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- SPEAKER:** SENATOR AMANDA VANSTONE (Minister for Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs)
DATE: Tuesday 6 April 2004 **Bookings from 23 March only**
VENUE: Mallesons Conference Room, Level 60, Governor Phillip Tower, 1 Farrer Place, Sydney **TIME:** 5.30 for 6.00pm
- SPEAKERS:** TOM FRAME (Author *Where Fate Calls: The HMAS Voyager Tragedy* and Anglican Bishop to the Australian Defence Force) & REAR-ADMIRAL CHRIS OXENBOULD AO (Chief Executive Officer, Waterways Authority, Sydney)
TOPIC: *The Sinking of HMAS Voyager: What Happened?*
DATE: Wednesday 14 April 2004
VENUE: BT Training Room (Room 401), Level 4, Chifley Tower, 2 Chifley Square, Sydney **TIME:** 5.30 for 6.00pm
- SPEAKER:** THE HON. PHILIP RUDDOCK MP (Attorney General)
DATE: Tuesday 20 April 2004 **Bookings from 6 April only**
VENUE: Mallesons Conference Room (Level 60) Governor Phillip Tower, 1 Farrer Place, Sydney **TIME:** 5.30 for 6.00pm
- SPEAKER:** ELLIE WAINWRIGHT (Program Director - Strategy & International Program, Australian Strategic Institute)
TOPIC: *State Weakness in the Pacific: The Solomon Islands and New Guinea*
DATE: Tuesday 27 April 2004 **Bookings from 13 April only**
VENUE: Museum of Sydney Theatre, Corner of Bridge & Phillip Street, Sydney **TIME:** 5.30 for 6.00pm
- SPEAKER:** KEVIN RUDD MP (Shadow Minister for Foreign Affairs and International Security)
TOPIC: *Australian Foreign Policy*
DATE: Thursday 27 May 2004 **Bookings from 13 May only**
VENUE: BT Training Room (Room 401), Level 4, Chifley Tower, 2 Chifley Square, Sydney **TIME:** 5.30 for 6.00pm
- SPEAKER:** DR LENORE COLTHEART (Editor *Jessie Street: A Revised Autobiography* [Federation Press], author, academic & researcher- currently assistant director, The National Archives of Australia)
TOPIC: *Remembering Jessie Street*
DATE: Tuesday 1 June 2004 **Bookings from 18 May only**
VENUE: to be advised **TIME:** 5.30 for 6.00pm
- SPEAKER:** MURRAY GLEESON AC (Chief Justice, High Court of Australia)
DATE: Wednesday 9 June 2004 **Bookings from 28 May only**
VENUE: Mallesons Conference Room (Level 60) Governor Phillip Tower, 1 Farrer Place, Sydney **TIME:** 5.30 for 6.00pm
- SPEAKER:** MARGARET FITZHERBET (Author *Liberal Women: Federation to 1949*, [Federation Press 2004])
TOPIC: *Liberal Women: From 1901 to 1949*
DATE: Wednesday 16 June 2004 **Bookings from 2 June only**
VENUE: 41 Phillip Street, Sydney
- SPEAKER:** CORAL BELL (Author *A World Out of Balance: American Ascendancy and International Politics in the 21st Century*, [Longueville Books 2003], visiting fellow at ANU)
TOPIC: *Exits From Wars*
DATE: Tuesday 22 June 2004 **Bookings from 8 June only**
VENUE: to be advised
- SPEAKER:** BOB McMULLAN MP (Shadow Minister for Finance & Small Business)
DATE: Wednesday 30 June 2004 **Bookings from 16 June only**
VENUE: BT Training Room (Room 401), Level 4, Chifley Tower, 2 Chifley Square, Sydney **TIME:** 5.30 for 6.00pm
- SPEAKER:** THE HON. JOHN ANDERSON MP (Deputy Prime Minister, Minister for Transport & Regional Services, Leader of the Nationals)
DATE: Wednesday 21 July 2004 **Bookings from 7 July only**
VENUE: Mallesons Conference Room (Level 60) Governor Phillip Tower, 1 Farrer Place, Sydney **TIME:** 5.30 for 6.00pm
- SPEAKER:** GREG COMBET (Secretary, ACTU)
DATE: Wednesday 4 August 2004 **Bookings from 21 July only**
VENUE: Museum of Sydney Theatre, Corner of Bridge & Phillip Street, Sydney **TIME:** 5.30 for 6.00pm

