prayers follow you wherever you may go".

I'd like now to focus on the lead-up to the famous battle of Villers-Bretonneux. Picture the context. We're talking about March and April 1918, when the British and their allies are facing their biggest crisis of the war. In March 1918 the Germans have launched an immense offensive that has driven the British back no less than 40 miles. There is widespread genuine concern that after years of fierce fighting, awful hardships and frightful casualties, Britain and its allies might well lose the war. Pompey is well aware it's the climax of the whole conflict, and he is tremendously fired up as his brigade is rushed here and there to fortify vulnerable sectors in the British defence. At one stage he is directed to occupy a particular village behind the front, and finds

it full of what he describes as British “fugitives”; he orders them to vacate the village under threat of arrest.

In all this Pompey is in his element. In another village he finds that some undisciplined soldiers are concentrating less on resisting the oncoming Germans than on hopping into the grog left in the suddenly deserted estaminets and chateaux. He takes characteristically assertive action. When a British officer is caught in the act, Pompey arranges for a notice to be issued declaring that the next officer caught looting will be summarily and publicly hanged, and his body will be left swinging as a deterrent. He knows this order might well be illegal, but desperate situations require desperate remedies. And there was certainly no more trouble with looting. As Pompey (who was a solicitor in civilian life) observed afterwards, “no-one seemed inclined to make of themselves a test case”.

These weeks in March and April 1918 constitute a special phase of the war for Australians. Far too many Australians today know nothing about it. But they should know, because here we have some of the splendid moments of our history. The arrival of Australian units prompts the distressed retreating French civilians to turn around and retrace their steps because they are confident the Australians will stop the Germans. Some of the finest national statements in Australian history are to be found here, like the reassuring words of some of these diggers to the distraught French women: “Fini retreat madame, beaucoup Australiens ici”. [“No more retreat madame, many Australians here”]

At this critical time, after three years of war, Pompey wrote this:

The AIF have hitherto accomplished nothing to be compared in importance with the work they have in hand just now ... I was never so proud of being an Australian as I am today ... The gallant bearing and joyous spirit of the men at the prospect of a fight thrills you through and through. You simply cannot despair or be downhearted. Whatever the odds against, you can feel their spirits rising the more the danger seems to threaten. It is glorious indeed to be with them.

What the Australian soldiers did in 1918 – both in these weeks in March and April, when they were prominent in the defence against the German onslaught, and also later that year, when they spearheaded the offensive that brought eventual victory – what the Australian soldiers did in 1918 prompts the conclusion that Australians were influencing the destiny of the world in 1918 more than Australians had ever done before and probably more than Australians have ever done since. Australians put a lot of focus on 1915 and Gallipoli, and it’s understandable why we do, but we should focus on 1918 more than we do.

Pompey died in 1931. He committed suicide. In the book I outline a number of factors.

1. His profound grievance over promotion. He was not promoted to divisional command in 1918 when three vacancies materialised straight after his triumph at Villers-Bretonneux. He became increasingly obsessed about what he felt was a flagrant injustice.
2. What we now call post-traumatic stress disorder. As Australia's most famous fighting general, Pompey had more than his share of front-line horrors. But the flashbacks and nightmares that plagued him in the 1920s were dominated by episodes when he had to allocate men to carry out dangerous assignments and they did not return. He knew this was an inescapable part of being a battalion or brigade commander, but it still tormented him afterwards.
3. In 1931 he was unhinged by the economic Great Depression. Particularly for someone of Pompey's social and political views, it seemed as if the whole system was about to go over the cliff.
4. What was particularly overwhelming about the economic Great Depression for Pompey was that it sabotaged his unflagging post-war efforts to look after the men who had served under him with employment and welfare. He found this especially troubling.
5. While horse-riding not long before his death he banged his head severely. After his death his relatives wondered if this incident had been more significant than it had seemed at the time.

These are the main factors that contributed to the tragic end to Pompey's life.



Photo – David Karonidis

Nahid Kabir

Dr Nahid Kabir is an Post Doctoral Research Fellow in the School of Communications and Multimedia at the Edith Cowan University in Perth, Western Australia. She is the author of *Muslims in Australia: Immigration, Race Relations and Cultural History* (Kegan Paul London, 2004). Nahid Kabir addressed The Sydney Institute on Monday 14 March 2005 and reminded her audience that Muslims had a long history in Australia going back to contact with the continent before European settlement. In addition, Muslim Australians are a very diverse group ethnically and socially, coming from various nations such as Afghanistan, Albania, Bangladesh, Bosnia, Ethiopia, Fiji, India, Indonesia, Iran, Iraq, Lebanon, Pakistan, Palestine, Somalia, South Africa, Turkey, and other places. Their only common element is their religion.

MUSLIMS IN AUSTRALIA:

IMMIGRATION, RACE RELATIONS AND CULTURAL HISTORY

Nahid Kabir

I am sincerely grateful to The Sydney Institute for giving me the privilege to address you here. I feel very honoured.

The book, *Muslims in Australia: Immigration, Race Relations and Cultural History* (London: Kegan Paul, 2004) is a history of Muslim settlement in Australia from 1860 to 2002. It is based on my doctoral research. When I started this research in late 1998, this field was not as topical as it is today. However, I decided to go ahead with it because I perceived that from a career perspective it would be a relevant study and would also be worth investigating as a virtually unexplored area.

By an unexplored area, I mean that there was a tremendous shortage of literature on this topic and unfortunately this shortage still persists. As a result, various immigration and race relations texts written on the Aborigines, Chinese, Irish, Germans, Jews and Vietnamese among others assisted me to look at the placement of the minorities in this predominantly Anglo-Celtic Christian country.¹ The reports compiled by the Committee on Discrimination and the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission on Muslim and Arab Australians were also useful but did not provide enough material for a book-length publication. So I resorted to other methods such as interviews and archival retrieval. Both these methods were a challenge for me. First, how do I interview people?

Being a Bangladeshi-born woman I only had access to the Bangladeshi community but I wanted to include in my study many Muslims from diverse backgrounds as well as members of the wider community. So I started extensive networking and became a member of several Muslim associations. I contacted a few Muslim spiritual leaders, the *imams* of different States and sought their views on this topic. Friends living in other states also directed me to contacts with other local Muslim groups. Simultaneously, I extended my network to mainstream Australians. I started talking to my neighbours, my children's school friends' parents/grandparents, explained to them my project and finally requested them to agree to taped interviews. Even-

tually, I picked people randomly and interviewed them. An attempt was also made to interview Prime Minister John Howard to gain his views on Muslims in Australia but I was not successful.

Next, major archival research was carried out in the National Archives, Canberra, ACT, but a foremost problem was the absence of separate files on the "Mohammedans" as Islamic believers were called in the colonial and "White Australia" periods. Islam was often referred to as "Mohammedanism". Sometimes the Mohammedans were classified as "Hindoos". On some occasions "Mohammedan" cases appeared in a "Hindoos" file. Therefore, the first method which was a search by religious categories, such as "Islam" and "Mohammedans", met with little success. The second method was a search by the name of countries and nationalities of the Muslims in Australia such as Afghanistan/Afghans, Albania/Albanians, India/Indians, Syria/Syrian/Lebanese, Turkey/Turks/Turkish subjects, as well as the "disabilities" file of the above mentioned ethnic groups. Finally, the most effective method proved to be tracing Muslim names. By searching 38,000 naturalisation files with dates ranging from 1904 to 1936, some Muslim files were found. Relevant files from other State and National archives were also retrieved.

For this project, I am indebted to all the interviewees, archivists, librarians, the Australian Federation of Islamic Councils, the Islamic Council of New South Wales, the Lebanese Muslim Association in Lakemba, Sydney, the Muslim Women's Associations in Brisbane, the Australian Bureau of Statistics, Agence France-Presse and cartoonists of *The Australian* and *The Sydney Morning Herald*, Peter Nicholson and Alan Moir. Thanks are also due to Drs Clive Moore, Raymond Evans, Sarva Daman Singh, Mary Kooyman, Professors Martin Stuart-Fox, James Jupp and Andrew Markus, my family and friends and to The University of Queensland where I conducted this research.

Muslim contact with the continent of Australia took place before European settlement, as early as the seventeenth century when the Macassarese people came to the north coast on fishing expeditions. A Muslim presence can also be found during the convict period when a few Muslim convicts and settlers arrived in Australia in the early 1800s. The first official Muslim settlement, however, took place in the 1860s with the arrival of some Afghan camel drivers. Subsequently Muslims from many different nations have settled in Australia, with a major influx occurring in the past 30 years.

Muslims in Australia are ethnically diverse. They come from various nations such as Afghanistan, Albania, Bangladesh, Bosnia, Ethiopia, Fiji, India, Indonesia, Iran, Iraq, Lebanon, Pakistan, Palestine, Somalia, South Africa, Turkey, and other places. They are heterogeneous in language, colour and ethnic culture. The only element they have in common is their religion. Although religion and

culture are two different aspects of ethnicity, it is argued that the Muslims share Islamic culture, which can sometimes be identified by their names, dress code, eating and drinking habits. This makes them a distinct non-Christian cultural group and separates them from the mainstream Australian population, which is predominantly Anglo-Celtic/European Christian.

Historically speaking, some migrant groups were underprivileged in the course of their settlement in this country. Within the framework of national identity and security, the book, *Muslims in Australia: Immigration, Race Relations and Cultural History* explores the position of Muslims in Australian society over the last century and a half. It seeks to examine whether Muslims have encountered discrimination on the basis of their colour, ethnicity or religion. In particular, it asks whether religion has become the primary category of discrimination.

The perceived notion based on various race theories would be that all coloured people which also included Muslims were kept underprivileged during the colonial and “White Australia” periods. Of course, the Afghans and the Indians as ethnic groups encountered unequal treatment in social and economic spheres just as did other coloured people such as the Aborigines and the Chinese. Hostilities against Afghans were economic and racial rather than religious and these patterns were similar during both the colonial and “White Australia” periods. They were always referred to as an inferior coloured race, the increase of which, apart from lowering the mainstream standard of living would also result in racial contamination if they inter-married. Afghans were segregated and banished to the interior where, because their numbers were small, their Islamic practices did not constitute a threat to the dominant population. They were allowed to build mosques and their *imams* were also permitted to enter Australia for short periods of time. Similarly, the Javanese Muslim immigrants in north Queensland did not encounter any resistance in practising their religion but due to economic hardship, they could not teach Islam to the next generation.

Some Muslims were denied naturalisation – an act which conferred the rights and privileges of a native subject upon an alien. It was not because of their religion but because of their colour. On the other hand, the Ottoman Turks were granted naturalisation not because they were Muslims but because they belonged to the superior European race. The Indians were technically British subjects because their country was a British colony. However, they were denied economic and political rights – again for reasons of colour.

Now the question arises whether all the Caucasian settlers enjoyed a privileged position because of their superior race? What about the Irish and Germans settlers? The dominant British Protestants perceived Irish Catholics as “Papist rebels” in the early days

of settlement. Hostilities directed against the Irish were more for religious than economic reasons. The Irish also faced discrimination in employment, educational institutions and law enforcement areas. The Afghans were stereotyped mainly because of their race, whereas the Irish were persecuted because of their religion. Eventually, the Irish gained a position of equality because they began to, and were willing and able to, conform to the standard Australian pattern of nationalism, which was possible because of their Caucasian race or “white-ness”. The points of difference between the Irish and the Afghans were that the Irish were more numerous, and faced resistance but not consistent denial in the course of their settlement. Australia was willing to absorb the Irish into its British community – a privilege denied to the Afghans.

The Germans, racial cousins of the British, who had previously been the most favoured immigrants and naturalised British subjects, became unacceptable during both World Wars. They posed a security threat to Australia because their country of origin was at war with the British Empire. Constant surveillance was also kept over Communists from World War I to the 1950s, whether they were Russians or Australian trade unionists and sympathisers. The same surveillance was applied to anti-conscriptionist Irish Catholics during World War I. These people encountered some form of discrimination because they posed a potential danger to Australia.

During World War I the Ottoman Turks, whose country of origin was at war with the Empire, and some Indians who sympathised with the Turkish *Khalifa* (monarch) were looked upon as potential threats while the 1915 Broken Hill Tragedy which involved the killing of some Australians by two Afghans was ignored because the Afghans were not the “enemy of the time”. Similarly, during World War I the once rejected coloured Syrians were naturalised because their enemies were also the Ottoman Turks. On the other hand, during World War II, some Albanians, though Europeans, were interned because they posed a fascist threat. However, the colour issue did not subside during or after the wars. For instance, there was serious resistance to the arrival of the Maltese during wartime, since they were perceived to be an economic threat to the local population. The reduction of the Afghan numbers to a minimum by 1947 also revealed the effectiveness of the “White Australia” policy.

From 1901 to the 1960s, the “White Australia” policy dominated Australia’s immigration intake. It was essentially based on an ideology of white racial homogeneity. Of the Caucasian races, the British had been the “most preferred group” followed by Northern and Southern Europeans respectively. In the 1950s, immigration from Europe was regulated by an official assimilation policy. Assimilationist ideas were

based on the notion that superior Anglo-Australian institutions and values should remain unchanged.

Between 1964 and 1966 a shift of policy occurred from assimilation to integration. Finally, in 1973, a multicultural policy was introduced. It aimed to impart equal opportunities to all Australians irrespective of their race, colour, ethnic origin or religion, and discrimination on these bases became unacceptable. Turkish and Lebanese Muslims arrived in relatively large numbers in 1969 and 1970 respectively, and the 1980s saw a bigger rise in the Muslim population overall. Along with these new arrivals whose values and culture are so different from the mainstream population, Australians also began to learn about the Islamic world particularly through the media.

People began to hear about the Iranian Revolution in 1979 when Ayatollah Khomeini considered the United States – which he called “the Great Satan” – to be the number one enemy of Iran. Because America had given protection to the Shah of Iran, Khomeini declared the US embassy in Iran to be a “nest of spies” and demanded the return to Iran of the Shah and his assets. This episode was followed by the Iranian hostage crisis, 1979–1981, when 52 American hostages were held at the US consulate in Tehran by some Iranian students. The seizure of the Grand Mosque in Mecca in 1979, the Lockerbie bombing in 1988 and Ayatollah Khomeini’s *fatwa* against Salman Rushdie in 1989 (which still persists) made news in the Western world. With Saddam Hussein’s occupation of Kuwait in 1990 followed by the 1991 Gulf War, Australians became more interested in the Muslim world. After World War I, this was the second time that Australia directly became involved in a war against a Muslim/Arab nation.

Along with the negative news of the Islamic world, some Muslims in Australia began to experience difficulty in obtaining employment, criticism over their dress code and eating habits and resistance to mosque building. In 1986 their unemployment rate was 28 per cent compared to the nine per cent of the national unemployment rate (Australian Bureau of Statistics). The arrival of this influx of Muslims coincided with an economic recession in Australia. Various explanations were put forward for the underprivileged position of Muslims in the job market. Some suggested that this country had never been exposed to foreign culture. The Muslims’ low level of English proficiency was another factor. Muslim women’s restrictive lives or Muslims’ unawareness of mainstream culture could be a contributory factor. Another explanation was that many immigrants were unskilled and belonged to the working classes and that led to their disadvantaged position. However, interviews with some highly skilled people and the ABS census data also revealed that the dominant society tends to hire people of their “own cultural kind”.

In the 1980s, one of the major social grievances was Australian resistance to Muslim attempts to build mosques. Such resistance could have been for reasons of “racism” or fear of the spread of terrorism through the mosque congregations, unfamiliarity with Islamic culture or perception of the spread of Islam as a cultural threat or simply because of noise or parking factors. Some Australians letters to city councils revealed their “fear of reprisals from a group of religious fanatics who have a reputation world wide for violence”, though a few Australians were supportive of the Muslim cause. The global political climate or media representation of Islam could generate fear amongst the wider population but when a councilor or politician manipulates fear for electoral gain that can be interpreted as deliberate prejudice. Some mosque cases have been prolonged. The councils fought court cases using tax payers’ money but it was a costly venture for the new immigrants.

The 1980s also saw an influx of Buddhists who were predominantly Vietnamese. Like the Muslims, they were also underprivileged in the labour market and some Australians were critical of their illegal arrival, and their ethnicity. Some Buddhists also faced resistance in building temples, but virtually nothing was said about their religion. One point worth noting in this context is that the local residents who opposed the temples did not exhibit as much hostility as had been expressed against some Muslims. However, in both cases, despite prejudicial overtones, the legal system was not biased against the Muslims or Buddhists and granted them the right to construct mosques and temples.

In August 1990, Iraqi President Saddam Hussein called for a *jihād*, a holy war, against the West and occupied Kuwait. US President George Bush compared Saddam Hussein to Adolf Hitler and decided to contain his aggression. Australia then joined its American ally to fight Saddam Hussein. But why did some Arab/Muslim people face repercussions from the wider society? Were the Muslims supportive of the aggressor Saddam Hussein or critical of the presence of Australian troops in the Middle East? Again why were the repercussions particularly concentrated in Sydney and Melbourne?

Loyalty becomes an important factor during wartime. Australia was previously involved in war against the Muslim world, the Ottoman Empire in World War I. With the outbreak of World War I, the Turks of Constantinople soon became enemy subjects and were no longer trusted. Restrictions on immigration of the Ottoman Turks continued until 1930. The Albanians were defined as “enemy aliens” during World War II. They were subjected to internment and other restrictions. During the 1991 Gulf War, Australia had a large Arab and Muslim Australian population, who were perceived by some as “enemies”.

During the 1990–1991 Gulf crisis, some Arab and Muslim Australians in Sydney protested against Australia's involvement in the war. One poll published in the Arabic newspaper held that 82 per cent of Arab and Muslim Australians supported Saddam Hussein. In wartime when the wider community sends troops to another country, public emotion supports the soldiers and questions of loyalty divide society. Some Arab and Muslim support for Saddam Hussein was interpreted by the media and the wider community as disloyalty because the Iraqi leader had also declared a *jihad* against the West, which would obviously involve Westerners. However, some Arab and Muslim Australians, especially veiled women, became unfortunate victims of the repercussion even though they remained neutral or loyal to Australia during the crisis. The beating of some Muslim women in shopping malls, hate mail, death threats, bomb threats and vandalism were certainly perceived as persecution. This maltreatment of some innocent people cannot be dismissed by saying that the wider society viewed these people as “enemies”. Other factors, such as ignorance and racist beliefs have also contributed to the dreadful plight of the Muslims from August 1990 to February 1991. The intensity of this backlash could have been averted if the Hawke Government had provided help much earlier.

The 1990s witnessed the rise of Islamic militancy and certain terrorist groups such as the Al-Qaeda network led by Osama bin Laden. Islamic militants' alleged acts of terrorism killed many Americans. Examples of this occurred with the car bombing of the World Trade Center in New York, the attack on the peacekeeping forces in Somalia in 1993, bomb explosions in the American bases in Saudi Arabia in 1995 and 1996, the suicide bombing of the *USS Cole* in Yemen in 2000 and finally the terrorist attack on 11 September 2001 on the World Trade Center in New York and the Pentagon in Virginia, which killed many Americans.