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THE

Sydney Institute

QUARTERLY

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on why historians
should stick to
their craft

RORY ROBERTSON –
an overview of the
economy

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and why younger women
won't revolt

A letter to
PAUL SHEEHAN

**VALE PATRICK
O'FARRELL** and
LES HOLLINGS

Book reviews with
JOHN MCCONNELL

MEDIA WATCH
on long quotations from
Alan Ramsay, Oscar
Humphries' search for
words and Rachel
Ward's latest love

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with Gerard Henderson's

MEDIA WATCH

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ABC + D – FOR DYSFUNCTIONAL

ABC managing director Russell Balding maintains that the ABC Board is not dysfunctional. Strange, then, that Maurice Newman – one of Australia's most influential and respected business leaders – felt the need to resign from the ABC Board. In a letter to Communications Minister Daryl Williams dated 28 May 2004, Mr Newman wrote that he had "taken this decision" because he could "no longer be assured that accepted governance standards will be observed on the Board". Maurice Newman referred to "the recent gross breach of [ABC] boardroom confidentiality on the issue of independent monitoring of ABC broadcasts". He also mentioned the inability of his fellow Board members to secure the agreement of the Staff Elected Director [Ramona Koval] to the Board's governance protocols. Mr Newman indicated that this "leaves open the potential for further leaking of boardroom deliberations and papers" which "will seriously undermine trust and respect among directors and the capacity of the Board to function effectively". Sounds dysfunctional? Sure does.

The story so far. At the March 2004 ABC Board meeting, a letter from Maurice Newman to the ABC chairman Donald McDonald was tabled. The former recommended to the latter that an independent media monitoring organisation should be commissioned to carry out a review of bias at the ABC. The issue was discussed at the April 2004 meeting. Subsequently, the ABC managing director engaged Rehome to monitor the ABC's political coverage from Budget day until the Federal election. This seemed a harmless suggestion. But it angered the Staff Elected Director - so much so that she wrote an angry email to Donald McDonald on 6 May. This correspondence was leaked to the ABC TV Media Watch program where the proposal was bagged by presenter David Marr on 17 May. In the process, Mr Marr pontificated: "There's no systemic political bias on the ABC". So there.

Interviewed by Tanya Nolan on the ABC Radio PM program on 17 June 2004, Ramona Koval was asked about the leak. The official ABC transcript reads as follows- TN: Who do you think leaked that letter on the ABC's independent monitoring to Media Watch? (Silence) ...I take it that you can't discuss it, or you won't discuss it? RK: Um, well I don't think it's right for me to accuse any of my fellow Board directors. Um. TN: So do you know... where it came from? RK: (After silence) Well, why don't you ask Media Watch? TN: Well, because you've been accused of leaking that letter. RK: I've just explained to you that I have not done anything that is improper. I have always acted within my legal obligations. TN: But you haven't directly answered whether or not you were the one. RK: That is my answer.

And a manifestly inadequate answer at that. Ms Koval refused to deny that she had leaked her own email to Media Watch and she has refused to abide by Board's governance protocols which cover, inter alia, the confidentiality of Board decisions. In summary, the ABC Board has lost an able director. The Staff Elected Director refuses to address to the Board's governance protocols. Meanwhile, Board discussions have been leaked to the ABC's very own Media Watch. Yet Russell Balding believes that the ABC Board, as currently constructed, is not dysfunctional. It's called denial.

RECENT DEVELOPMENTS IN THE US AND AUSTRALIAN ECONOMIES

Rory Robertson

The best recent news from abroad is that the US economy is again growing strongly after a dismal period that included its early-2000s recession and a couple of years of sub-par GDP growth. Someone flicked a switch last June, and the US economy responded suddenly with rapid growth - a 6 per cent annualised pace - through the second half of 2003.