Until 2001, Australia, as an ally of the US, was sympathetic to its cause but was not directly affected by Islamic terrorism. In 2002, the Australians were horrified when many of their own people became direct victims of terrorism in Bali in Indonesia. Late at night, 12 October 2002, some members of Jemaah Islamiyah or JI, with links to the Al-Qaeda network, bombed the Sari nightclub and the nearby Paddy's club in the tourist district of Kuta. Among the Westerners, Australian casualties were the highest. Eighty-eight Australians died and many were injured. Finally, in November 2002, bin Laden declared Australia to be an Al-Qaeda target for terrorism.

Although Western conflicts and Islamic militancy are complex issues, the question of national security has made Islamic militants the “new enemy of the West”. The radical Islamists also aim to bring the West under an *umma* – one Islamic state with no territorial boundary

– though this of course would be in conflict with Western interests. It should be noted that the militant Islamic groups constitute a negligible minority out of 1.4 billion Muslims worldwide and the majority of Muslims are moderate people who are allies of the West. However, the radical members have contributed to a negative perception of Islam. They have declared a *jihad* against the West and used an extreme interpretation of the Quran for their own purposes. To some extent, this is affecting Muslim placement in Australian society.

In 1996 the unemployment rate of Muslims in Australia was 25 per cent, compared to eight per cent for the United Kingdom and Irish-born, and nine per cent for the Australian-born and national total, in spite of the fact that the Muslims' skill levels were almost equivalent both to the Australian-born and the national total. The skilled categories for Muslims, the Australian-born and the national total were almost the same while the UK and Irish-born rates were higher. Muslims were also better represented in higher and bachelor degree education than the other groups (ABS).

Many Muslims are of the opinion that their Islamic culture, which is exposed by their names and dress code, affects their employment opportunities. Their cultural identity immediately reveals that the applicant for a job is not a "native" and belongs to a different ethnic background. In consequence it is believed they may not be able to fit in with the employing company's culture, which is Anglo-Celtic Christian or Australian. Thus, overt Muslim identity may constitute a disadvantage. Other alternative explanations are that the Muslims' shorter period of stay in Australia, the economic recession, lack of English language skills, lack of integration and the persistence of structural racism are contributory reasons. But it is also clear that militant Islamic activities and worldwide terrorism have impacted negatively on moderate Muslims in the West. Indeed such actions may more directly affect the present apparent discriminatory treatment of Muslims by some Australian employers.

Throughout the last decade Australian Muslims have increasingly been stereotyped by some members of the wider community. From 1998 to 2002, several incidents concerning people of the Islamic faith led to public debates which highlighted Muslims as a religious category. In the case of certain criminal acts, such as gang rape, these episodes were directly linked to Islam.

In 2001, the Arabic Muslim community once again encountered severe condemnation. The New South Wales police force, politicians and the media suddenly rediscovered rape – a common crime – and held that Muslims were responsible for some sensational cases. Political rhetoric now seemed to demonise one religion – Islam.

In Sydney's southwest region there had been several cases of gang rape committed by local youths, but now some Middle Eastern

Muslims were singled out and labeled as “gang-rapists”. Some major newspapers directly alleged that Muslims of Middle Eastern origin from south-western Sydney were gang rapists. Several articles, radio talk-back shows and letters to the editor condemned the Middle Eastern Muslims. Muslim leaders pleaded against the crime being made an issue based on race or religion. They argued that it is a local problem regardless of the background of these people, and should be solved within the context of the Australian community.

With the arrival of Afghan asylum seekers in the Norwegian freighter *MV Tampa* in August 2001, popular rhetoric suggested that these refugees were Muslims and that they should not be allowed to enter Australia. Australian Prime Minister John Howard refused to allow the ship entry into Australian waters. Because the boat people were picked up in the Indonesian sea rescue zone, he requested the ship to return to international waters. Some Australians held that under the present climate of international terrorism, the Howard Government was concerned with the security and sovereignty of his country while critics argued that as it was an election year, the refusal to accommodate the asylum seekers was motivated by political reasons.

The *Tampa* crisis was soon followed by the September 11 attack and a consequent backlash against various Muslims. Some Muslim women wearing the *hijab* and men of non-Caucasian appearance were verbally and physically abused. Several mosques, Islamic schools and colleges were vandalised. Islamic centres received hate and threat mail and Islamic school buses were damaged. On 22 September 2001, at around 3 am the Kuraby Mosque in Brisbane, made of timber and iron, was burnt down by an arson attack. This was, however, an isolated incident. In the September 11 and Bali tragedies Muslims were as much shocked as the wider society but they were still subjected to a degree of intolerance.

After 11 September 2001, a debate about whether Muslims should be allowed to migrate to Australia appeared to surface among a small number of Australians. Some politicians, journalists and letter writers discouraged Muslim immigration arguing that Muslims do not fit into this Judeo-Christian society. It has also been suggested that the Muslims’ holy book, the Quran, teaches Muslims to treat non-Muslims harshly or that Islamic invasion would bring terrorism into this country. Thus, Islam became a criterion of discrimination. However, after both tragedies, in 2001 and 2002, Prime Minister John Howard, Immigration Minister Philip Ruddock, Attorney-General Daryl Williams and other politicians asked Australians to practice restraint towards Muslims.

This study has found that Irish Catholics were once a rejected religious group. They were eventually accepted as Australians when

they integrated into the wider British-Australian community. Though they could be distinguished from the British by their strong accent and represented a lower socio-economic group, by virtue of their “white-ness”, they were in a privileged position to integrate with the dominant population. The Buddhists whose arrival in Australia coincided with the Muslim migration of the 1970s and 1980s encountered less discrimination as a religious group partly because of their integration into the wider community and partly because they do not have an extremist group which is impacting on Western interests. Australian Muslims are mostly moderate people and by a degree of reasonable integration, they can wipe out the wider society’s misconceptions about Islam.

Endnote

1. Australia is a secular country, but in the Australian Bureau of Statistics Census form (1996, 2001), many people identified themselves with Christianity.

ANNUAL DINNER – 2005



Photographer: David Karonidis



Photo – David Karonidis

Kevin Andrews

The Hon Kevin Andrews MP, Minister for Employment and Workplace Relations and the Minister Assisting the Prime Minister for the Public Service addressed The Sydney Institute on Wednesday 23 March 2005. At a time when the Federal Government was contemplating the passing of its seven industrial relations bills, introduced since the 2004 election, Minister Andrews stressed the connection between industrial relations reform, welfare reform and a strong economy.

A NATION OF

PARTICIPANTS – WORKPLACE RELATIONS & WELFARE REFORM

Kevin Andrews

Let me begin by placing my remarks in the economic and social context that we face today.

Over the last decade Australia has experienced a sustained period of economic prosperity. We now have an unemployment rate at a 30 year low, inflation has been kept in check within a band of between 2-3 per cent and stable interest rates have allowed many Australian families to not only become home owners, but also to increase their net wealth. Despite this prosperity – and perhaps partly because of it – other demands require our attention. The spectre of unemployment has given away in many places to labour shortages, especially of skilled labour. The unemployment queues of the early 1990s have diminished, but the ranks of the disabled pensioners and sole parent beneficiaries have grown rapidly. Too many of our children still grow up in jobless households.

On one hand business and industry cries out for more participants in the workforce; on the other, large numbers of people are locked out of being able to participate in the economic life of the nation. All of this is occurring against the backdrop of an ageing population, one consequence of which will be a substantial contraction in the growth of the workforce over the next 10–15 years.

How then do we address this modern paradox? Let me return to first principles.

Work is a social good which, in turn, is a foundation and expression of human dignity. Seen this way, work or employment and finding it for all who wish to participate should always be a primary focus of national policy. Not only does work enable us to express ourselves as human beings, and fulfil our material needs, it enables us to contribute to society as a whole, to our families, our community and the nation. At issue then is how we ensure work for all those who are capable of it.

None of us exist in isolation. We have a duty to allow each of our fellow citizens to participate in the work of society according to

their ability. Sixty years ago, the authors of the 1945 White Paper on Employment proclaimed that “full employment is a fundamental aim of the Commonwealth Government.” It was an objective that sustained us for several decades. But the changes wrought by the transition to a modern, globally competitive economy undermined this aim, returning us to levels of high unemployment in the late 1980s and early 1990s.

While many areas of the nation are now experiencing close to full employment, there still remain many Australians unable to participate. If a rich country, following years of economic prosperity, cannot tackle the isolation caused by this problem, who will ever be able to do so?

Policy objectives

Having regard to these principles, what should the objectives of our policy be for welfare and workplace relations reform?

All Australians should be able to contribute, according to their ability, to the economic life of the nation. No one should be precluded from participating. People with disabilities both want and are generally able to contribute. This is equally true of others locked out of employment, because of age, personal circumstances or changing industrial trends.

Some want to characterise welfare reform in purely economic terms. This misses the point. When the great majority of Australians, whatever their physical, mental, or social situation, want to contribute positively to society, the issue is both social and moral. To miss the chance to increase the opportunities for more Australians to participate in the workforce would be to betray our obligation to our fellow Australians.

The objective is not complex. It is simple. Government, business and workers (and their representatives) alike need to re-examine their commitment to improving participation in the workplaces of our nation. Business must not only seek the workplace flexibility to be competitive in the new global environment, it must also offer the flexibility that workers increasingly seek, especially those who need to balance their family and work commitments, deal with episodic illness, or wish to phase work and retirement. Unions must not only look to the rights and entitlements of their members, they must consider the impact of their policies and demands on those unable to find a job. And government must look not only to the obligations of those on welfare benefits, but the assistance they require to move into work.

Welfare to work

Australians should be secure in the knowledge that a safety net and social support system will always be available to them if it is genuinely needed. This is the Australian way. However, in Australia today, at a time of strong jobs growth and emerging labour and skill shortages, the number of working age people in receipt of income support has grown to over 20 per cent of all working age Australians, or more than 2.7 million people. Only a small percentage of this number have participation requirements tied to their income support. 700,000 are on the Disability Support Pension (DSP) and 630,000 receive a parenting payment. Both of these payments are more generous than the Newstart Allowance received by the unemployed. There are now more people receiving the DSP than there are on unemployment benefits.

This is not a criticism or reflection on the genuineness of people with disabilities or single parents. What it does highlight is that people with disabilities in particular, have a very low rate of participation in the workforce. Less than ten per cent of people receiving DSP undertake any work, including many people who have significant work capacity.

Participation requirements that are currently placed on sole parents are very low by international standards. Sole parents are on income support for an average of 12 years; however, many do engage in some form of workforce participation during this time.

Why should we imagine that the typical single parent – who may be a woman raising children alone as a consequence of divorce or separation – does not have the same aspirations as the rest of us?

Figures from June 2002 show that around 41 per cent of Parenting Payment Single recipients were working, and 42 per cent of those not working wanted to work. Not surprisingly, the incidence of work and the preference for work was higher for those with older children. While these figures are encouraging, they also demonstrate that sole parents do face very real barriers to participation. In order to continue to boost the participation rates of sole parents, there are a number of issues that will need to be addressed. These include the provision of more family friendly workplaces; increased availability of affordable before and after school child care and timely payment of child support. This is but a small sample of the policy issues that require attention, as individual circumstances and needs can and do differ markedly.

Many people on income support are also reluctant to move into employment and lose access to not only their benefits, but also other forms of special assistance. The importance of the pensioner

concession card (PCC), mobility allowance and home help for example should not be underestimated.

People want to be secure in the knowledge that we understand that if their employment does not work out, they should not be left worse off. In my discussions about welfare reform (including the representatives of those who are currently facing barriers to greater participation in the workforce such as people with disabilities), they have made it clear to me they want to contribute and participate in the social and economic life of this nation. We need to assure people that if they have a go and it doesn't work out, they will not be left worse off. We need to re-assure them that they will be given the opportunity to have another go, if their initial foray into the workforce isn't successful.

Approximately one quarter of all DSP recipients suffer from a psychological/psychiatric condition. Such conditions are often episodic and due regard must also be given to how we can more appropriately deal with the situations that many of these people may find themselves in when they have an episode that leaves them unfit for work. The level of support that is required to assist these people to ensure that the opportunity of ongoing employment remains, while providing the necessary support for their particular circumstances, will be different to those who have a physical disability.

The reality should be that if people on income support are willing to have a go and work to their capacity, or improve their work capacity, the system should support them financially and with necessary services. Taking up work, be it part time, full time or voluntary, should not mean taking a risk.

There are substantial barriers which prevent people with disabilities from participating both in the workforce and every day life. They include physical barriers such as access to transport and buildings and mental and psychological challenges. Whatever shape or form they come in, these barriers have been unfortunately reinforced by negative community attitudes and a low expectation of people with disabilities. This has contributed to many people with disabilities feeling a sense of disempowerment.

Governments, business and the disabled themselves must work together and set about removing these barriers and negative stereotypes. We must re-assert that there should be opportunity for everybody in Australia.

Increasing participation is not just a matter of moving more people into the workforce. We must also address the demand for their services. Business needs to be educated about the benefits of employing people with disabilities. We can learn from companies such as Westpac, McDonalds, Telstra, and IBM who can see the benefits for themselves and their employees. There is also a role for the Commonwealth to play, given the declining number of people

with disabilities in the public service. The Australian government can do more by taking the lead and making a commitment to increasing employment of people with a disability in the public service. People with disabilities have acknowledged to me that they want to be more economically active. The Disability Support Pension should not be a dead end payment, as many see it today.

The principle object of reform must be to encourage and assist more and more people to contribute and participate positively. Any future policy changes and reform must use this as a starting point from which to build.

Workplace relations change

If we are to succeed in improving participation in work, especially for the disadvantaged, then it is imperative that we sustain a globally competitive economy. Participation and workplace relations reform are linked. In 1986, Gerard Henderson said of what was then the Department of Employment and Industrial Relations that:

The Employment people usually tried to place people in work...In Industrial Relations...the unintended consequence...was to drive workers onto the dole queues...enforcing awards...irrespective of the capacity of individual industries and employers to pay.

As the Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry has said:

[T]he object of...reform [in these areas] is about all of us – a stronger Australia for our businesses, our employees and our families. It is about and for people – business people and working people.

The Australian economy has embraced and adapted to substantial change over recent years. However, our workplace relations system is “still burdened by the restrictions of 30 years of inertia caused by timidity, self-interest or obstructionism.” The Workplace Relations Act which has been in place for over eight years was never meant to be a definitive statutory framework but an evolutionary step to a more dynamic and flexible labour market.

Where have we come from?

Before outlining the government’s agenda for further changes to the workplace relations system, it is important to reflect on the historical basis of our current system. The traditional goal of the system was to conciliate and arbitrate the rights of existing employers and employees. The system, or at least the parties in that system, looked to the interests of those inside the system rather than all Australians who wished to participate.

For much of the last century, the system was accepted rather unquestioningly. Industrial relations was the one facet of the economy

that had its own unique culture and way of doing things. Gerard Henderson described the interests of “IR types” as “doing deals and arranging fixes (all in the name of “industrial relations reality” of course).” This was the old economy which was heavily regulated and protected, providing a central and dominant role for government, trade unions and big business.

In such an environment, protected interests flourished and there was little if any need for the Australian economy to be either competitive or productive. Wages were set through a centralised system and commensurate increases in productivity and efficiency were not considered necessary. Workers were provided with minimal choice or flexibility in how they determined their wages and conditions. The majority belonged to trade unions and this afforded unions a mandated and privileged role in the system.

Union power led to the institutionalisation of unproductive work practices whose legacy continues to impede the Australian economy from reaching its full capacity, both in respect to output and other economic and social goals, such as lowering unemployment and increasing workforce participation. The system was predicated on the creation of disputes which privileged third parties over employers and employees alike and totally overlooked what should be the aim of any government looking to the needs of future generations, namely to encourage the creation of jobs for those outside the workforce and to reduce regulatory barriers to employment.

The very complexity of the system seemed to infuse it with some sort of unique mystique. Gerard Henderson, in his ground-breaking *Quadrant* article on “The Industrial Relations Club”, indicated that critics of change pointed to the age of the system itself as somehow a convincing argument against its reform. Despite the introduction of the Workplace Relations Act in 1996, which among other things provided greater scope for individual workplace agreement making, Australia still has in place a workplace relations system which is predicated on the “old economy” principles.

After a decade of sustained economic growth and a significant increase in employment, Australia now has a once-in-a-generation opportunity to lock in lower unemployment and higher workforce participation for years to come; but we risk missing this opportunity if the workplace relations system and its institutions fail to keep pace with the evolution of the economy and the needs of all those who wish to participate.

In the twenty-first century we must accept that individual agreement-making and workplace bargaining are here to stay, and the days of industry claims, union privilege and over-arching tribunals are gone forever; and that to continue to hanker for the days of one size fits all industry wide awards is unrealistic. No government, especially

a government that wants to maximise productivity, increase workforce participation and secure high wages, should be content with a level of regulation which creates barriers to people being able to enter the workforce.

The government believes that further workplace relations change is vital to our future economic prosperity and our goal of increased workforce participation. In an international environment, where trade barriers are disappearing and there is an increasing shift of production to developing countries, the need for Australian companies to be as efficient and competitive as possible has never been greater.

It is said that over the next ten years, two countries each over 60 times Australia's size are set to rapidly grow and massively expand their export activities. Australia's ongoing success as a major exporter in this environment is inextricably linked to the ability of our economy and those who participate in it to adapt quickly to meet those challenges. Australia's businesses and Australia's workers must have a modern workplace relations system if they are to compete with the likes of China and other emerging economies.

As the OECD recently reminded us, Australia needs ongoing economic reform including workplace relations changes to increase the productive capacity of our economy in order to keep pace with the rest of the world. The advent of the Workplace Relations Act saw the focus of the system shift to give primary responsibility for workplace relations and agreement making to employers and employees at the enterprise and workplace levels.

Indeed it is a clear lesson of the last ten years that where workplace agreements have led to greater flexibility and growth in productivity the results are also higher wages. Since 1996 the government's workplace relations policies have contributed to a stable and low inflationary climate. Combined with higher productivity, this has ensured increasing real wages and low interest rates for Australian workers and their families.

Australia needs to continue to build on the statutory framework of the Workplace Relations Act which promotes choice, strategic decision making and the workplace flexibility necessary for increasing productivity and economic growth through agreement making if we are to meet the challenges that will confront us in the coming years.

Our current agenda

During last year's election campaign, the federal government committed itself to the necessary task of ongoing reform of the workplace relations system to improve flexibility and productivity which we believe are the key to jobs. The government has already begun progressing workplace relations reform measures and has

reintroduced some legislation that has been stalled in the past or to meet emerging issues.

Further workplace relations changes

We are also examining further measures to simplify and harmonise workplace relations in coming years. The measures that the government is considering include:

- options for the setting of the minimum wage including whether the current ambit and adversarial process is sustainable into the twenty first century.

I should emphasise that the government is committed to retaining a minimum wage, but the process for setting it should not be one that locks out of the workforce people who are willing and able to work;

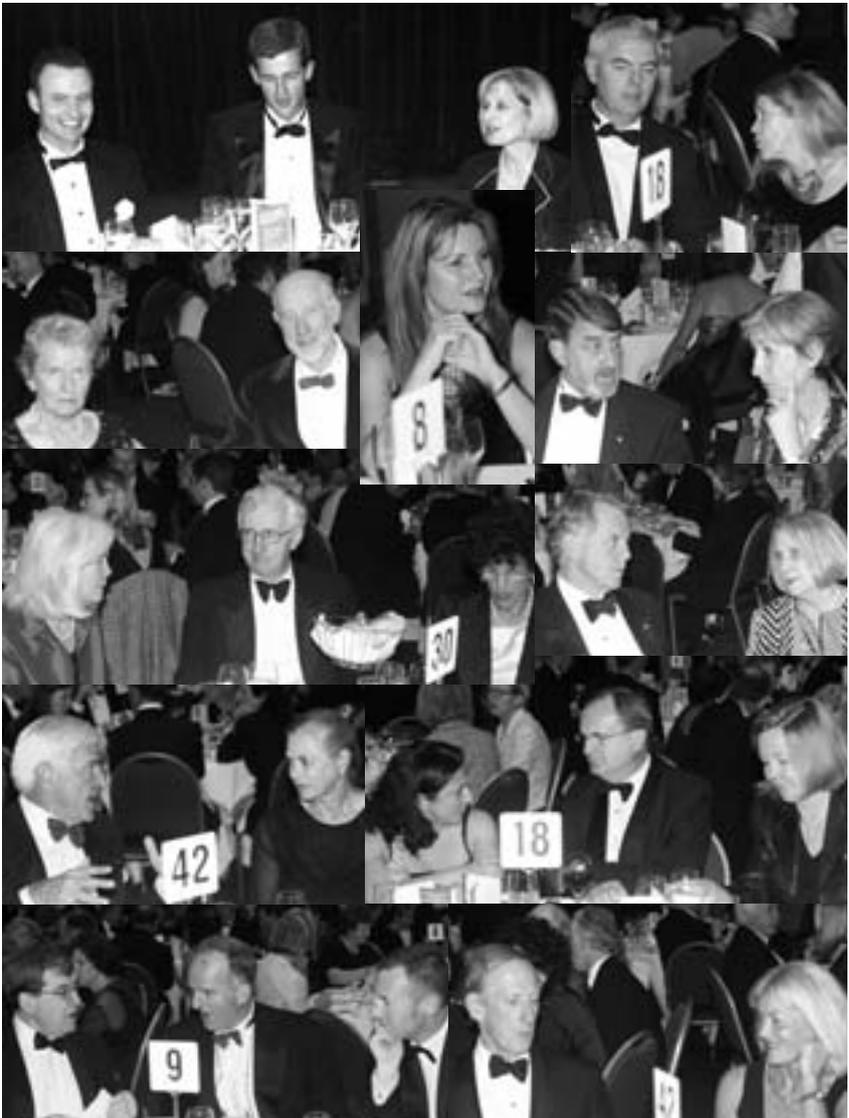
- significant changes designed to remove the complexity and third party interference with agreement making and to simplify the process;
- a series of changes to the role of the Australian Industrial Relations Commission, including increased use of mediation, to ensure it is more aligned with the needs of a system that is suitable for modern Australian workplaces; and
- changes focused on further simplifying awards, whilst continuing their role as a genuine safety net of minimum terms and conditions.

These are not radical measures, but the logical next steps in the evolution of the workplace relations system. In the twenty first century we need a system that, to adopt Gerard Henderson’s words, “give[s] the electorate what it wants – the right to have a say in determining working conditions and work practices.”

In conclusion

Ongoing workplace relations reform produces an economic benefit with significant social dividends – more employment, higher living standards and greater workplace freedom, mobility and participation. This has been the experience of the past decade and the government is determined to pursue ongoing changes to provide a basis for sustaining higher productivity and employment into the future. The changes will be designed to allow all those in our workplaces to meet the challenges of the twenty first century, the needs of our economy and all who want to participate in it.

ANNUAL DINNER – 2005



Photographer: David Karonidis



Photo – David Karonidis

John Edwards

Labor's former prime minister, John Curtin, is much admired – by John Howard and others – due to his role as Australia's war time leader during the Pacific War. However, in his new book, *Curtin's Gift: Reinterpreting Australia's Greatest Prime Minister*, John Edwards writes that there is much more to John Curtin than war time leader. According to Dr Edwards, "Curtin remade the Australian economy" during the Second World War. John Edwards addressed The Sydney Institute on Tuesday 29 March 2005.

CURTIN'S GIFT

John Edwards

Sixty years after his death, why do we still care about Curtin? It is I think largely because he became Prime Minister of Australia two months before Pearl Harbour and he died in office two months before Japan's unconditional surrender. He spanned the period of what we rightly think of as the greatest threat, the only serious threat, that's ever been presented to Australia's independence and integrity as a nation. So he's important in that respect. He's also interesting to think about because he's now just slightly beyond our vision. It was possible, in writing this book, to speak to people who knew him or that met him. Clyde Cameron for example, former Minister for Labour in the Whitlam Government, had met him. A wonderful economist, Leslie Melville, who died only a couple of years ago, and was then more than a hundred years old, had been an advisor to Curtin and had many interesting things to say about him. Gough Whitlam remembers Curtin well as the Prime Minister, although he was of course a young man still when Curtin died. But for people of my age, people born after 1945, it's just a little beyond us. He is not quite behind the glass of history, but he is no longer a living presence in the public mind.

He's most remembered for the Pacific war, and particularly for the iconic episode, which is in all the Curtin books, all the Australian histories of the period and which I also discuss in my book – the return of the sixth and seventh divisions of the Australian Imperial Force from the Middle East in 1942. He's remembered in that episode as being very deeply anxious about their safety as they cross the Indian Ocean, some of the transports unescorted at a time when the Japanese Navy had control of the seas. He's remembered for that; he's remembered for defying Churchill to insist that the troops come back. And he's remembered in our history books also for a sense that he turned us away from the UK and turned us towards the US, setting a pattern which continued after World War II.

Well that was where my interest in Curtin began. It sparked my curiosity about the sort of man he was. The Curtin presented to us in our histories is one of somebody who was very ill-prepared for office. When he became Prime Minister in 1941 he'd never held political office before, as a minister. He'd never been an executive in charge of

anything serious. He'd left school at fourteen and been an alcoholic most of his life. His most demanding management role was secretary of a small trade union, which he left as much through alcoholism as through his discovery that the timber workers of Victoria weren't really interested in Socialist revolution. He comes down to us, in the descriptions of some of the people who knew him, as a very modest and humble man, one who, at least according to Menzies, privately confided that he had no wish to become Prime Minister and wished to remain as Leader of the Opposition throughout the war. We think of him, accordingly, as a very ordinary man who had greatness thrust upon him but only by, as it were, the accident of the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbour and the Japanese success in their Pacific conquests. He stands in our memory as a reluctant politician, a saintly but pallid figure.

Well it follows, of course, that bringing the troops home is the major episode about Curtin because without it there wouldn't have been much to him. We are told that General Douglas MacArthur was put in command of Australia's fighting forces and he told Curtin he would take care of the front if Curtin took care of the rear. But we are also told in the biographies of Chifley that as Treasurer he ran economic policy. It didn't leave very much for Curtin to do. When all the other claims are credited, Curtin is left with bringing the troops home. Without that and the war we would not particularly remember him. In fact, that's the view some historians do take. Fred Alexander, a West Australian historian, described him as a lucky man because of the war, which gave him a reputation far greater than his intrinsic qualities would justify. Stuart McIntyre, a Melbourne historian, said that Curtin would have been a very mediocre and timid peace time Prime Minister.

Well this seemed to me, when I was researching, to be a suspect account, one that doesn't seem to be quite right. One thing about it which struck me is the energy and force with which Curtin pursued his political career. He failed to win a seat in Parliament several times and nonetheless insisted on standing again. He returned to serious drinking when he was refused a ministerial post in the first government of which he was a member. As soon as the position of leader of the opposition became vacant, he seized it. In his career he was quite otherwise from the reluctant politician.

He also had that very characteristic kind of sardonic humour that professional politicians have. It was not at all saintly. Forced to find a ministerial portfolio for Eddie Ward, a man who gave him great grief in cabinet, Curtin confided to journalists that he had given him Transport and Territories because, as he said, "the Army has the transport and the Japs have the territories." He addressed a banquet in London, where he told the story of an Englishman who had been

very reluctant to migrate to Australia because, as he said, that is where the convicts went. As the audience laughed very uncertainly Curtin added that the man went anyway, and married an Australian. But she refused to visit England because, as she said, that is where the convicts came from. He had a sense of humour that was at odds with the pallid reputation.

He also had a very startling candour. His relationships with journalists were extremely good and we can now read the accounts of their off the record press conferences. Some of the journalists kept very detailed notes. It's quite striking how open he was with them. For example, he discussed Australia's commitment to produce uranium for the UK which he told reporters was required for scientific purposes associated with the War. This at a time when the whole Manhattan project was shrouded in complete secrecy.

Another thing which is rather at odds with his reputation is his racism. He was a lifelong adherent of the White Australia policy and it's certainly true that the White Australia policy was economic in its motivation and origin but, nonetheless, Curtin described it in racist ways and played it, as a card, politically. For example, in the conscription debates, 1916–17, he warned that were conscription to be introduced, were Australian whites males to be sent to die in France, there would no alternative but to bring in people of other races to Australia.

There's also another inconsistency in the story of his simplicity in that Curtin was extraordinarily widely read and not merely in politics and economics but also in English literature and we can document it; his engagement in literary debates, as well as political debates. He had a very well stocked mind. He was a very well read man.

So I thought maybe there is a different way of thinking about Curtin. That took me then back to reviewing this whole episode of bringing the troops home. What was Curtin like, as a warlord? And the conclusion I came to was that he was in a way very much less than we remember him and in way very much more. For example the decision to bring the troops back from the Middle East to fight the Japanese was not initiated by Curtin but by Churchill and communicated to Curtin and received his assent and that of the other Australian politicians in the Advisory War Council.

He did not create an alliance with the US. The alliance with the US, the expectation that the US would support Australia in the war against Japan, had long been part of Australian and UK defence policy. Indeed it was inevitably so, because Japan's principal enemy in the Pacific was not Australia and not Holland in Indonesia but the US – so the US was our natural and inevitable ally and planning under both Labor and National governments in Australia, had assumed this. It's true that Churchill had a very strong objection to Curtin's

27 January 1941 declaration that without any inhibitions of any kind Australia looks to America, free of any pangs as to our traditional links or kinship with the United Kingdom. But Churchill's real objection was not to this apparent turn to the US, which he encouraged, even insisted upon, it was that a little further down in the same article Curtin claimed direct Australian representation in Washington to put the Australian point of view. Churchill was determined to resist this because his principal objective was to prevent the US treating the war against Japan in the way in which Australia wanted it treated as a war of equivalent interest to the war against Germany.

Well, as I said, Churchill initiated bringing the troops back from the Middle East. The actual dispute between Churchill and Curtin was not about bringing the troops home from the Middle East but about the destination of the 7th Division as it went past Burma. This was after the fall of Singapore in mid February 1942 so the troops could no longer go to Singapore. It was after it had been established that Indonesia would soon fall to the Japanese so they couldn't go there and the decision then became would they go to Australia as Curtin insisted or, as Churchill was then insisting, should they go to Burma and prevent the Japanese from conquering Burma and moving into India. Well there's no doubt Curtin made the right decision and there's no doubt the proponents of Churchill's view, which included Menzies and most of the post-war leadership of the Liberal Party, were supporting the commitment of the troops in Burma. They were completely wrong – the troops would have been lost. But that's the whole dispute and Curtin very correctly, with the support of the Army and the chiefs of staff and unanimous support of his own cabinet, insisted that they come home to Australia.

Was that a decision that saved Australia from Japan as it is sometimes portrayed? No it was not. In fact most of the AIF remained west of Singapore, well into 1942, well after the threat from Japan began to decline. Anyway, was the threat of invasion from Japan a real one, as Curtin said? Australia actually had a clear superiority of military manpower against Japan in the region and that superiority quickly accumulated all through 1942. The Japanese threat had been diminished, not by Curtin or MacArthur, and not by returning Australian troops or by the US army, but by the Midway carrier battle in June 1942 which destroyed Japan's command of the air and the sea.

It seemed to me then that the claims for Curtin saving Australia by bringing the troops home were not ones that could stand up. He made good decisions, ones to which the conservatives objected. He insisted on carrying them out but they didn't seem on their own to give him the place in Australian history that has been conferred upon him.

Then I went back a little bit further and re-examined a bit more of Curtin's life and particularly the account of him as being an ill-prepared individual for office. And I discovered that this was also quite untrue. In fact Curtin had a lifelong interest, not in defence but in economic policy and he had engaged in a debate about economics from his earliest years as an adult. He was very widely read in socialist economics and by his late twenties, early thirties, in the works of Maynard Keynes in the UK, whom Curtin thought early to be the most interesting economist in the world.

He grew up in a time of economic failure in Australia and particularly of banking failure and the idea of exerting control over the economy and particularly over the banking system seems to have been his political cause, lifelong. We can trace the evolution of his views on this issue, as I do in the book, from his very earliest writings. In particular we can rediscover the speeches he made in Parliament as a member of the government but opposing government policies during the Depression.

He made in that period three great speeches on economic policy which were decades ahead of their time. For example, to deal with the Depression, he urged not only deficit spending which was inevitable, not only an expansion of credit, which was refused by the Commonwealth Bank, but also the floating of the Australian pound; a radical view which would not be adopted here until 1983. He was well ahead of his time.

He also learned a lot from the experience of Labor's Scullin government during the Depression. It was destroyed by opposition in the Senate, by its inability to get a program through that would address the Depression. It became one of Curtin's principles that things which would be refused in peace time might very readily be granted in war time.

This then offers a new perspective on Prime Minister John Curtin. Setting aside his role as a war lord, setting aside the colourful story of Curtin pacing the grounds of the Lodge as he waited for news of the ships coming down the Indian Ocean with Australia's returning troops. Instead we see that Curtin was working towards the most extraordinary transformation of the Commonwealth that had ever been undertaken.

Within days of coming to office as Prime Minister, without a majority in the House of Representatives, let alone the Senate, Curtin seized for the Commonwealth control over the Commonwealth Bank which had been denied it for decades. He established the Commonwealth Bank as a true central bank with control over the trading banks. The trading banks vigorously objected as the minutes of Commonwealth Bank meetings, now held by the Reserve Bank

of Australia, attest. Curtin set up, within a week or so of coming to office, the central bank that we still have today.

Very soon after the Pearl Harbour attack, a couple of months after he came to office, he initiated a second great change in Commonwealth economic power, which was to seize Commonwealth control over income tax. In doing so, under the threat of war, of national emergency and survival, he conferred on the Commonwealth a power which it never returned and which has given it a predominant power over revenues and spending. Prior to Curtin, the bigger states rivalled or exceeded the Commonwealth in power. After Curtin there was never any question but that the Commonwealth was the dominant power in Australian federation.

Within a few months of coming to office Curtin engaged Australia in negotiations with its allies, principally the UK and the US, on the creation and governance of the economic institutions which would dominate the post-war world, the IMF, the World Bank, and the GATT (which became ultimately the World Trade Organisation).

Under Curtin, Australia was engaged in the construction of these bodies from the beginning so that within a year of coming to office, with little attention, publicity or notice, he had created the three foundations of the modern Commonwealth: control over the central bank, control over taxation and spending, and Australian engagement in international economic governance.

Then, in 1943 and 1944, he tied all three together in another initiative of his, falsely ascribed I think to Chifley but clearly Curtin's, which was to adopt for Australia a policy of full employment, to which the policies of the central bank, the fiscal authority of the Commonwealth and Australia's engagement in international institutions would be directed. Full employment; meaning in a literal sense very low unemployment but meaning in a wider sense, stabilisation of output along Keynesian lines so that Australia would, in the post war world, narrow the huge swings in output which had characterised all the years of Curtin's childhood and adult life.

As I said, he died in office, in 1945. He was a very sick man from the last months of 1944. All these achievements were crowded into a little over three years but nonetheless when he died, as became clear, he'd not only brought the troops home, he'd not only lobbied with partial success for more resources in the war against Japan, he'd not only mobilised a nation and readied it for the threats which a Japanese presence presented, but he'd also, under the threat of war, transformed government in Australia in a way that we enjoy now. All the things that he set up then have identical importance, and in many respects, are similar to the institutional structure we have today.

Gerard Henderson has written about a federation trifecta, and Paul Kelly about a federation settlement, and both lists include

compulsory arbitration, a White Australia policy and high tariffs. But if that was true in 1901, what we can also say is that Curtin in 1941, 1942 and 1943 introduced a new trifecta of Commonwealth control of the central bank, Commonwealth control over taxation and spending and Commonwealth engagement in a global economic governance all in the pursuit of policy of full employment. White Australia is no longer with us, compulsory arbitration is barely with us and high tariffs have gone, but the central bank, Commonwealth control over spending, Australian engagement in global economy and all in pursuit of the full utilisation of our resources remains the central premise of the Commonwealth, and Curtin's most enduring gift to the generations which followed him.



Photo – David Karonidis

Herbert E Huppert

Professor Herbert E Huppert, FRS, University of Cambridge, is Chair of the Royal Society Working Group on Bioterrorism, an independent group established by the Royal Society. The group has recommended that the UK government should establish a new centre to improve UK resilience in case of chemical or biological attack. To outline the investigations of the Working Group, Herbert Huppert addressed The Sydney Institute on Monday 4 April 2005.

BIO-TERRORISM

- A UK PERSPECTIVE

Herbert E Huppert

The events of 11 September 2001 completely changed the outlook of the Western world. In a virtually unprepared for incident, 3,000 innocent people lost their lives; and many, many more individuals and families suffered extensive trauma. There were also extensive repercussions the world over. There were direct economic costs, of over a hundred billion dollars. There have also been untold military costs. Interestingly, in this matter a number of leaders of democratic countries have made decisions probably against the will of their people. Of course little of this was foreseen by the pundits in the first few weeks or months after the attack.

In 1947, after World War II, a highly confidential committee of the British government was requested to investigate how the UK could defend itself in case of future attack. One of the conclusions of this interesting and comprehensive document was that there was no defence against a suicide bomber. Anyone who, for example, chose to fly his or her plane (though I doubt they envisaged it would be a her) into the Houses of Parliament was virtually unstoppable. But of course we can, and must, defend ourselves to the best of our ability.

The Royal Society, which is the premier scientific society of the British Commonwealth and the oldest scientific society in the world, publishes two or three major policy reports each year. The Society has a longstanding scientific interest in bioterrorism, which predates 11 September 2001. For example, in both 1994 and 2000 it published reports on Biological Weapons. These reports highlighted the potential danger to civilians from biological attacks and tabulated the likely agents and their consequences. Note one of the conclusions of the 2000 Biological Weapons report was that the greatest danger from biological weapons is not the direct consequences of their use, but the fear they generate. This still remains the Society's opinion in 2005.

With the present background, the Royal Society decided to launch a working group to prepare a report on the current scientific position of the detection and decontamination of chemical and biological weapons. When preparing such reports, the Society often chooses as a

chairman an individual who is not an expert in the field being considered, on the grounds that he or she will be able to sift dispassionately through the evidence.