Hopes are high that this year will be a good one for the US (and so global) economy. With market interest rates low, share prices, home prices and consumer confidence all trending up, the US dollar trending down and big tax cuts still pulsing through the system, US output (GDP) is widely expected to grow by a solid 4-5 per cent over 2004. For those who like to worry, the obvious ominous sign is that almost all economists agree that everything is coming up roses.

As is discussed below, the missing link in the US expansion remains decent jobs growth. A (very) gradual uptrend in employment has begun but a major strengthening is required before a sustained US economic expansion is assured.

UPBEAT US GROWTH IS GOOD FOR AUSTRALIAN EXPORTS

A sustained US expansion is very important for Australia because it's much easier for our economy to grow quickly if the biggest economy in the world is growing quickly, in part because its strength typically sparks activity in the Asian economies - our major trading partners - and Europe.

About 20 per cent of our GDP is exported, so the global weakness of recent years had been a major drag on our economy (see **Chart 1**). While export growth averaged around 7-8 per cent per annum over the 1990s, our exports have been about flat for the

past three years. The collapse in the usual uptrend hurt our economy by as much as 1.5pp per annum (that is, by 20 per cent of 7.5 per cent).

The ongoing turnaround in the global economy and ongoing recovery of our rural sector from drought together provide a basis for the widespread optimism that the Australian economy will remain strong this year, notwithstanding the rapid appreciation of our currency (A\$), and a flattening of the big uptrend in home-building and home-filling. (Note: farm GDP has grown by about 30 per cent over the past year, boosted recently by the biggest grain crop in Australia's history.)

1. Australia: Export volumes*

Source: ABS and RBA

AUSTRALIAN ECONOMY OUTPERFORMED US ECONOMY IN EARLY-2000s

That the US had a recession in 2001 without the Australian economy suffering a similar fate is a remarkable development (see **Chart 2**). US recessions in the mid-1970s, the early-1980s and the early-1990s were matched by similar recessions here, so we're talking a major break from the experience of recent decades.

2. Nominal GDP growth

Source: ABS and Datastream

One can argue that Australia's economic outperformance over the early-2000s was as much the result of good luck as good management. For our purposes, however, let's just say that extreme A\$ weakness and home-building strength in 2001 showed up at just the right time.

Regardless, the payoff from skipping - postponing? - a recession is sizeable. Perhaps this is most visible in the relative performance of unemployment in recent years (see **Chart 3**). Recession pushed US unemployment up by about 2pp to 6 per cent, unwinding more than half a decade's worth of progress towards lower unemployment. By contrast, without the downtrend in jobs that comes with recession, Australian unemployment has fallen below 6 per cent, as low as it has been in the past two decades.

3. Unemployment rates

Source: ABS and Datastream

Indeed, on the two main economy-wide gauges of spare capacity - unemployment and the National Australia Bank's measure of capacity utilisation - Australia's resource usage at present is as high as it was at the peak of the 1980s boom. That is, we're as close to "full employment" now as we've been in decades.

EXPLAINING GAP BETWEEN LOCAL AND US INTEREST RATES

The fact that Australia has much less spare capacity than the US is the key to understanding the sizeable gap between RBA cash at 5.25 per cent and Fed funds at 1 per cent (see **Chart 4**). As noted above, the relative lack of spare capacity locally reflects the relative strength of our economy since 2000.

The US Federal Reserve ("the Fed") cut its funds rate from 6.5 per cent to 1 per cent between 2001 and 2003 in order to limit the damage from the recession and in an attempt to push the US economy back towards full employment. The RBA "followed the Fed" in 2001, cutting its cash rate from 6.25 per cent to 4.25 per cent in response to local and global

economic and equity-market weakness. The Australian economy's outperformance since then, however, has prompted the RBA to raise its cash rate by 1pp, in total, to 5.25 per cent.