The working group of 14 scientists consisted of seven who were already experts in the subject and seven others who were superb scientists with very relevant knowledge, but had not applied it to bioterrorism before. They included: chemists; physicists; engineers; biologists; medics and an individual particularly knowledgeable about hazards and risk analysis. Evidence was taken from a broad range of sources. These included key UK Government departments, emergency service staff, or “first responders”, emergency planners, the academic community and industry.

A strongly motivating force for the committee was the many similarities between dealing with the consequences of a malevolent event and an accidental release of a chemical or biological agent. Many countermeasures will be equally applicable to either type of incident. For example, the conflagration which could follow the high-speed collision on the roads of two super-tankers carrying inflammable material is independent of the cause of the event. Much could be gained from close coordination and communication between staff now focused on preparedness against malevolent attack and those dealing with accidental releases.

The main title of the report was “Making the UK Safer”, and is available from the Royal Society web site. It is safe, but it can be made safer. Let’s take automobile transport as a comparison. We safely drove cars in the 1950s. We then brought the fatality rate down by almost a factor of three by introducing sequentially: seat belts, tough drink driving laws, and now air bags. We are unlikely to make anywhere totally safe – against accidents due to cars, buses, trains... or terrorists – but we can aim to do as well as possible.

The primary recommendation was that the UK Government should give high priority to establishing a new dedicated centre. Its aim would be to co-ordinate and manage wide-ranging new science to improve the UK’s defence and to minimise the impact of any civilian chemical or biological incident. A number of factors brought the working group to this conclusion.

First, rapid and effective detection and decontamination of an incident are necessary to minimise negative health impacts and reduce disruption to civil society. While the UK already has considerable world class scientific expertise in this area, it needs to be harnessed effectively in order to strengthen its existing resilience. In addition it has experts in closely lying areas who are not always aware of how useful their knowledge could be. For example, I have a colleague who works on dispersions of pollutants, but may not have even considered the obvious parallels in the release of biological or chemical agents.

The committee is confident that the attracting of new scientific minds, with novel thoughts and perspectives, can only be beneficial.

The committee believed that the most urgent need, in terms of technological development, is for generic hand-held detection devices that can identify a wide range of agents. These will allow the emergency services to rapidly detect the type and severity of any contamination they encounter. The quicker that information can be determined, the more tailored and effective the response will be. The committee also stressed the need for such generic detectors because in all likelihood a cocktail of agents will be used – not just a specific one previously anticipated. An important requirement will be “kite-marking”, that is imposing European Safety Standards, or their equivalent, on current technologies. It is also necessary to devise and apply new concepts such as so called “lab-on-a-chip” to the problem in such a way that devices become smaller, preferably hand-held and of the size of a mobile phone, faster and more sensitive. Eventually, there must be a large commercial market in one’s own individual detector; and some military personnel are already issued with such devices. Ultimately devices will be remote controlled, which will dramatically reduce the risk to users when assessing a situation.

There is a definite shortfall currently in the lack of assessment and standardisation of detection equipment which means that first responders have no clear idea which of the currently available products, if any, would be most effective for their needs. The centre should therefore also look to undertake or coordinate a program of testing in order to produce useful guidelines and kitemark appropriate equipment. This could be used efficiently in the many examples of unknown white powder, more than one per week in Britain at the moment, which cause such fear and consternation. At the moment their origin and properties often take a long time for the authorities to determine. Accuracy in identification is essential. You will all recall the disaster following the storming of the Moscow theatre. It had been taken over by Chechin rebels. In response the Russian authorities released a fentanyl derivative, whose use was legally rather questionable. Therefore the authorities did not inform the medical teams correctly, who were unable to deliver the appropriate treatment for most of the patients. A further example is the purple powder incident in the British Parliament in the middle of May, 2004. Demonstrators threw an unknown powder into the Chamber, and covered the Prime Minister, from the visitors’ gallery. The Speaker did absolutely the wrong thing. He called for the Chamber to be cleared, without knowing what the substance was. Alternatively, could the police at Westminster have detained the Prime Minister and members of the Cabinet? And for how long?

Detection is only half of the game. Action is also needed in decontamination, an important aspect. By utilising techniques, particularly from industry, and especially from the giant chemical and detergent industries, improvements can be made to the decontamination procedures for people and vehicles in the immediate aftermath of an incident, to minimise casualties and prevent spread of the contaminating agent. Appropriate measures are also needed for the clean-up of buildings and the surrounding environment and deciding what constitutes a “safe” environment to return to once the clean-up is over.

Some of you may be wondering about the role to be played by dstl Porton Down, the premier military establishment set up in the UK during World War I. The Committee visited them and were most impressed with their scientific ability. But, understandably, they concentrate on military matters, which have some similarities with civilian situations, but also some very important differences. For example, contaminated tanks can be left to rust in the middle of the battle field. It would be hard to leave an array of contaminated cars in the middle of a large city, such as London, New York or Sydney. Further, as I enjoy saying to government Ministers, soldiers are generally young, fit and tough; and being killed is unfortunately one of the acceptable risks on a military battlefield. In detail, quite different detection and decontamination scenarios are needed in civilian situations, though much can be learnt from the military.

As a result of determining, commissioning and directing the work, the civilian centre the Royal Society Report recommends would also become a focal point for all these activities – a one-stop shop. On hearing of the twin towers incidents, Mayor Guilliani knew immediately to contact the Centres for Disease Control in Atlanta to determine if biological agents were involved. Would the person responsible in your country know whom to contact?

The issues of developing existing technologies and adequate assessment of situations apply equally to the problems raised in the part of the report dealing with decontamination following the release of a chemical or biological agent. Back in 2001, the United States saw the deliberate release of anthrax spores in letters. In the clean-up operation, the stated requirement was for no spores to remain in the environment. So far, while many of the affected mail sorting offices have been decontaminated, at a cost of around \$800m (and still rising) and produced 3000 tons of contaminated waste, none of the buildings are back in use. This is despite the fact that anthrax spores exist naturally in certain environments and can be an accepted occupational hazard in the leather and wool industries, particularly with imported raw materials, as is true in much of Northern England. The US authorities tried to return the buildings to be “cleaner than clean”

and did nothing to try to educate the public of the standard of cleanliness required.

The final major problem for decontamination, beyond agreeing safe enough levels and identifying the most effective way to reach them, is public perception. What the population at large perceive to be clean enough to be “safe” involves the psychology of what is acceptable risk as much as what the scientific evidence tells us. Communication and dialogue between scientists, Government and the public needs to be clear and open to ensure confidence in the governmental processes. The proposed centre could clearly play a role in ensuring an appropriate level of confidence is achieved.

The public should also become involved in realistic exercises to test and develop correct reactions to an incident. The report recommends that the centre should coordinate first responders, emergency planners and some civilians in running such exercises. These would not only provide reassurance to the public, but also become an integral part of emergency staff training and preparedness. Of course one of the most dominant problems is fear itself. There can be no doubt that the level of nervousness by the public since 11 September 2001, has increased enormously. One of the aspects that a good government would cover is dampening down these fears, while at the same time keeping a clear eye on the problem. I will have more to say about the aspect of risk nearer the end of the talk.

However good the technologies developed for detecting and decontaminating become, the reality of the situation, at least in the near future, is that the occurrence of a biological or chemical attack may first become apparent through those affected reporting medical symptoms. The medical detection systems in place need to be able to respond as effectively and rapidly as possible. Therefore, there should be increased training for clinicians in these areas in order that the relevant symptoms can be recognised. Equally, at a higher level, medical intelligence analysis, in conjunction with the Health Protection Agency and the National Health Service (or NHS) in the UK and similar bodies in other countries, can be used to improve recognition at the level of the population in order to strengthen resilience. The proposed centre could also undertake the coordination of these improvements.

Since the introduction of the report on 21 April 2004, with a number of my committee members, I have been to see a range of Permanent Secretaries, Chief Scientific Advisers, the Head of the Office of Science and Technology and Government Ministers. They all seemed to be in agreement with the basic ideas put forward in the Report. They all agree that the advantage of scientific co-ordination, directed from a Centre, would be enormous, but there still seems to be a little reluctance on the political side. What makes good scientific

sense does not always sit easily with politicians. As Ian Taylor, the previous (Conservative) Minister of Science, said to me during a recent meeting in Singapore on terrorism: “Herbert, the aim of government is to be seen to be doing the right thing ... not necessarily to be doing the right thing.”

In late May 2004 the government published its formal response to our report and the signs are encouraging. They first favoured a “virtual centre” based on the existing Home Office CBRN (Chemical Biological Radiological Nuclear) Team to “deliver a coordinated program in partnership with other government departments”. Through continued meetings with the Home Office and other government departments the Society will work to ensure that whatever model is ultimately implemented it can deliver the range of recommendations that our report outlines to help make the UK safer.

The government announced further in January 2005 that it will be setting up a new central decontamination service to help authorities and organisations prepare for and deal with incidents where CBRN material are released into the environment. This announcement goes some way to creating the single, central source of expertise, as our Report recommended. It means that those on the front line of coping with the aftermath of a release of any CBRN materials will know where to receive advice and guidance on decontamination. However, the Society believes that such a service should also encompass the detection of CBRN materials in the event of an incident because the two measures are so intrinsically linked. Quickly and accurately establishing the nature of a release is essential to deciding what decontaminating steps need to be taken. In addition, the service is limiting itself to the decontamination of buildings and the environment when easy access to expertise on the decontamination of people, animals and vehicles at the scene of an incident is also urgently needed.

In order to help build up research on CBRN in the Home Office with a strong co-ordination, a bidders conference was held recently to place research contracts in detection, decontamination and numerical modelling for the spread of a contaminant. This generated enormous response and interest, from both industry and academia, though rather less from the former, but the selection procedure has not yet taken place. However, it is already clear that further co-ordination and management is needed.

I want now to return to the tyranny of fear; and end with a few words on relative risk.

Three thousand dead within a morning is truly horrific. But that has to be compared with the constant 45,000 dead, and roughly half a million badly injured, each year on US roads alone. About half these deaths, over 20,000 each year, and hundreds of thousands of injuries would be preventable by compulsory use of seat belts. In comparison

with the devastation of a terrorist attack, it is much, much more likely that one is involved in a fatal road accident, even though this is only about 10 in 1000, or that one has up to ten years of life taken away by smoking, which affects, on average, 300 in every 1000.

In a brochure that came with my airline tickets there was the statement that air travel is “165 times safer than going by car, 27 times safer than rail, 2200 times safer than cycling!” How these figures are arrived at I do not know; whether that means per passenger mile, per passenger minute, per journey or whatever. This is one of the problems with these broad brush statistics.

I once met a charming Swiss astronaut, whose wife quickly told me how dangerous the job was: approximately 30 of roughly people experienced in space travel had died on the job, she told me. I replied, but by passenger kilometer it must be one of the safest means of transport.

Endnote

Despite the tragic bombings in London (7 July 2005), fear is still a major contributor to terrorist activities. The immediate follow up to these bombings appears to indicate that the emergency services and hospitals reacted quickly and effectively and the general public, though dazed and shocked, in general did not panic.



Photo - David Karonidis

Peter Garrett

Once the public face of Midnight Oil and a former President of the Australian Conservation Foundation, Peter Garrett is now the Labor Member for the federal seat of Kingsford-Smith in Sydney. Elected to parliament in October 2004, Peter Garrett MP has made a quiet start to his parliamentary career. In his first major speech as a new MP, Peter Garrett addressed The Sydney Institute on Wednesday 6 April 2005, and canvassed environmental concerns for Australia in the post Kyoto era.

AUSTRALIA: AFTER

KYOTO

Peter Garrett

Thank you for the invitation to speak to The Sydney Institute.

This week sees a number of conferences and high level meetings devoted to the issue of climate change taking place around Australia. Both the UK based Climate Group and the Pew Center on Global Climate Change headquartered in America are in town, talking about life after Kyoto.

The United States' chief climate change negotiator, Harlan Watson, also in Australia, was reported in the *Australian Financial Review* (4 April) as saying the world will be dependent on fossil fuel for the foreseeable future, that developing countries could not be expected to do anything to hinder their economic growth and that clean coal systems and improved nuclear power generation were the way forward. I have to say with respect, that Mr Watson is wrong. The way things often work here, we can expect a similar comment from a senior government minister to be made in due course – and that will be plain wrong too.

This week the Australian states, Labor governments all, with NSW and Victoria leading the process, have decided to take the initiative and instigate a national greenhouse gas emissions trading scheme. I say they are going it alone, but, in fact, it is the Howard Government which is going it alone in domestic terms and nearly alone globally.

A greenhouse gas emissions trading scheme has long been considered a vital element of any strategy to reduce greenhouse pollution and so, in the absence of leadership and action from the Howard Government, the states are filling the vacuum and doing the right thing on behalf of Australia. This is a welcome initiative that I and many others have thought necessary for some time. In 2003, as the ACF President, I, along with ACF Executive Director Don Henry, encouraged Premiers Carr and Bracks to take up the greenhouse cudgels in the absence of any constructive action from the Howard Government and consider implementing a scheme of this kind.

Everyone recognised it would be more effective if the federal government were involved but that, in its absence, the states could and

should take to the field. Their initiative should be applauded; it's a ray of light in an otherwise very dark tunnel.

The same tensions are apparent in America where similar regional initiatives are underway in the absence of US government willingness to initiate a national emission trading scheme. The Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative comprising North East and Mid Atlantic states envisages a cap-and-trade scheme plus emissions trading to operate in this industrial hub.

I came into the parliament with a strong belief that governments should play a strongly activist role in improving the lives of people – the health of communities, as well as the wealth of individuals. And that the health of communities comprising diverse individuals existing within a social, political and environmental frame, is a critical area for government action.

I said at the time that the environment policies Labor took to the election had improved greatly and were good policies, vastly superior to the Howard Government's, and on a range of fronts, from addressing climate change to protecting national parks. I made the observation yesterday that, notwithstanding this, some of the thinking of the Labor Party on the environment needs to come into the twenty-first century. I don't think there is anything exceptional in that remark. Indeed, I would have thought it was a blinding glimpse of the obvious, although it was, to coin a phrase, sexed up by journalists who claimed I had said our party, or our policy, needed to come into the twenty-first century. But who am I, a newcomer, or "novice" as one of those journalists kindly called me this morning, to question the veracity and professionalism of a press report?

Robust and forward looking policy development on the environment and other policy areas too, is at the heart of what political parties should do and should always be doing. I am glad the Labor Party is *continuing* to do this. And bringing *all* of the thinking on our side into the twenty-first century would merely widen and clarify the gap between ourselves and the Coalition.

If we compare existing Labor policy in this area:

- to ratify the Kyoto Protocol (Treaty),
- to have a Mandatory Renewable Energy Target of five per cent,
- to establish a national greenhouse gas emission trading scheme,
- to have a greenhouse trigger in the EPBC Act;

with the Howard Government's, we should be struck by the shallowness and backwardness in its position. If you don't think the government's inaction is costing us valuable economic and environmental progress ask those in the business community who are champing at the bit to get going on carbon trading and new and renewable energy solutions.

Under John Howard's leadership we are left with a government that is dragging Australia, dare I say, into the last century and beyond. On environment, the Australian Bureau of Statistics Measurement of Australian Progress Report shows we are going backwards on every indicator of environmental health except for air quality.

Now I believe that the debate about economic growth must include the issue of sustainability. However much argument there may be about the exact definition of that term, the health and long term wealth of our society in the future will be determined by the way in which we manage the economy so as to preserve the health and productivity of the environment.

In that sense, I believe the environment comes first, for humans ultimately rely upon it for their livelihood and existence. I am continually astonished when it is left out of political discussion, as it has been in the current debate about infrastructure, or as I'm sure it will be, substantively, when the Treasurer presents his 2005 budget.

I believe the ALP has the track record, the capacity and the policy framework to take this debate forward. Kim Beazley speaking last week in Melbourne made this clear when he noted the "serious environmental (and demographic) challenges" Australia faces. Environment Shadow Minister Anthony Albanese has consistently argued that "Labor does not accept the argument that the pursuit of environmental sustainability threatens future economic or employment growth – quite the opposite". And frankly the government's response, record and progress have been woeful.

The advent of climate change and the likelihood of increasing global warming means this issue is one of the most critical we face; its time scale is long, its impact as vast as the oceans already warming. Recent opinion polling by the Lowy Institute indicates that Australians believe "Improving the global environment" should, along with strengthening the economy and protecting Australian jobs, be our first foreign policy goal and that a majority of Australians have as much if not more concern about this issue as they do about terrorism. This shows that there has been a growing understanding of the urgency of this issue and increasing community demand for governments to do something about it.

Some 16 long years ago (1989), then Labor foreign minister Gareth Evans, never one to lack conviction, remarked that "...climate change and protection of the atmosphere (is) the biggest challenge faced by mankind in this age or in any other." This is a view shared by many today including South Australia's leader Mike Rann who says, "Metabolism of the world's modern economy is on a collision course with the metabolism of the planet." This view is shared by many overseas leaders, the most notable British PM Tony Blair, who have made similar points.

Tony Blair who has convened an International Task Force on Climate Change to provide government and industry with options for enhancing greenhouse emission reductions is this year president of both the G 8 and EU. Blair has made it clear that he believes Climate Change is a priority issue for the United Kingdom and the international community.

There is much support for a robust consideration of this issue from organisations as diverse as the NFF, the AMA, and of course the CSIRO. A number of leading corporations including Westpac, Origin Energy, BP, IAG and others are publicly committed to responding to the threats posed by climate change. But there remain those who are sceptical. I was intrigued to hear Ray Evans former Western Mining Corporation executive describe global warming on Radio National as "... a religious precept designed by the EU to give it legitimacy." Climate change has been declared a "global fraud" based on "left-wing, anti-American, anti-west ideology".

Resources minister Ian Macfarlane recently said, "Whether or not these emissions are causing climate change or not, I don't know. If you go back across history millions of years, carbon dioxide levels go up and down and global warming comes and goes..." Well again with respect Minister, that's wrong as well.

The plain fact is that the Howard Government is nowhere to be seen on climate change other than to parrot the position of the United States. Australia has refused to ratify the Kyoto Protocol despite our earlier and beneficial involvement in the Treaty deliberations. It has effectively thrown all its energy policy eggs into the basket of hope for clean energy technologies and geo-sequestration to instantly materialise, whilst discounting renewables and energy efficiency. It has presided over a substantial increase in greenhouse gas emissions which by 2020 are expected to increase by 23 per cent. And ABARE expects our energy consumption to increase by a whopping 53 per cent by that year too.

The Greenhouse Gas office hasn't achieved notable success and by asking communities to do their bit, which Australians are prepared to with its "Cool Communities Program" the government has effectively sheltered the free riders in greenhouse gas emissions, particularly the aluminium producers, from scrutiny.

Yes we are on track to reach the Kyoto first phase target of 108 per cent of 1990 levels but only because of the Australia clause whereby we could include as a one off land clearing, namely the benefits of the reductions undertaken by the Beattie government, in our emissions total. Otherwise we are stuffed, with no coherent policy or institutional framework to address the ever growing greenhouse gas spiral and the serious health – as we come under threat of increasing tropical

diseases, and environmental damage – as we experience the prospects of increased drought impacts wrought by climate change .

I was a little surprised when in parliament last month several government backbenchers disputed not only the efficacy of the Kyoto protocol but also the science of climate change. Climate sceptics are a regular fixture in the debate and are often drawn on to provide a scientific justification for the unwillingness of the Howard Government to ratify the Kyoto Protocol.

If we examine the matter closely we find there is broad scientific agreement that “anthropogenic” human activity caused greenhouse gas emissions are tending to make the atmosphere warmer and that the climate is changing right now. The work undertaken by the International Panel on Climate Change which has informed the Kyoto Protocol process represents one of the largest, most collaborative scientific efforts we’ve witnessed. It has found that since the advent of the steam engine the parts per million of carbon in the atmosphere has steadily increased from 280 ppm in the pre-industrial era to 368 in 1997 when the Kyoto Protocol was drawn up to 379 ppm in 2004. These increases are predicted to continue.

The big question is what will then happen when the levels reach around 450 ppm. The contentious part of the debate centres on the technical and theoretical questions of the effect of the effect, that is whether with global temperatures expected to rise there will be positive or negative feedback loops. For example, positive effects like the melting ice caps will lead to warmer temperatures and scientists are definite about this but would warmer cloud layers in the troposphere mean cooler temperatures? Here the answers are less definite.

There is no question there is uncertainty in attempting to predict the details of climate change due to the inherent variability in our global climate system, but there is equally no question that the global community is increasing in population size and industrial capacity. China for instance has its GDP growing at around 7 per cent per year, and energy use is predicted to substantially increase world wide over the coming century. The consequent ramping up the quantity of greenhouse gases in earth’s closed atmosphere creates the problem. Once above the 450 ppm level scientists believe a tipping point is reached as a greater than 2.5 per cent temp increase is seen to so affect the stability for the world’s climate. It is here that the scenarios encompass wild weather and more.

The International Panel on Climate Change consensus view that feedbacks will be mainly positive means that doubling CO₂ levels will warm the world by anything from 1.4 to 5.8 °C. Even at the low end this has been described (*New Scientist* February 12 2005) as “... probably the biggest fluctuation in temperature that has occurred in the history of human civilisation.” It was also reported in that edition

that science historian Naomi Oreskes' (University of California) "review of all 928 peer-reviewed papers on climate change published between 1993 and 2003 showed the consensus to be real and near universal." In the case of sceptical scientists, "They differ from the rest only in that they believe most climate models overestimate the positive feedback and underestimate the negative, and they predict that warming will be at the bottom end of the IPCC's scale."

More recent is the revelation that the existence of global dimming, whereby the presence of tiny airborne pieces of ash, soot and sulphur in clouds ie greenhouse gases, has actually resulted in less of the sun's heat reaching the earth's surface than might ordinarily be the case. Once we produce cleaner coal, we create the conditions for even more global warming.

Whatever the precise effects of increasing amounts of carbon dioxide and other gases will be over the long term, there is strong consensus that deep cuts in greenhouse gas emissions will need to be made – something in the order of 60 per cent by 2050, and that the world will need both international agreements and financial instruments to enable and regulate that process.

The Kyoto Protocol, now in force, was the first attempt by the international community to address the issue. In some quarters it has been unjustly denigrated, given the obstacles to reaching agreement that are inherent in a treaty of this kind. The refusal of the US and in lock step, Australia, both large per capita emitters of greenhouse gases to come on board does not lessen the significant achievement of getting a Treaty of this kind into international law.

The protocol has been called a modest first step, which indeed it is, but Kyoto also represents a considerable achievement in;

- 1) Bringing a large number of states to the table;
- 2) Establishing an international legal framework for reductions that facilitates the trading of carbon and the investment in energy efficient technologies as initial steps along the path to greenhouse gas reductions.

Critics have concentrated on the deficiencies of Kyoto; the status of carbon sinks, that the treaty is inequitable, the absence of developing nations and some big producers of greenhouse emissions like India and China, and the poor track record of those European nations that have signed on but made little progress.

Some of these criticisms are ill founded. China and India, along with a number of developing countries are a part of Kyoto, they've signed on, but will not act yet. Indeed the first obligation agreed to amongst the developed nations, namely to reduce their emissions which have permitted their existing high levels of development, has not really started. And yes, it is true that progress in Europe has been less than spectacular. But for those who say it's too modest in scope,

“from little things big things grow” we say. Importantly the criticisms of Kyoto on the grounds of inflexibility and fairness, which do have merit, can be addressed either within the treaty framework or possibly alongside it as a parallel process which integrates into Kyoto.

But for Australian companies who would be unable to join the international trading framework under Kyoto and take advantage of the architecture of Kyoto to sell energy efficiency into substantial markets, the government has made life that much harder. Critically the Prime Minister and his senior ministers have not put forward any real plan to address what happens after Kyoto. The Environment minister has declared that he accepts greenhouse gas emissions are responsible for climate change and that the government is committed to doing something about it but other than some vague discussions about “cap and trade coupons” there is no identifiable policy to actually do anything. This is a travesty.

Yes the government has hypothesised about possible technical solutions which would include: geo sequestration, hydrogen fuel cells, and of course the perennial favourite, nuclear power. On the question of technical solutions the kindest thing that can be said is that it displays faith but little reason. Why? Because, technologies are tools not answers and they need to work in a timely, cost effective way. Of the solutions touted which have been already tried, researched, and invested in, many haven’t delivered.

That isn’t to say there won’t be technical innovations which drive emissions reductions, indeed there needs to be. But this will only be a part of the larger repertoire of policy instruments governments must consider. There is still no safe, economically and ecologically responsible method of disposing nuclear waste. The Howard Government does not even have an identified national waste repository for the relatively small amounts of domestic waste Australia currently stores above ground. More to the point, the huge number of nuclear power plants that would need to be built to replace fossil fuel with the associated huge volumes of radioactive waste produced would impose immense costs and create a vast range of security risks. What happens if much larger amounts of radioactive material find its way into the hands of rogue states or terrorists?

Open debate on this issue is to be welcomed but as someone who has watched for 25 years nuke proponents say they have the magic bullet for safe radioactive waste disposal, we’re still waiting. Existing alternatives including biomass, tidal power and solar all contain much promise. Along with more speculative alternatives like hot rocks and theoretically possible technologies like thermo nuclear, they require significant research and investment over the long term but they hold good prospects for substitution. Wind is a viable renewable technology, in some countries already making a solid contribution to

carbon free energy production. Still the challenge of combating global warming requires a coherent approach which is underpinned by a national policy goal to rein in greenhouse gas emissions.

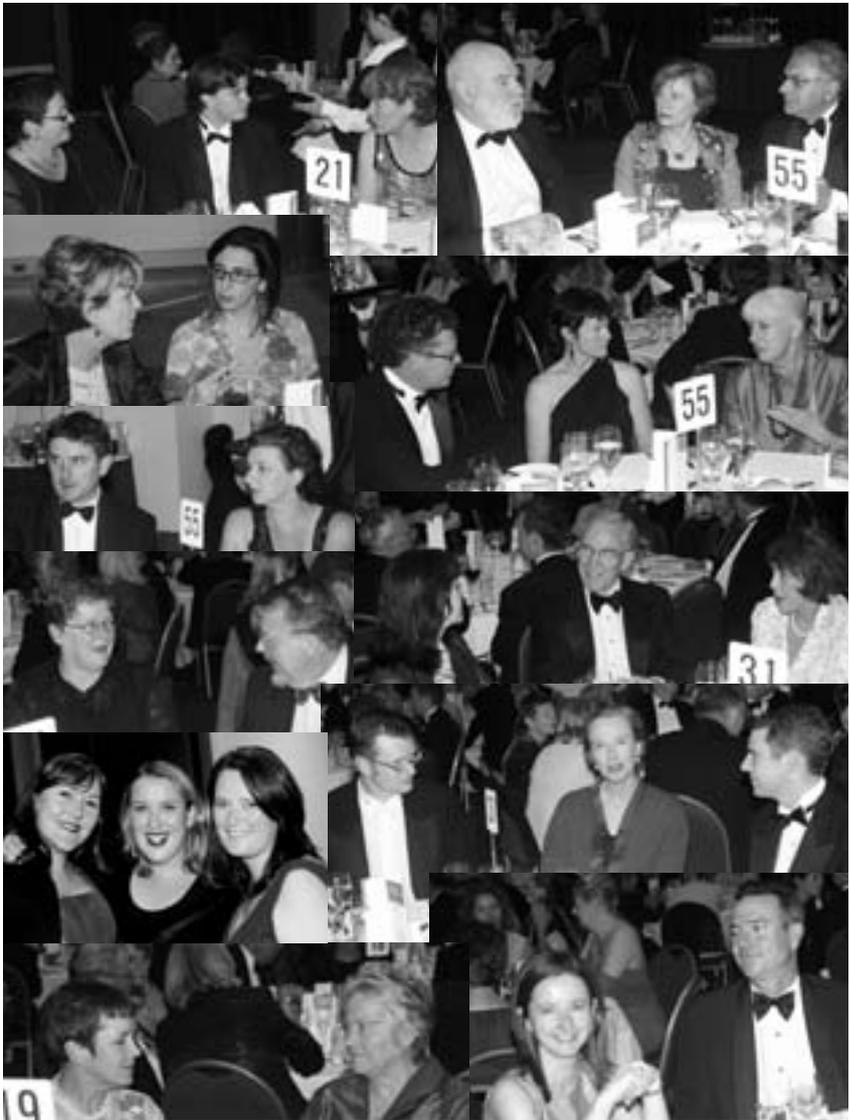
For the Labor Party, which has already grasped the nettle on climate change, I believe we should strongly consider a formal commitment to deep cuts in greenhouse gas emissions, namely 60 per cent by 2050. We should also consider the implementation of national energy efficiency standards for housing and government stock and further increasing the MRET target to give greater opportunity for the provision of more renewable energy.

Some business leaders are already public in their support for a carbon tax with former BHP chief Paul Anderson floating the idea recently. My personal view is that a revenue neutral carbon tax which did not adversely impact on the poor could be an option to consider down the track, but in the meantime we should look closely at other more targeted measures. We could for instance consider the option of a climate change levy similar to the one introduced by the Blair Government in 1999. The levy applies to energy used in the business and public sectors. Major energy users get an 80 per cent discount if they meet voluntarily agreed realistic energy efficiency targets.

“Good quality combined heat and power (CHP) plants and renewable energy is exempt with revenue returned to business via a 0.3 per cent cut in employers’ National Insurance Contributions.” as the DEFRA website which explains the levy says. “... The cut in National Insurance Contributions will lower the cost to firms of hiring workers and will help to promote employment opportunities. There will be no net gain to the public finances.” The levy additionally provides funds for energy efficiency advice to business and to date has exceeded expectations and delivered a savings of 60 million tonnes of carbon in the first four years.

I’m not a technical expert on these issues. I’m merely saying we should examine them and consider the options closely. To do otherwise is to delay addressing the problem. That’s not the Labor way, but after Kyoto it has been the Howard Government’s way. And that’s not good enough for the environment and it’s definitely not good enough for the Australian people.

ANNUAL DINNER – 2005



Photographer: David Karonidis



Photo – David Karonidis

Brendan Nelson

As federal Education Minister, Dr Brendan Nelson has left his mark on the Australian University and higher education system. Addressing The Sydney Institute on Thursday 14 April 2005, Dr Nelson spoke of the need for Australia to “challenge the façade that says that all of our universities are the same”. Advocating flexibility in the definition of what a university should be, Brendan Nelson argued that excellence in the university sector could only come with a willingness on the part of university administrators to not only collaborate with each other but also to be commercially astute.

HIGHER EDUCATION –

THE CHALLENGE

Brendan Nelson

Thank you very much Gerard and congratulations to you and Anne for your leadership and management of The Sydney Institute and Meredith and Rob and the members of the Board. Thanks also to those of you who have come this evening, in spite of the fact that I am tonight's speaker. I firstly recognise the Gaddigal Clan of the Eora People. We should never forget that their involuntary sacrifices made possible the construction of the Sydney CBD. Different, but no less important, were the sacrifices made by our non Indigenous ancestors.

I made the observation recently at the National Press Club, when addressing the scientific community, that John Kenneth Galbraith once made the observation that given the choice of change or proving it unnecessary, most people start working on the proof. In my previous life, when I was in a leadership position in the medical profession, I must say that was often my experience with my medical colleagues. And, to some extent, with the exception of the leadership of the university sector, it's been my experience with the higher education sector. Whilst I have the privilege to be responsible for a range of issues across universities and schools, apprenticeships and training, and research and science innovation and industry relationships, tonight I'll basically refine my remarks to the higher education sector and the reform agenda which lies ahead.

It's important, always, to put things in context and my critics, who are numerous I might add, constantly criticise me for doing just that. But I think it's extremely important that we shouldn't ever lose sight of what it is that we are trying to achieve in the long term and, most importantly, why we are developing and possibly implementing the policy, which as far as possible has been a product of some consensus, as far as that might be achieved. The pressures that are bearing down on us are many and the only benchmarks that will count in higher education, for the foreseeable future, are international ones. The yardsticks, in terms of achievement domestically, whether within one single jurisdiction or indeed within Australia, are important. But they are less important than the international ones upon which we

are being judged. The pressures are numerous. But of course, like in almost every other field of Australian endeavour, it's the product of globalisation, and its economic and cultural consequences.

The massification of higher education was the journey upon which we embarked in 1989 with John Dawkins and essentially amalgamated what were then 17 universities and 74 colleges of advanced education. That's also been the experience in many other countries with which we would normally compare ourselves. But as Barry Jones said – and I consider Barry to have one of the finest intellects in the country – three years ago, the Dawkins reforms were the single worst decision that had been taken by the previous government, of which he was a member. And I'll leave it to you to reflect on the veracity or otherwise of that remark. But that egg has been scrambled, well and truly.

We also face, of course, the revolution in telecommunications, which is changing the way in which we learn and the way in which education is being delivered. This is the inexorable push to lifelong learning and then of course the very rapidly emerging dominance of a global market in education, into which both providers and consumers are prepared to invest considerable sums of money, in excess of a \$30 billion a year US market which is growing exponentially.

All of those pressures, and many others, really define the context in which higher education is being delivered in our country. Our priorities are

- 1) equity: to make sure that people can get access to higher education in this country, wherever they live or whatever their circumstances.
- 2) quality: to make sure that we are well above those international benchmarks that are bearing down on us.
- 3) diversity: to ensure that we are able to drive the sector, both public and private, which is diverse in its offerings of the highest quality.

We've also got to make sure that it's sustainable and, as you know, some of our institutions are in a much stronger financial position than are others. The other thing which is extremely important to us, or at least should be, is choice. We shouldn't be forced by virtual geography, or socio economic circumstances, to have a very narrow, if only one choice, in terms of your higher education provision.

Into all of this, of course, feeds the Productivity Commission Report which was recently released. We've had a number of these things. Those of you who have empty lives and have read the National Commission of Audit Report and the Time and Income Modelling Taskforce Report for 1996 NCA would know that our aged dependency ratios are going to collapse from 5.3 to 2.6 to 1 over the next 40 years. The recent Productivity Commission Report, of course, maintains that if all else remains equal, and in particular if we don't sustain high rates of productivity growth, we're going to face a fiscal

deficit, cumulatively Commonwealth and State and Territory, over the next four years of about a seven percentage point in GDP. Alternatively we'll face a 23 per cent increase in private taxation levels to sustain the health and welfare conservation. We're also likely to face a 10 per cent retraction in participation in the labour market. None of that will be particularly new to any of us. Nonetheless, in the absence of significant change whether it be in population or as the Treasurer said also, participation, as far as higher education and research is concerned, if there is no significant change in productivity, into which technology and education significantly feeds, then we do face, dare I say, quite considerable challenges over the next four years.

Another important thing worth remembering, constantly, is that we are small players, but we are important and we are of a very high quality. Our country, for a variety of reasons not the least of which is the leadership we've had in the recent past, are significant players internationally in a number of areas. But we are 0.3 per cent of world population. We are just over 1.2 per cent of global GDP and we are less than 4 per cent GDP with the United States of America. We are still only 6 per cent of APEC. And it should be obvious to us today that our future is going to rely on our ability to learn how to learn. It's about ideas. It's about developing technology from those ideas. And it's also about creating a culture, and supporting it, particularly with tax law, which encourages commercialisation of that technology as best we can in our own country. To sustain not only traditional industries that gave my generation an economic and social legacy, but also to support emerging ones. In that context, by the way, just reflect on the fact that in the last decade alone, the trade across the OECD countries in research and development of intensive industries has increased from 3.5 per cent to 6 per cent of the OECD by GDP.

All of those challenges, and many more, are the reasons why I and the government are not taking the very simple path of doing absolutely nothing in higher education. What we have achieved in the last three years has been achieved through a lot of consultation, a lot of hard work, good leadership, particularly on behalf of the universities themselves. We've now passed through the previous parliament, a program of reform which will deliver about \$11 billion of additional money to the sector over the next decade. We've moved the sector to its basic funding, if you like, on the basis of what it actually delivers – what we call a Commonwealth Grants Scheme, as distinct from the relevant funding model which was developed and implemented in 1990. We've moved the sector increasingly to performance based funding pools. We now have income contingent loans – HECS style loans for students who chose to go to either public universities as private students or the one of almost 100 private higher education providers in Australia. In fact we've now got about 30,000 students in 31 accredited private

higher education providers who are accessing what we call FEE HELP, this income contingent loan this year.

We've also implemented a regional funding model to increase the funding to universities servicing regional communities. We've put \$327 million of your money into scholarships for 40,000 students to help them with their living and education costs while they're actually at university, targeting in particular regional and rural students. And we've also, with the co-operation of the states, been able to make some significant gains in relation to governance and administration in terms of the structure, function and responsibilities of the university governing councils.

In this term there are a number of things that need to be done. I'd like to go through a small number of those now. The South Australian Premier has successfully negotiated with Carnegie Mellon in Pittsburgh, for it to establish a campus in South Australia. Some of you might say, well South Australia's a key market, potentially, in higher education, and Carnegie Mellon proposes to provide 200 places, predominantly post graduate – in fact the first instance all post graduate places – in a minimum number of fields. Carnegie Mellon, under the five protocols which govern the establishment of a university in Australia, cannot establish in Australia. Carnegie Mellon is ranked by the Shanghai Jiao Tong University Top 200, at number 62. The ANU is ranked at 53, Melbourne University is ranked at 82. And to put that in some context, it's also ranked 38 in *The Times Higher Education Supplement*, whereas ANU I think was ranked at 16, Melbourne University 22 and Monash University at 33.

We currently have 37 publicly funded universities and three private universities that have received some public funding. At the moment my critics say to me, "Well it's very important that every university in Australia actually conduct research." We define universities basically on those institutions that conduct research and undertake scholarship which is the synthesis of information, a production of books if you like of scholarly materials, and also of course to provide teaching. However, I've said to the sector if that's so important then, why is it that we have 14 publicly funded universities that either fully own or are major shareholders in at least 15 subsidiary companies that do no research, that engage contracted teaching staff and have limited access to library resources. Why, for example, is the University of Southern Queensland running an education centre in this city? Why is Latrobe University running an education office in Brisbane? I'm sure there are very good reasons for it, and the vice chancellors will be on the phone in an hour's time to tell me. But, nonetheless, and I'm not for one minute seeking to disparage the quality of what is being offered in those facilities, the reality is that the people who are lecturing me about the importance of research in a university environment, are

ignoring some very obvious things that are going on at the moment. The Central Queensland University has 30.9 per cent of its teaching load in commerce, management and administration. Yet it's only one per cent of its research fund. On the other hand 29.2 per cent of its teaching load is in IT, but this area of study accounts for only two per cent of its research fund. There are universities that offer teaching programs that do very little if any research in that particular field.