To the extent that the RBA expects above-trend GDP growth to continue, it has a bias to tighten further in order to limit the emergence of domestic wage and price pressures. The Fed's inclination to hike will be minimal until decent US jobs growth is well underway, so the big gap in policy rates may be with us for some time.

4. Policy rates

Source: Datastream, RBA and US Federal Reserve

DECENT JOBS GROWTH THE MISSING LINK IN US EXPANSION

The Fed has anchored its funds rate at 1 per cent in order to promote decent jobs growth in the wake of a three-year downtrend in employment. The recent trend at least is up, even if progress continues to disappoint. US jobs growth has averaged just 60,000 per month over the six months to February, barely half the rate required to absorb the new entrants to the labour market that flow from 1 per cent population growth (see **Chart 5**).

5. US non-farm payrolls

Source: Datastream

Reflecting primarily a downtrend in US factory jobs, the level of private-sector employment remains three million below its peak in December 2000. In an election year, we'll hear more and more from the Democrats that this President Bush is well on the way to becoming the first US President since Herbert Hoover in the 1930s to oversee a net loss of jobs during his full four-year term.

Other indicators confirm the ongoing weakness in the US labour market. When looked at in terms of aggregate hours worked, labour input into the US production function remains no better than flat (see **Chart 6**). Nor do present levels of newspaper job ads suggest rapid jobs growth is just around the corner (see **Chart 7**).

6. Aggregate hours worked

Source: ABS and Datastream

7. Job ads

Source: Datastream and ANZ Bank

Internet job ads are a growing thing, but there's no doubt newspaper job ads will jump significantly when a hiring boom moves into the pipeline. For now, the US Conference Board's "Help Wanted" index continues to bump along the bottom, showing no sign of the sort of rebound that brought an end to the "jobless recovery" of the early-1990s. Meanwhile,

ANZ job ads suggest moderate rather than rapid Australian jobs growth in coming months.

LOW US INFLATION BREEDING LOW US RATES

It is on the inflation front that the US economy recently has produced something extraordinary. While Australian core inflation continues to cycle around the RBA's 2-3 per cent medium-term target, US core inflation has trended down to 1 per cent, its lowest level in four decades (see **Chart 8**).

8. US inflation and rates – back to '50s!

Source: Datastream and US Federal Reserve

Recall that inflation was low all around the developed world in the 1950s and into the 1960s, but there followed in the 1970s a spectacular blowout to double-digit rates. The recent return to very low inflation in the US - and indeed to low inflation across the developed world - reflects intense global competitive pressures on top of longstanding central-bank efforts to put inflation back in her box.

After a quarter of a century of promoting disinflation (falling inflation), US policymakers now are at a crossroad. Further falls in inflation are potentially disastrous, and even the current 1 per cent rate is seen as undesirable because it leaves the US economy vulnerable to deflation (falling prices) in the event of "an adverse shock" (read "the next recession").

That's why, for the first time in pretty well anyone's memory, US inflation now is seen as "too low" and the Fed is actively trying to push inflation up rather than down. It's trying to build - in Chairman Greenspan's words - a "wider firebreak" against deflation.

Experience spanning half a century of US inflation and interest rates - and you can paint a similar picture for most developed economies - demonstrates that just as very high inflation bred very high interest rates in the 1970s, very low US inflation at present is breeding very low US interest rates.

(A more general point is that in today's low-inflation world, decent *real* rates of return on investments are achievable without needing to generate double-digit nominal returns. Assuming 2 per cent inflation, for example, a nominal return of 6 per cent per annum (4 per cent real) over the next decade would translate into a 50 per cent increase in an asset's real value, while a 9 per cent nominal return (7 per cent real) would result in an about-doubling of the asset's real value.)

CURRENT FED POLICY NOT PARTICULARLY REMARKABLE

The funds rate at 1 per cent in nominal terms is at a 45-year low. It's widely seen as ridiculously low, but at zero in real terms (1 per cent nominal less 1 per cent inflation), it's only as low as it was in the early-1990s (3 per cent nominal less 3 per cent inflation). That is, the Fed's current policy stance is pretty much the same as it was last time the US economy was struggling to generate decent jobs growth.