One of the important matters for consideration then is how do we define a university? What is it? There are non public providers in higher education which, in my opinion, are providing very high quality programs in a relatively narrow number of fields which are at least of an equivalent quality to that which is being provided in some universities. And, it's important for us to appreciate, for example, the international context. The United Kingdom has now moved to accept that some universities actually conduct very little, if any, research. The reality that we face is that in Europe, for example, they have the Bologna process which aims to bring together 12 million students in 4,000 universities across 40 European countries, to provide an integrated higher education model which looks at what we call credit transfer and articulation and also to provide a common quality assurance program right across those European universities. That is what we are competing with and not all of those universities are actually going to be doing all of the things that we think are important to define a university.

My challenge to the university sector in Australia is to say that it is time we started to challenge the façade that says that all of our universities are the same. They are not. They are all good, many of them are outstanding, and they are all good at different things. I challenge us to think about a future, for example, without naming them specifically, where a university could, for example, be excellent in teaching or in scholarship and do very little, if any, research, but have a formal relationship with a research intensive university, which helps inform its teaching and its scholarship and vice versa. That's something we ought to think about. Running parallel with this process is arguably the most difficult thing that we've embarked on this year. That is what is called a research quality framework. In this country today, we basically reward or distribute research funding on the basis of quantity. It's how much money you've got, or you're always getting, in relation to research and the number of publications that you produce. That is a gross simplification, but nonetheless that's basically how it works in Australia.

As Australia's Minister for Education, Science and Training, I cannot tell you that we fund the highest quality research in all circumstances, whether in universities or in publicly funded research agencies. I brought Sir Gareth Roberts out here from Oxford to

oversee a process to put together an expert advisory group. What we are now doing, over the process of this year, is developing a new system for distributing research resources throughout Australian universities. Once we've trialed the models and the preferred approaches, which we'll be doing from July this year, we will be in a position to make a decision about applying a new model for distributing \$3.4 billion in research money to the higher education sector. As a consequence of that, some universities will get more, some universities will get about the same and some universities will get less, and some may not get any. Only at the end of that process – keep in mind I'm running this in parallel with an examination of protocols – will we allow those universities to retain the title of university.

Reflect on this, for example. In 2003 we distributed \$230 million of your money in competitive research funding. One university received less than \$20,000. We had several that attracted less than half a million. The Group of Eight universities, basically those in Sydney and Melbourne and so on – those universities, last year, attracted 67 per cent of the competitive research funding and 64 per cent of the institutional grants skill money. The top 12 universities attracted 74 per cent. That means that two thirds of our universities are, at the moment, attracting about a quarter of the competitive research funding. So, at the end of this process, we may see some large universities that end up receiving less and we may see some of our smaller, less research intensive, are attracting more. But I cannot and will not make any apology for saying, as a small country in terms of population, that if we want to keep ahead of the game we've got to fund quality. Our priorities have got to be collaboration, quality and, wherever practicable, commercialisation of research.

The third thing that we're working on is the governance and administration at the universities. We've already been able to progress a significant amount of governance reform. In my view we have a lot further to go. At the moment our universities, with the exception of the ANU and the Australian Maritime College, basically report to nine different governments. They report different information at different times of the year. Some of them tell me that they like it, they think it's a good defensive mechanism; others are of the view that perhaps there should be some rationalisation. The federal government basically provides 98 per cent of the public money that goes into the university sector and drives the policy framework. But governance auditing and management is the responsibility of the state and territory governments, as are real estate issues. The challenge that I've put to the sector is: Is it not in the interests of an internationally competitive higher education sector to have the universities essentially being audited and having their governance and management responsibilities in the hands on one government, instead of nine? We've got

problems in terms of the level playing field. Not all the universities, because of the jurisdictions they are in, can actually manage their real estate in a similar sort of way. They don't have equal access or ability to go into commercial ventures. The approvals processes and accreditation processes differ from jurisdiction to jurisdiction. There are also differences in auditing and financial management programs, depending on which jurisdiction you're actually in. These are the kind of matters that we need to address.

The federal government cannot, nor should, force the states and territories to hand over the universities. The federal government is not interested in acquiring the real estate or anything of the sort. But we've now got 40 universities that have 1,500 off-shore programs, and the standard of Australian higher education will be judged by the standard of the lowest standard of any campus anywhere in the world, not just in Australia, but off-shore. If and when there is a problem with off-shore provision, the auditing and financial accountability responsibility of that does not lie with me. It currently lies with the states, with the exception of ANU. And we need to start to think about whether or not it serves our better long term interest to move, as I say, to rationalising it.

There are four ways we can do it. We can either have a transfer of responsibility from the states and territories to the Australian government. We could have uniformity in terms of legislation across the country. We could, if you like, selectively test our Commonwealth Constitution Powers under the Corporations Act. Alternatively, universities could be made into trusts. It's a debate that needs to be had and the New South Wales government has already said that it is interested in transferring responsibility for its enabling acts across to the Commonwealth. This has got to be a product of consultation. It's not something coercive.

One of the other things which I mentioned that's been happening with the Bologna processes of those 4,000 universities, is articulation credit transfer. Across Australia this year, about 3.4 per cent of students who got a place in an Australian university received credit for some work that they've done at TAFE, or with a private training provider which is much less common. In New South Wales it's in excess of 4 per cent, but there is enormous variation. At the University of Western Sydney, about 10 per cent of the students that commenced a degree program this year actually received credit for something that they had done at TAFE. At Charles Sturt it was about 9 per cent, at UTS it's about 7 per cent. But if you go to Sydney University it was 0.2 per cent. At the University of New South Wales it was 0.3 per cent. Now some universities seem to have a very progressive attitude towards students who initially choose a vocational education and training program. Some universities will not even talk to the TAFE

sector, let alone recognise what the students have done in them. Sally Walker, for example, at Deakin University was well trained in the Alan Gilbert “school”. She was a student who did part of a Diploma of Architecture at the Homestead Institute of TAFE in Victoria, then did a Masters Degree at Deakin in Architecture, is now doing a PhD at Cambridge. There are many similar examples throughout the sector.

That’s not to suggest that a university should be forced to recognise all students who do all programs in TAFE and with private training providers. But it is absolutely essential that we cut through the current complexity. And we should also make it easier for students to actually understand what their credit transfer arrangements will be. One of the many reasons why we have close to a 40 per cent attrition rate across the university sector is, apart from the pressure of parents and a society obsessed with higher education at the exclusion of all else, is because the students themselves, particularly the young ones, don’t realise that if you go into a TAFE program, you can actually move across to a university degree at a later time and get a credit transfer for that. I’m not ashamed to say it but, as a person pointed out to me recently when I said this, my own son who’s an apprentice landscaper remarked to me recently that he has just realised that once he finishes his training he can actually get a credit transfer into Macquarie University. If the Minister’s own son didn’t know that what hope have we got for the rest of the country!

There are just two issues that I would like to finish on. The first (I made this clear to the unions just prior to Christmas) is that we will be determined to complete the industrial relations deregulation agenda which we set out in the previous parliament, much of which we were able to implement and some of which we were not. It is important in Australian universities that all staff, in my view, be free to be represented by the union, to have a Certified Agreement if that’s what they choose. I have no difficulty with that whatsoever. And the universities will be required to offer staff the opportunity to enter into an Australian Workplace Agreement if that’s what they choose. But a third party should not be involved in negotiations unless individual staff want them to be. The university should not discriminate in favour of, or against, unions. Moreover, that basic Commonwealth Grant Scheme money should not be used to subsidise union activities. I’ll be making an announcement very shortly with Kevin Andrews, the Minister for Workplace Relations in this regard. I notice that as of February 2005 we have 12 universities that have signed 19 Certified Agreements, 17 of them expire in the 2006/07 financial year and we’ve got two that expire by January 2008. Any university that has signed such an agreement should not assume that they will not be forced to revisit.

The other important matter is to never stop thinking about the future. The ANU's Vice Chancellor, will say the ANU is the best university in the country. But universities are like your children, you love them all. Nonetheless, by any standard, ANU is considered to be amongst Australia's leading university, if not very close to the top. It is an institution which, in Canberra, has nine research schools and one institute of advanced studies; it has 2,700 postgraduate students and 7,200 undergraduate students. The CSIRO, in Canberra, has basically nine divisions, five of which are principally based in Canberra and employ 1,400 people in seven locations. Whereas the ANU is outstanding at investigated, originally driven research from individual researchers, its licence revenue is about 0.2 per cent of total research income. To put that in some perspective, this ranks alongside the University of South Australia. The CSIRO is extremely good and is getting much better at broad strategic research which is focused on medium to long term problems which lead to practical solutions and increasing to commercial art forms.

Graham Davies will very shortly lead a small team of people to look specifically at how we can collaboratively bring the ANU and CSIRO together. They are currently working on 88 joint research projects and in 2003 they published 68 joint publications. We've got about 70 Ph Ds in Australia at both institutions, and around 30 of the CSIRO's staff have got appointments at ANU. If we take a 50 year view, I would be surprised if the ANU is still taking undergraduate students. It will increasingly emerge as a research intensive institution. It's not something that can or should be coerced by government, but what I am encouraging Professor Chubb and Dr Geoff Garrett, the CEO of CSIRO, is to look as constructively as we possibly can at how we can bring these two organisations much closer together, so their respective strengths can drive one another. I will be surprised if CSIRO and ANU, in time, do not ultimately become one institution.

I do think we have to start to develop a framework where such institutions, and many others throughout the country, can start to look increasingly at how they can work together. And not by using any sort of financial penalty. Our higher educational future is about critical mass, collaboration, quality and, as I say, commercialisation.



Photo - David Karonidis

Richard Tognetti

Violinist, conductor and Artistic Director of the Australian Chamber Orchestra Richard Tognetti was guest speaker and guest of honour at The Sydney Institute's Annual Dinner held at the Harbourside Ballroom, Star City, Tuesday 19 April 2005. In 1989, Richard Tognetti was awarded the Tschumi Prize at the Berne Conservatory where he studied with Igor Ozim and in 1999 he was made one of Australia's National Living Treasures. After his address, Richard Tognetti was joined for a final performance by oud soloist Joseph Tawadros. Richard Tognetti was introduced by the Institute's Chairman, Meredith Hellicar, the MC for the evening was Sydney Institute Board member Paul Murnane and the vote of thanks was given by The Hon senator Helen Coonan. The Annual Dinner for 2005 was sponsored by Australia Post.

FROM THE END OF THE WORLD: THOUGHTS ABOUT ARTISTS AND RATBAGS HERE AND ABROAD

Richard Tognetti

Back in 1996 post-modernist artist Jeff Koons' gorgeous 43 feet high flowerpot sculpture *Puppy* adorned the outside of the Museum of Contemporary Art here in Sydney. It was original, vibrant, engaging and innocent – and rated G. Inside, the gallery bookshop was selling a bright pink book of Koons's art and as I flicked through it I was shocked and flushed to see Koons had featured himself as the subject in a series of X-rated photos with his then wife Italian-Hungarian politician cum porn star Cicciolina. This exhibit was called *Made in Heaven*.

In 1990, Cicciolina attempted to practise what others preach by announcing to the world: "*I am available to make love with Saddam Hussein to achieve peace in the Middle East.*" Koons claimed the exhibition depicted love – because love is made in heaven. I think they're now separated, Jeff and Art and his Cicciolina. Art critic Robert Hughes described Koons as: "*The last gasp of methane to come out of the rotting carcass of postmodernism*".

These X rated images aren't even allowed in some states, yet here they were as ART with no plastic covering, to be viewed by minors, perverts and the odd art connoisseur. Fred Nile where were you?

Cheekily placed against this self-proclaiming pink tome was a somewhat more subdued book entitled *Against art and artists* by Jean Gimpel. As I began to read it, I was struck by an iconoclastic temperament, bitterly criticising artistic self-aggrandisement. It served to make me feel at once both paranoid and inquisitive because it described my world, the world of the artist and his or her ego. I started to question my fellow artists and their role in society. Gimpel had had a "loss of faith in the importance of Art", and makes a scathing critique on the cult of the Artist personality, with the vigilant eye of an historian. One central claim is that the Artist (he is mainly concerned with visual artists but the application is parallel to the world of music) has lost touch with the Church and therefore morality. He describes how

many painters were obliged by the church to tow the line – creating propaganda Art:

Caravaggio had to paint his Matthew passion again because the Saint “made a vulgar display of his feet”. In 1573 Veronese dissented from the accepted doctrine by introducing all kinds of human and animal figures ...including fools, dwarfs and parrots into his treatment of the Last Supper – all of which the holy office considered incompatible with the gravity of the subject. Veronese’s justification for such narrative additions was that “...*these people were outside the room where the supper was taking place, and .. If there is space left in a picture I decorate it with invented figures.*” He then boldly asserted: – “*we painters claim the licence that poets and madmen claim.*” The inquisitors could not persuade him to amend his work, so he changed the title to *The Feast in the House of Levi*.

The *Virgin appearing to St Hyacinth* is by Lodovico Carracci, one of the artists at the very origin of modern devotional art, accepted because they adhered to the Church’s conventions, but whose work today is scorned by many on grounds of taste. Ruskin considered they had “no single virtue, no colour, no drawing, no character, no history, no thought”. Gimpel informs us, however, that they “... *who condemn(s) these images in the name of ‘good taste’ should rather consider the question of their religious efficacy. The criterion of taste belongs not to his religion but to the religion of Art.*”

But it is the love for Art that has survived and flourished, not so the doctrines that inspired it. The religious canon has caused more pain than the art; it is the very worship of Art that creates a harmony with which no other “religion” can compete. A greater sense of real reverence is achieved in an art gallery or concert hall, and in a sense the art galleries and concert halls are the new places of worship, because they are free from the dogma associated with organised religion. I would also suggest that religion without aesthetic value is a worse transgression than aesthetic values minus moral doctrine.

Arguably, the Catholic Church has never recovered from this loss of faith in the artist. Skip forward a few hundred years to the Catholic liturgy of Vatican II and we find that it has not inspired grandeur, beauty or magnificence and has stimulated little to compare with the glory of its former times.

Vis-à-vis art, the Western Church is colourless, and apathetic. Is it really true that music has been partly dissolved from service at Sydney’s St Andrews? How many beautiful modern churches did you travel past this week? When did the church last commission music of any worth? The strumming and evangelical moaning that emanates from Hillsong Church surely ought to incur God’s wrath and not her blessing. “Art for Art’s sake and money for God’s sake”. Mel Gibson’s woefully sadistic and rudimentary portrayal of Christ in the *Passion*

– is it really the same parable that JS Bach urges me to worship as told in any of his passions?

For many years artists unquestioningly served the church. And what obliging servants they were. Consider the results of the Catholic faith in Michelangelo, Caravaggio, Giotto, and the composers Gabrieli or Vivaldi. Their output continues to hold even the most stubborn apostates rapt in a spiritual connectedness; and if the Bach family had been the only Lutheran progeny – then praise be enough. On each of his Symphonies Haydn writes “*Fine Laus Deo*” – in praise of God.

Perhaps surprisingly Mozart, cinematically portrayed as an uncouth, libertine proclaimed, “*That ungodly Dog is dead*” on hearing of the French philosopher Voltaire’s death. On the direction of the Church and art’s symbiosis to the Church, there was no greater cataclysmic presence than that of Voltaire’s. There erupted in the age of Enlightenment, a volcanic awakening of the thinking ego and mind which spawned new fountains of expression that were inspired not within the spires of the church but rather from man’s own inner sense of being. “*Liberty of thought is the life of the soul*” and so was born the freethinker and the Romantic psyche. Voltaire helped to free man, for better or for worse, from the shackles of blind religious devotion.

Art became Art for man’s sake rather than for God’s sake. The modern Ratbag was born. We can seek the genesis of this back with Socrates who relentlessly penetrated the gratuitous self-reliance in the belief of common doctrine; he was sentenced to death for such Ratbaggery and forced to poison himself. The original Ratbag, he didn’t propose alternative dogmas, he provoked thought by query.

Beethoven was the first great musical Ratbag who defied doctrines and social mores. Early in his life he found his own musical language, he went deaf, smelt like God knows what, and was a spitting foul-mouth with a defiant and querying genius. The artist’s ego was well and truly thriving.

In the twentieth century, we had disintegration, anarchy and self-analysis originating with Freud, musically expressed by American Charles Ives and Schoenberg in Austria, and continuing with Satie, Satre and John Cage. Complexity and paranoiac introspection was riding a frenzied wave of experimentation. This is the time modern music got a bad name for itself – Nietzsche’s Mad dream for a modern music.

Music became very much for the initiated and the creators shunned the patron and the casual listener. But then something surprising started to happen – fires started to break out on the verdant slopes of Europe’s musical empires and the folk musicians and errant gypsy rockers started storming the castles. Many in the European classical music tradition despised and continue to despise the success

of popular music and the new world order as America's rebellious culture threatened Europe's hierarchy.

So what does this have to do with the Australian Chamber Orchestra?

This was a musical hierarchy that had little resonance in the nihilistic, larrikin world of Frank Arkell's Wollongong where I grew up in the 1970s. Since I was five I dreamed of being a musician, and for many reasons the function and power of European music grabbed my ear. But where I was growing up, just about every type of music except *Meatloaf*, was an irrelevance.

I've now been in charge of an institution called the Australian Chamber Orchestra for fifteen years, half its age. Classical music continues to inhabit a rarefied world and within that world I occupy the even more obscure world of a chamber orchestra. The chances of you meeting a violinist working in a chamber orchestra in Sydney are ten in five million, if you meet the bass player then that's one in five million. I'll briefly take you into this world.

The ACO was founded in 1975 by Sydney cellist John Painter who envisaged a group of musicians in charge of their own destinies, rather than being the sheep of a larger organisation. To this day, we remain true to this concept. We comprise 17 core players and perform over 100 concerts each year around Australia and the world.

In 1989 when I was appointed Artistic Director and Lead Violin of the ACO I entered the job with a fire in my belly harbouring in broad brush-strokes two ambitions, one I envisaged would be difficult, – to be a radical and challenging Artistic Leader (which I thought was expected of me), and the other, I considered easier – this involved the ACO treading the boards on the international stage.

I wrongly thought that the ACO would be accepted *without prejudice* in the international arena, and naively considered that by collecting a good group of players and performing well, we would be embraced. Immediately I ran into obstacles. Not only were we perceived as being unacceptably young (average age 23) for an orchestra, but also the main concern for promoters was the name ACO and especially the word Australian. We even had Japanese promoters suggest we drop two letters and bingo we'd come from Mozart land ... the source of the Western European musical tradition – Austrian eight letters Australian ten they sound the same what the heck.

Indeed I thought that our unique geographic identity would be taken as *exotic* and therefore: enticing. That wasn't the case. A review on our first tour in Vienna was entitled: "*Vom ende der Welt aber gut*" – "from the end of the world – but good". We also played in Oxford on that trip and a group of us stopped to ask an old don if he could recommend a good restaurant, "Do I detect an Australian accent? What are you doing here?" "Indeed you do, Sir," we replied.

“We’re performing in your town tonight as the Australian Chamber Orchestra.” “Goodness me,” he scoffed, “that’s a contradiction in terms.” “So is a good restaurant in Oxford.” Things have changed.

As I said, I thought it was expected of me to be radical: indeed the Australia Council’s charter back then demanded innovation above almost anything else. The head of funding in 1989 said we were not innovative, because we were playing music derived from the European tradition and therefore not to anticipate much support. He expected innovative Australian culture. I asked him what that was and he admitted he didn’t really know, because it didn’t really exist and this is what he was trying to foster.

In any case, I considered it important to offer my music from a European tradition a distinctive voice that would find a larrikinism and rawness that sets Australians apart, if for nothing else. Art is an arena where one ought to be compelled to be original and anti-establishment – even if one is of the establishment. The Australian Arts Scene appeared in 1989 to be still populated by Ratbags – Patrick White was just alive and continuing to shoot off vicious retorts, Brett Whitely was there and shooting up, theatre director cocky Barry Kosky was beginning his volatile career, bellicose Bob Ellis was strutting his stuff, as was of course Barry Humphries the towering comic icon. Memories of the likes of Eugene Goosens and Percy Grainger were embalmed in aromatic scandal and remained alive and infectious. All of them are Ratbags extraordinaire. There did seem to be a need and space for them in our society then, and I wonder where their successors are today.

The classical music world, especially in Europe, is full of cobwebs and I wanted to push and sweep them away, but little did I suspect that many in the classical music establishment love *living in cobwebs*.

So let’s look at these three words *Australian Chamber Orchestra*.

Orchestra: the word intimidates a lot of people. An orchestra is commonly perceived to be a large group of white, drab, old fashioned men sitting dressed in tails, slouched over their instruments playing dead white males’ music from *old Europe*.

Chamber: chamber pot, or a place where people do commerce; is a room, a cavity. It is a peculiar word denoting things that don’t typically arouse people to flock to a concert. It certainly lacks the romance of “opera” and the grandeur of “symphony”. Combined with orchestra it’s confusing. Even though Australia’s main funding body, the Australia Council, conveniently categorises us as a *chamber music* outfit because the funding rung for chamber music is lower than that of orchestras, we consider ourselves to be an orchestra. We are an orchestra that performs sometimes in a chamber setting and sometimes we play chamber music.

Australian in the world of classical music is a nonentity a non-draw. It's difficult to attract classical musicians here, difficult to sell Oz over there. Why is it that Metallica, Radiohead and the Beatles have all come to our shores, but even medium sized named soloists and orchestras decline the invitation? Pianist Murray Perahia when invited replied that he wouldn't be available to come to Australia for the year 2000 or any year thereafter! Part of the problem is that many classical musicians are lazy in that respect. They only like to play for the converted and the modern classical musicians don't like to travel out of their comfort zone.

When conductor Claudio Abbado was head of the Berlin Philharmonic he wouldn't consider coming here on the basis it was "a tourist destination", even though many of his orchestral musicians were dying to visit. Why should he come here, there is no musical tradition, *das Land ohne Musik* (the land without music) as Wagner cruelly described England. He would prefer of course to play for real music lovers than sun lovers. And so the same prejudice existed against us travelling to Europe. Who would be in Australia to appreciate their sophistication, and how on earth could we express this sophisticated art form over there?

And so on the one hand I was perceived overseas as a radical for performing music from the Western canon just because I was doing it from Australian soil and then at home considered lacking in the necessary innovative requirements to be taken seriously to promote Oz art, because I was playing music mainly drawn from the Western Canon. Things have changed.

I did listen to concerns about innovation forging a culture though. When innovation is a distant island to the act of performance, art atrophies. But it's also important to understand the traditions from whence we are derived.

The ACO thrives on cross-fertilisation of different art forms and working with artists from different fields. A couple of years ago we commissioned a number of Australian composers to respond to the songs of pop Ratbag Tim Freedman. We learnt a lot and were excited about what came out of the test-tube but one critic thought we were having a mid-life crisis. We've collaborated with Peter Garrett, Michael Leunig, Neil Finn, and most recently photographer Bill Henson, sound sculptor Paul Healy and singer Paul Capsis. All of whom have shed a different light on what we do. This keeps us attuned to the creative spirit. Maybe we don't always come up with a Beethoven's 9th but even our strongest critics salute our bravery.

As interpreters, these collaborations keep us in touch with the creators and the innovators. The more outlandish the idea, and the bigger the Ratbag the more volatile will be the result.

Let us consider what the Ratbag is.

I thought that there is no better way to understand the Ratbag than to speak, which I did at great length, with one of the nation's most illustrious and tender Ratbags, Michael Leunig. We decided that a true Ratbag must possess the following characteristics: the Ratbag must have the courage to be daring; they are neither hurried nor harried; they dare to say the unspeakable but always with love; they are judged by rationalists, but they themselves are not; they are not required to be professionals and are beholden to no-one; they should have no moral agenda; they don't have to have all the facts at their fingertips; they express "the unfelt grief of the people", but they're not necessarily relevant; they speak or act in an uncensored, non-linear flow; they have a hyperactive bullshit detector; they are unassailable; like the bard, the King dare not touch the Ratbag; they cannot be entrusted with money for if they are given money they will use it on valueless things such as adventures and story telling; the Ratbag should confound, astonish, query and disrupt rather than confirm and soothe;

The Ratbag is one of the essential bacteria in our culture like acidophilus is to yoghurt. By breathing in Ratbaggery we become less likely to fall to the illness of moral hypocrisy.

And so who are the Ratbags: One could salute Germaine Greer; Helen Garner; Paul Keating; Wilson Tuckey not, he's more a cranky politician with a wood chip on his shoulder; Len Evans more raconteur than Ratbag; John Pilger; Judah Waten, Frank Hardy, and all the commie bastards are gone, and no conductors. We did have something of a Ratbag in charge of the opera— but she was booted out. Was this a bit of Ratbag genocide?

With few exceptions such as John Safran you won't find them on TV because they are beholden and the native language of TV is too glib. Morning radio and JJJ breed a kind of vulgar banality that can't pass for true Ratbaggery. And someone who gets paid \$5 million dollars per year to read Holden ads is not a Ratbag.

Our society deserves a balance of the rationalist and the Ratbag. Has there been a cultural cleansing, a kind of genocide of Ratbags – and therefore, a white anting of real innovation? There is too much emphasis on being professional and not enough support for innovation at the coalface.

Innovation is something you can't force. If you paid Michael Leunig ten million dollars a year you wouldn't get better art from him, but starved he sure as hell is going to atrophy and probably look for another country that will accept him.

Money won't originate art like Bill Henson or Patrick White, but it will buy us the means to articulate their message and it sure as hell will make us competitive in getting good conductors here and in turn inspire young aspirants. Author and social commentator Iain

McCalman so eloquently says: “*Without a culture of scholarship, innovation can easily be stillborn*”.

When first asked to present this talk I thought I must eschew the artist begging for more money. I think it can be tiresome, but it is important to understand that it was no accident that the success and rise of Art in the Renaissance was linked to the flourishing bank sector of Florence.

Just recently a report was released on the state of the orchestras in Australia – we were not included, remember we’re not deemed to be an orchestra. It posted fairly predictable points and then close to the end a bomb was dropped and with something akin to cultural terrorism, it was recommended that three out of six of this country’s major orchestras reduce the number of their players so that they would become more efficient and economically viable.

Shouldn’t we be recommending that we create new orchestras rather than dismantling the uncertain tenure of what we have? We need a vision.

Listen, for the final time this beautiful organic, structure – an orchestra – can’t be rationalised, it is born of irrationality. Its existence is precarious at the best of times and like all cultural constructs they should be celebrated. Why doesn’t the government look at ways to expand rather than destroy these rare and wonderful beasts? When we talk about education, music is regularly held up as an example of how the brain can be enriched. Slowly we absorb the message about the need to preserve and cherish our outer ecology but why does it take an even greater effort to convince ourselves to look after our inner ecology?

How do we vitalise the Australian Arts sector? Hardly by slashing and burning orchestras. Look what conflicting messages we are receiving: On the one, we’ve never been richer and then on the other hand we have to cut orchestras’ budgets again! When will we be allowed to get it into order? If you cut now then you’ll probably have to cut in five years time until we’re left with a tiny ever-divisible sector of cultural cake.

Sometimes I feel fortunate that I live in an age and a society where the artist is allowed to feel like a madman, liberated to explore the furthest reaches of the mind. But here in Australia at a time when artists are beginning to achieve a slightly warmer welcome we need to open our arms to the Ratbag.

Maybe we should have put a Ratbag in charge of the report into the orchestras. But then possibly a Ratbag would suggest that the best way to ensure the popularity of classical music is to drive it underground by banning it!



Photographer: David Karamidis

Richard Tognetti and Joseph Tawadros at the 2005 Annual Dinner



Photo – David Karonidis

Ita Buttrose

According to Ita Buttrose, magazine editor and co-author of the book *Motherguilt: Australian Women Reveal Their True Feelings About Motherhood* (Penguin 2005), feelings of guilt in mothers are real and widespread. “Mother guilt is an unrealistic guilt, that happens when we become mothers,” says Buttrose. “We have unrealistic expectations of our role and it’s impossible to be perfect and when things go wrong as they often do when you raise children you think it must be our fault ... I think there’s an epidemic of it and the epidemic has been increasing in the last 30 years.” Ita Buttrose addressed The Sydney Institute on Tuesday 26 April 2005.

THE MOTHERGUILT

PHENOMENON

Ita Buttrose

Since I've been out on the road talking about this book – a couple of things have struck me. Men, particularly radio hosts, immediately ask: this is a book about blame, is it? What have men done now? No, I tell them, this is not a book about blame, this is a book about the way that it is in Australia, right now.

The other thing I've noticed is that although men are well aware that their wives and/or partners suffer guilt – I can't tell you how many times some man has said, I've got to get this for my wife, she's always feeling guilt – surprisingly, guilt, and the reasons behind it, do not seem to be something that couples often discuss. Even today, women don't talk about how tough it can be to combine motherhood with their job in the paid workforce. I'm reminded of a young mother I met at a radio station in Melbourne earlier this month, just back from three month's maternity leave, she told me that being a mother and working was harder than she thought it would be.

"Have you talked about it with your husband?" I asked her.

"No, of course not."

It's something that always strikes me as strange. We live in the age of communication – instant communication, really – and yet men and women find it so difficult to communicate with each other about matters that are so fundamental to their well-being and happiness. But on a positive note, another young mother told me this book was timely because it gave women permission to talk out loud about guilt. Well, I hope it does – I hope it has.

As a mother, I found writing this book cathartic. Whatever remnants of guilt I might have had have now gone completely. But in the beginning, well that's quite another matter. When I became a mother for the first time, 36 years ago, nothing prepared me for the overwhelming feeling of responsibility that swept over me as I looked at this small bundle for whom I now had to care.

She was born in London. My husband and I went to England to work and further our careers. I got a job as a sub-editor on a magazine, of course, but we decided (or, did he?) that when the baby

was born I would stop work, we would leave our London flat and find a house in the country. We moved to a charming village in Sussex, an hour's train ride from London.

This was quite a transition for me, a city girl, who had been working since she was 15, now living in the country. I knew no one in that part of England, and back then, if you hadn't been introduced, the English didn't say good day, let alone smile at you.

The morning after I got home from the hospital, my husband began commuting to his job in London. He left at 6:30 in the morning and got home at 7:30 at night. I was very much alone and a bit scared. I soon discovered that babies have minds of their own. Sometimes Kate would start crying in the afternoon and keep it up for what seemed like eternity. Obviously it was my fault. I was doing something wrong. Guilt gnawed away. And then the health visitor arrived! Back then, all new mothers were checked by the health visitor within the first couple of weeks of a baby's birth. In one way it was reassuring but on the other ...

"Where's the baby?" a no-nonsense woman in sensible brogues asked as I opened the front door. She strode into my daughter's room and within seconds fixed me with a stern stare and announced: "This room is too cold". I couldn't believe it. You could scarcely see the baby. Kate had so many blankets covering her that it's a wonder she could breathe. She didn't look or feel cold to me. "You must heat this room at once," ordered the health visitor. No sooner had she left, when I was on the phone to my husband. "The health visitor has been. She says I'm freezing the baby," I sobbed as I writhed in massive motherguilt. It was awful. Heaters were borrowed and bought. The temperature in Kate's room rose, it became a tropical oasis and when I fed her I dripped with perspiration.

I co-authored *Motherguilt* with Sydney GP Penny Adams. We met on the TV show *Beauty and The Beast* with Stan Zemanek. Now I don't suppose members of The Sydney Institute would have watched this show. It was a very entertaining program, wasn't it? And a lot of fun. However, we think the only mother who should feel any guilt is Stan's mum!

The subject of mothers and guilt often cropped up in letters used in the show. Penny has seen motherguilt sufferers in her surgery for years and I've received graphic reports about its prevalence from women who have written to me for advice at the magazines and newspapers I've edited over the years. Perfectly sensible women doing a great job of mothering would confess to being wracked with guilt when something goes wrong, as it so often does, in all sorts of ways, when you are raising kids.

It is so wrong for women to feel like this. In an attempt to help them put motherguilt to rest we decided to write a book about it, in

which mothers, well known and not so well known, would share their experiences.

Some of their stories are poignant, others hysterically funny and some are inspirational but all of them are truthful. Over the centuries women have learned from each other by sharing their stories. True stories are important because immense learning and healing occurs when women share their real experiences.

As we spoke to mothers throughout Australia, the book grew and developed in a way that we hadn't anticipated. We have explored all aspects of mothering, the one we have as mothers with our children – which is the main theme of the book – and also the one we have with our mothers. We've looked at the crucial issue of fertility. Mothers are needed, but in spite of Peter Costello's request that women have "One for you, one for him, and one for Australia" his pleas seem to have fallen on deaf ears. We've also examined Australia's high rate of abortions, family-friendly workplaces (what a joke they are), child care and relationships with the opposite sex.

What do men and women really want from each other these days? How can we make improvements that will benefit women, men and children – and ultimately the world in which we live? This book has been quite a voyage of discovery.

I believe motherguilt is more prevalent today than it was in the past because society's expectations of women, especially when they become mothers, have increased. There is so much pressure on mothers these days to be everything – not only to be mothers and raise the family but to participate in the workforce – and be a good worker, a good friend, a good partner, to share the financial obligations of buying a home.

What is often overlooked is that motherhood is a full time job. Too many people, including mothers, often forget that. In fact, most people take female care-giving for granted. The job of making a home for a child and developing his or her capabilities is more often than not equated with "doing nothing". Doing nothing – that sounds like utopia to me.

The very definition of mother is selfless service to another. Have you ever stopped to think how a typical job advertisement for a mother might read?

WANTED: Person to work, often 24/7 in chaotic environment. The successful applicant must have outstanding communication and organisation skills and be proficient in all the following areas: counselling, events management, nursing, catering, teaching, home maintenance, odd job repair skills, transportation, sanitation and conflict resolution. No previous experience is required as on-the-job training will occur on a continually exhausting basis. While no paid holidays, superannuation

or stock options are offered, this job offers limitless opportunities for personal growth without remuneration.

A mother's influence is very hard to shake off, even when we're well into adulthood. Many women mother as they were mothered, and as a consequence, have inherited motherguilt from their own mothers and their mothers before them. They have accepted the mandate that they must take responsibility for everything to do with their families and make everything right for their children.

Women so want to be perfect in this most important of biological roles but when things go wrong – as they often do – they blame themselves and guilt is a natural reaction. That's the thing about motherguilt – it thrives on unrealistic expectations. It slinks into a woman's life when she least expects it, kindled by a belief that she has somehow failed in her responsibility to her children. And it often occurs when a mother puts her own needs and desires first.

Wherever mothers are, whatever their circumstances, guilt crops up. Let me give you some examples to show you how widespread the guilt can be.

For instance, older mothers feel guilt. It is not unusual these days for women to have their first baby in their late thirties or early forties. When Jocelyn, who is now 50-something, sent her 12 year old boys to boarding school last year, she felt guilty. Never mind that she is an insulin dependent diabetic. All she could think of was: How would her boys cope without her around to pick up their things? Her guilt was made worse by judgemental female friends asking her: "How could you?"

In multicultural Australia, cultural clashes often occur and some mothers can inflict tremendous guilt on their offspring when he or she chooses a partner of a different nationality. When Kevin and Anthia fell in love, her Greek parents were most unhappy. They wanted her to marry a good Greek boy, not a good Australian boy. "How could you do this to your father," her mother yelled at her. "You're not our daughter any more." They didn't speak for two years.

Jewish mothers are legendary. They, their daughters assured us, like to lay guilt on their children. Rolene shared a story about her mother: "The other night I was in bed when she rang. Our conversation went something like this."

Mum - I am sick.

Rolene - I'll come over.

Mum - No don't do anything... but I feel ill.

Rolene - What can I do?

Mum - Nothing. You lead your life.

Rolene - I'll come now.

Mum - Don't worry. I'll get better... but I am sick...

“What could I do,” said Rolene, “but get up, put on some clothes, grab some chicken soup and whatever else I could find and rush right over to her. When it comes to laying on guilt my mother is in a class of her own.”

Lynley was adopted. “I don’t know what was going through my mother’s mind when she gave me up for adoption but when I left my son [it’s difficult for us, who are not in her situation, to comprehend but Lynley gave her son up] I felt a deep loss and an ache that has never gone away.”

Emmelyn, a Singaporean Chinese living in Sydney feels guilt that she is giving her sons an Asian role model and is not able to be a role model for them according to Western standards.

Kate feels guilty for not loving her stepchildren in the same way she loves her biological children.

The one wish all mothers share is that their babies will be born healthy, but sometimes, in spite of having what appears to be a perfect pregnancy, things do go wrong and a child is born with intellectual or physical disabilities...

When we were told our son was autistic, we were in shock. In the early days, the thought of autism had crossed my mind but because he is so loving, I dismissed it. I had the mistaken belief that autistic kids weren’t affectionate. We were dumbstruck. It was as if they were talking about somebody else. Max was with us, playing in the corner. I really grieved and I think my husband grieved equally, but in a different way. As my husband had to get back to work, I took Max back to where I’d parked the car and sat it in crying. I thought of all the other mothers in similar situations, who must have sat in other car parks crying over their sense of loss, contemplating the fact that their child wasn’t normal. I felt guilty and concerned that I might have done something that caused his autism. I wondered about a big night I’d had out with the girls before I knew I was pregnant ...

Surely, there can be no pain in the world worse than losing a child but even when this happens and the mother has nothing to do with it at all, guilt is close at hand. A child’s death is often sudden. There is no chance to say goodbye. In a single moment, all of a mother’s dreams are wiped out. First she feels shock, then anger and disbelief, and finally guilt that in some way she was responsible.

Alexia was 17 when she died from a fall during an abseiling expedition in the Blue Mountains. She was an experienced abseiler and a strong athletic young woman.

Learning of her death was a sudden and total shock. It was a cold Sunday night, we were preparing dinner to be eaten in the lounge and had set up a table in front of a cheering fire. It was a simple change of routine and a bit of a weekend treat. Alexia seemed later than she had promised and as usual, I had my ear half-cocked waiting for the familiar slamming of car doors, the yells and the crunch of her return footsteps. When there was

a knock at the door, I think my husband, Ian, opened it. I stood ready to mock-scold her for lateness but in the hallway were two young police-women and the parents of her companion on the trip.

I knew immediately something was very wrong. I probably heard them tell me she was dead and maybe I heard them say something about what had happened. I am not sure now. What I do remember is that her companion's mother tried to put her arms around me, and how my body felt peculiarly stiff and awkward. The mother was wearing a textured black wool shawl that pricked the skin of my face and I remember I struggled to escape her embrace. I know I tried to speak and I think I said something like, "Not my girl, not my beautiful girl" over and over. I could hear my voice, it sounded utterly false, cracked and high, and as though someone else was saying the words. I did not cry but felt cold and distant and I desperately wanted these people, however nice they were trying to be, to go away."

Later the mother told of "a sneaking superstitious thought that perhaps I had not been fully loving or attentive enough to my children...or maybe it was some other unnameable sin, such as taking advantage of all the freedoms offered to women these days. Another part of the guilt was the tortuous notion maybe if I had just done this or maybe been firmer about that Alexia would still be alive."

Does guilt differentiate between stay-at-home mums and mothers in the paid workforce? Of course not. In fact, nothing provokes the wrath of a stay-at-home mother more than the suggestion that because she does not have a paid job she is not a working mother. As Jean Kittson said: "The term working mother is redundant. If you are a mother, you are always working and at times it can be hard work."

Stay-at-home mothers overload themselves and are just as busy as their office counterparts. As well as running households and caring for kids, they do hours of voluntary work for charities, the community generally, numerous chores at school, helping at sports days, doing canteen duty and learning supervision. Schools would not be able to function without them.

As I said earlier, motherhood is a full time job. However, when women enthusiastically heeded the clarion call of women's lib, everything changed. They embraced the idea of taking a second job without thinking about the consequences. Working was fun and stimulating, earning money and being financially independent gave women a sense of freedom. It was wonderful. Women learnt to juggle. They never asked for help. It was about this time that Superwoman appeared on the scene – what a pest of a woman she was.

I can remember doing the washing and hanging it out on the line at night after a day at the office, and doing all sorts of things for the kids when I'd got home, and I was actually singing that song, "I am woman, I am invincible, I can do anything" as I hung out the clothes. I must have been nuts!

I think women didn't want to ask for help because we were so grateful that men had let us go out to work, and secretly we worried that if we said it was hard to do everything expected of us, perhaps we might have been seen as failures. I was certainly constantly tired, as working mothers so often are.

Tiredness has all kinds of ramifications on relationships which is why we thought it might be a good idea to take a look at mothers and their sex lives. At a recent mother's sexual seminar, 150 women were asked how many of them had thought about sex in the past 24 hours – not necessarily participated, just thought about it. Not one hand went up.

The hidden cost of work could be measured in a loss of intimacy. Women find they can't be terrific workers, wonderful mothers and have great sex because too many of them are struggling under the double burden of paid work and running a home. For many couples, sleep is the new sex. What I most love about women is that they never lose their sense of humour. As Melissa said: "There is only one thing I want in bed – breakfast. And I mean bacon and eggs!"

Interestingly, many mothers told the researchers they were angry that their partners didn't help them more in the home. So perhaps anger and resentment could be considered as enemies of intimacy.

Would it be easier if childcare was more accessible, more affordable? Yes! Would it be easier if the workplace was truly family friendly? Yes! Do men suffer from guilt? No! Well, not as far as we could discover. As one man said: "Guilt means I've done something wrong. What have I done wrong?"

We did find that when men assumed the mothering role that guilt did affect them, though. A man whose wife died several years ago is bringing up their now teenage daughter on his own and combines both the mothering and fathering roles. He told me that he suffers from motherguilt. When his teenager flexes her independence and things sometimes go wrong, he feels tremendous guilt in his mothering role and thinks that he must be doing something wrong. But he never feels guilt about his fathering role.

We looked at the bond between mothers and sons. We found that boys break away from their mothers, it's part of their rite of passage, but as men get older and into middle age, many admit to feeling guilty about not spending time with their mothers – and so they should!

We explored the bond between mother and daughter too. That bond is extraordinarily strong. It might become fragile at times but it is hard to break, almost impossible, in fact. In middle age, the bond women have with their mothers becomes even stronger. Researchers say it is a waste of time at this point to even think of trying to change your mother. It just isn't possible.

Is there a solution to motherguilt? Of course there is.

First of all, a woman has to see herself not just as a mother but as a person.

Do men have a role to play? Most definitely.

In the twentieth century women became “equal” – and I use that term loosely – in the workplace but men didn’t embrace equality in the home for themselves. Perhaps because women wouldn’t let them. We always think we know best when it comes to running the home. The challenge in the twenty-first century is that men must become equal in the home. It won’t be easy, change never is. But I am convinced it must happen.

One of the messages we hope all women will take away from this book is that motherhood is fun. It enriches a woman’s life. It is a joyful experience. To see the world through the eyes of children is magical. Motherhood needs to be valued . Women need to tell themselves, “I am a good mother” and we need to tell other mothers, “you are a good mother. You do a great job.”

And if anyone here still needs convincing...

Mothers are all too often taken for granted and their many qualities, especially those relating to leadership, completely overlooked. Yet a mother is possibly the world’s most powerful and effective leader. Without her expert guidance her children would flounder. She shapes them and colours their beliefs and her influence lasts a lifetime. She constantly offers encouragement and gives them the confidence to tackle the challenges and detours they will encounter throughout their life’s journey. She is a role model for her daughters and sets an example to her sons as well. Her imagination inspires her children. It is through her eyes that their curiosity about the world is stirred. She will love them for ever – and worry about them too. It could be argued that mothers are supreme beings. There is old saying that brilliantly reinforces this line of thought: “God could not be everywhere, so he made mothers.”

ANNUAL DINNER - 2005



Photographer: David Karonidis

ANNUAL DINNER – 2005



Photographer: David Karonidis

Supplementary Speeches

Annual Dinner – 2005

Introduction to Richard Tognetti – Meredith Hellicar

Albert Einstein once said *“A table, a chair, a bowl of fruit and a violin; what else does a man need to be happy?”* Well for us it is Richard Tognetti playing that violin, surely one of the most exciting musical experiences one can have. But what about the violinist? What else does he need to make him happy? Tonight we’re truly fortunate not just to be able to hear Richard play his 1759 JB Guadagnini violin but also to hear him speak.

So let me introduce him to you ...

Richard grew up in Wollongong with two brothers. His parents still live there and indeed are here tonight – I extend a very special welcome to you both. Richard has memories from as early as two years old of listening to music and feeling embodied by it, connected totally with it. His parents played a lot of classical music and he grew up in the 70s listening to an enormous variety of music from the Tijuana Brass, which was as radical as his father went, to music like Hendrix and Pink Floyd. He apparently hated every second of school and was always getting threatened with expulsion. He attended the Sydney Conservatorium High School and later studied at the Conservatorium of Music in the early 1980s with Alice Waten and at the Berne Conservatory in Switzerland with Igor Ozim, where he was awarded the Tschumi prize in 1989, the year he took up his position as Artistic Director and Leader of the Australian Chamber Orchestra. Incidentally he had already played with the ACO while a student.

Like many of his contemporaries and predecessors, Richard had left Australia highly critical of it. In a 2003 interview he told Matthew Klugman *“I believed Australia was a cultural desert, that there was no audience here, that not much was happening, that the real possibilities were elsewhere.”* Nevertheless, according to Klugman, he was surprised at the end of his studies to discover *“a sleeping affinity with Australia”*. His girlfriend (now wife), prominent wine maker, Suzie Roberts, was here and he decided to give Australia a go, accepting the job of leading and directing the Australian Chamber Orchestra.

Coming home, he set out to have some “serious fun”, approaching each piece anew, rearranging string quartet and symphony pieces for chamber orchestra, commissioning new pieces from various Australian composers, and pioneering a series of daring collaborations with performers from outside classical music. For Tognetti, this has

been no “*vacuous vision to turn Australia upside down*”, rather it has been a highly disciplined search.

It has therefore been a feature of the ACO under Richard Tognetti that it pursues the inner vitality, the life, of the pieces the musicians play. Musical Renegades—a wonderful documentary on the ACO—shows how the orchestra takes each piece apart, bar by bar, almost note by note, to see what it reveals, what it hides, what the composer wittingly and unwittingly captured. He requires his musicians to be “*warriors to keep the music from becoming mush, from doing the same safe interpretations*. He also requires them to stand up whilst playing. He says “*It’s better for us to stand for a start. You get more life out of the musicians if they are standing, they play more like soloists.*”

Richard has directed the ACO and appeared as soloist in twenty international tours, spanning nineteen countries. Concert highlights include the Vienna Musikverein’s International Chamber Orchestra Series, the BBC Proms at the Royal Albert Hall, the Concertgebouw Summer Festival, the Salzburg Festival, Carnegie Hall, the Teatro Clon in Buenos Aires and numerous performances at Wigmore Hall. In 1996 his arrangements and original music featured in Penny Arcade’s show, “*Sissy sings the blues...*”, which opened the Vienna Festival. The highly successful 2001 Sydney Festival performances of Mozart’s *Mitridate, re di Ponto*, marked his debut as an opera conductor. In the same year the ACO established a new chamber choir, the ACO Voices.

He has developed a keenness for performing music on period, modern and electric instruments and his arrangements of works by Janacek, Szymanowski, Paganini, Beethoven, Ravel and Satie among others, have served to expand the chamber orchestra repertoire.

His more notable collaborations include those with rock-musician Iva Davies, with whom he co-wrote and performed on electric violin, *The Ghost of Time*, and in October 2003 he performed at the Opening Ceremony of the Rugby World Cup in Sydney in a widely acclaimed duet with accordionist James Crabb. He has composed the score to Peter Weir’s *Master and Commander* and was violin tutor for its star, Russell Crowe and features on the soundtrack as soloist. In 2000 he collaborated with rock singer Peter Garrett and cartoonist Michael Leunig to perform and record *The Carnival of the Animals*. A further collaboration followed in 2001 with Leunig, Neil Finn, Brett Dean, Paul Healy, John Rogers and Gondwana Voices, called *Parables, Lullabies and Secrets* and in 2002 the ACO and the Bell Shakespeare Company joined to perform Stravinsky’s *The Soldier’s Tale* for which they won the Helpmann Award in the category of Best Classical Concert Presentation.

Some of his collaborations have been both surprising and spontaneous. He wrote himself that “*at the National Treasures bash in August,*

2001, the gig was at the Sydney Town Hall and after playing some classical fare, I surprised the guests, along with other musicians from the ACO, by joining Slim [Dusty] and his band for Claypan Boogie and a few other classic songs. I joined Slim's right-hand man Mike Kerin, the fiddler known as "Fettler". Mike and I got on like a house on fire and have kept in touch – indeed, Mike's taught me a thing or hundred about fiddling. I think, at first, everyone was a bit worried about the meeting of musos from different sides of the tracks, but we thought it doesn't really matter what side of the tracks you come from. A few minutes into rehearsal, we realised that hell, there were no tracks – if it's good music making, then that's all that matters."

Richard also collaborates with his wife to produce the annual Huntington Festival in the Huntington Winery at Mudgee. The Festival is renowned for its approach to programming, presentation and engagement of artists.

The ACO's national concert season – over 80 performances every year throughout Australia – gives it the largest subscription audience base for any chamber orchestra in the world. They also work hard to be as accessible as possible through their regional tours and their range of youth tickets which are less than half the adult price. Regular international tours have drawn outstanding reviews for their performances. In May 1999, the *Times*, London, declared "This must be the best chamber orchestra on Earth". Again in October 2001 the London *Times* continued its love affair, declaring that "The Australian Chamber Orchestra is a ticket to musical bliss".

Richard has received honorary doctorate degrees from the Universities of Wollongong and Western Australia and, most recently, from the Sydney Conservatorium of Music. He was appointed a Living National Treasure in 1999.

In an interview with *Age* journalist Claire Halliday, in December 2004, Tognetti explained his success as an addiction to music: "Music is my addiction. My obsession. More than that, music offers me – and I think a lot of people – a connection with who we are and what we are, albeit in a very abstract way." In response to a question from music reviewer, Jill Sykes, about what in his own life feeds his music, he responded "You don't have to be sad but if you've just got happy art, what do you say? It's turmoil that makes things happen." To Klugman, he confided "You've got to be a dreamer if you're a musician. The kernel of your thought process needs to be as a result of dreams. I have always been that way. It did cause me problems. I am surprised that I have become as organised as I am now.... If I had to choose, I wouldn't choose another life. I enjoy being a musician and I enjoy the pain and the anguish of drawing sound out of a little wooden box. I think it gives me a structure that I wouldn't otherwise have. I think I always need a thrill and music certainly offers me a thrill."

I suspect Richard is just as thrilled by surfing as he describes himself as an obsessive surfer since he was about 17. He goes surfing

as often as he can. He tries to travel as much as he can with a surfboard under his arm. He says he's not a highly talented surfer but he's a committed one : "Surfing is a stabiliser. Surfing makes me happy."

What also makes him happy is his nearly three year old boy, Leonardo.

Now let's hear from the man himself ...

Vote of Thanks – The Hon Senator Helen Coonan

In 1999, as Meredith mentioned, Richard was named a National Living Treasure. Slim Dusty was inducted on the same night and obviously there was some chemistry at work with them going on to perform together in *Lights on the Hill*. Slim described how Richard "cut loose" in this performance. To borrow from Slim, Richard really cut loose tonight in his engaging excursion into the world of ratbaggery. I wasn't actually acquainted with ratbaggery in quite the same way that I am now and I'm looking at it through wholly different eyes.

But what is really interesting, ladies and gentlemen, is that Richard describes himself as a violinist, as he undoubtedly is. However, his words and his music have succeeded in convincing me, as I know all of us have been convinced, that the meaning of the term "violinist" and indeed "musician" no longer apply in the traditional sense. Instead we are faced with an emerging definition, a tougher more outspoken breed of muso who fights for the survival of the culture they value against the odds of a seemingly indifferent public, at least that's the message I got tonight.

Tonight is not the first time we've heard Richard speak with such passion. Sometimes, as is the case tonight, it's through both words and music and slides, often it's solely through his violin. And those of us who have been privileged to hear and see him play, know that each time he puts bow to strings his performance has a transcendent quality born of complete dedication to his art-form. Such a radical mind, such an original voice, is of course guaranteed to draw criticism. Richard has put many noses out of joint with the zeal with which he expresses his views, but I hope he continues to be zealous in the future. He's a musician somewhat akin to a statesman representing his very own artistic realm. Who knows, perhaps he's the first classical musician to double convincingly as a really great politician, if that's not too back-handed a compliment Richard.

Inspiration can be in short supply. We're lucky of course to have Richard Tognetti, the Australian Chamber Orchestra and their kind, here now. We must, however, be ever-vigilant so that they do not disappear. Enabling an understanding of ourselves, our communities, our nation, is a central task of the Arts and our cultural institutions and artists who interpret our world for us. The Arts and our artists

provide a window through which to view Australia and Australians; they speak to us and for us in an artistic and cultural language that is uniquely ours. As musicians, Richard and the ACO have always challenged audiences with their bold programming and performances which defy and break down classical music's established boundaries. With his virtuoso intellectual curiosity, Tognetti expands horizons by taking audiences beyond a steady diet of the three "B's" – Bach, Beethoven and Brahms – to experience the artistry of people like Michael Leunig, Neil Finn and the Whitlams. Why are we surprised that it's Richard Tognetti who makes these connections.

Tonight, as our guest speaker, Richard has offered his perspectives, he's challenged orthodox and complacent views of what is Australian culture, indeed what is culture. However, he has convincingly rehabilitated ratbags and ratbaggery. For my part, he has forced me to rethink the legacy of "Les Patterson" as the definitive minister for the Arts and roving Australian cultural attaché.

On a serious note, through his magical mastery of the violin, Richard has reminded us that the Arts and culture simply define and shape and interpret what it means to be Australian. In the year 2000, the Australia Council conducted a survey on attitudes of the Australian public towards the Arts and there were some very interesting results; 67 per cent of respondents stated that they would love to own a really good piece of art. In Richard Tognetti, a new breed of violinist who surfs and who speaks fluently on his most beloved subject of music and art, I'm convinced that we Australians do own a really good piece of art.

Richard, we salute you for your God-given talents; you're more than entitled to culturally strut, even swagger. You could never be described as bland. I thank you on behalf of all of us here tonight for taking us on a cultural journey and for providing a personal and compelling vision for Australian artists both here and abroad.

ANNUAL DINNER – 2005



Photographer: David Karonidis

GUEST SPEAKERS AT THE SYDNEY INSTITUTE February – April 2005

Jennifer Horsfield (Teacher, Historian, Author, *Mary Cunningham: An Australian Life* [Ginninderra Press])

Isolation and Depression in Pre-War Rural Australia: The Story of Mary Cunningham

Dr Marion Sawyer (Author *Us and Them: Anti-Elitism in Australia* [API Network, 2004] & Academic ANU)

The Elites: Who Are They Really?

Allison Henry (Director, Australian Republican Movement)

An Australian Head of State: Where Are We At?

Nell Schofield (Actor & journalist; author, *Puberty Blues* [Currency Press/Screen Sound])

Australian Beach Culture – Puberty Blues Revisited

Ross McMullin (Freelance historian and author, *Pompey Elliott* [Scribe Press 2002] & *So Monstrous a Travesty: Chris Watson and the World's First National Labour Government* [Scribe Press 2004])

Early Australia in War and Peace: Chris Watson and Pompey Elliott

Dr Nahid Kabir (Author, *The Muslims in Australia: Immigration, Race Relations and Cultural History* [Kegan Paul, 2004])

Muslims in Australia – Immigration, Race Relations and Cultural History

The Hon. Kevin Andrews MP (Minister Assisting the Prime Minister for the Public Service; Minister for Employment and Workplace Relations)

A Nation of Participants – Workplace Relations and Welfare Reform

Dr John Edwards (Economist/Historian, Author *Curtin's Gift* [Allen & Unwin, 2005])

Curtin's Gift

Dr Herbert E Huppert (Professor of Theoretical Geophysics & Foundation Director Institute of Geophysics, University of Cambridge)

The Science of Bio-Terrorism: A UK Perspective

Peter Garrett MP (Labor MP for Kingsford-Smith)

Australia: After Kyoto

The Hon. Dr Brendan Nelson MP (Minister for Education, Science & Training)

Higher Education – The Challenge

Richard Tognetti (Artistic Director & Lead Violin – Australian Chamber Orchestra)

From the End of the World – Thoughts on Australian Artists and Ratbags Here and Abroad

Ita Buttrose AO OBE (Journalist and Author, co-author *Motherguilt* [Viking, 2005])

The Motherguilt Phenomenon