Similarly, the *real* 10-year Treasury bond yield of about 3 per cent (4 per cent nominal less 1 per cent inflation) is near its five-decade average of about 2.75 per cent. While nearly all US economists agreed at the turn of the year that the (nominal) 10-year yield could only move higher from 4.25 per cent, it spent the next 10 weeks trending down. Again, the thing many are missing is that it's 1 per cent inflation that's extraordinary - low nominal interest rates simply are par for the course in low-inflation territory.

In thinking about the appropriateness of the 1 per cent Fed funds rate, one must bear in mind that most relevant US interest rates are nowhere near that low. The predominant mortgage is a 30-year fixed-rate loan with an interest rate in the 5.5-6 per cent range, while a great number of businesses are borrowing at rates well above 6 per cent (see **Chart 9**).

9. US interest rates

For all the power of the Fed, it is a fact that Chairman Greenspan has less control over key US rates than RBA Governor Macfarlane has over key local rates. That is, discrete changes in the RBA's cash rate flow directly into standard-variable mortgage rates and bank (variable) base-lending rates, whereas key US interest rates are market determined, and so are tied only indirectly to Fed policy. In particular, notice that the 5.5pp drop in the funds rate since 2001 has produced only a 2pp drop in key market rates.

If the Fed ultimately turns out to be successful in reviving inflation - and there still is an "if" - US interest rates will return to more normal levels. Given substantial spare capacity, ongoing weakness in jobs growth and the well-known inertia in inflation outcomes, a big jump in rates probably is more a story for 2005 than 2004.

US-DOLLAR DOWNTREND HELPING US GROWTH, HURTING GROWTH ELSEWHERE

One of the biggest issues in the global economy at present is the two-year downtrend in the US dollar (US\$). The lower US\$ helps the US economy by stimulating US exports and crowding out imports, hurting other economies in the process.

Movements in the US\$ are best assessed on a real trade-weighted (TWI) basis (see **Chart 10**). The real "major currency" TWI (which includes the A\$ among a range of others) is down nearly 25% from its peak, whereas the real "broad" TWI (which further includes all other currencies, including the fixed Chinese Yuan) is down by only about half as much.

10. Real US TWI

Source: US Federal Reserve

The seven-year uptrend in the US dollar to February 2002 meant that it was increasingly easy for Australian and other exporters to sell product into US markets. That "free ride" on the back of ridiculously-low exchange rates is now over. As the

Source: US Federal Reserve Bank

A\$ headed up towards 80 US cents from lifetime lows near 48 US cents in 2001, the extreme competitiveness of Australian products disappeared.

Many - including some who failed to hedge when the A\$ was ridiculously weak - have laid the blame for the A\$'s uptrend on last year's rate hikes by the RBA. That the A\$'s behaviour has pretty well mimicked that of the Euro (see **Chart 11**) puts a big question mark over that version of events. The bulk of the story simply is that the US dollar went up, then the US dollar went down, with local factors playing a minor role.

11. Exchange rates

Source: Datastream and Reuters

Regardless, a key issue for policymakers right now is the extent to which the sharp uptrend in Australia's TWI to 16-year highs will offset some or all of the benefits to our economy from the strengthening global economy. Another key question is how much further, if any, the uptrend in the A\$ has to run. No one knows, of course, even if they think they do: no less an authority than Fed Chairman Greenspan has argued that in forecasting exchange rates it is hard to outperform a simple coin toss.

US EQUITY PRICES, HOME PRICES AND CONFIDENCE MOVING IN RIGHT DIRECTION

As is now well known, US equity prices ran way ahead of US company profits in the second half of the 1990s (see **Chart 12**). Put simply, a "bubble" formed in response to hot air from the majority of analysts and wishful thinking from the majority of investors. By contrast, Australian share prices maintained a close link with profits through the 1990s; interestingly, local equity prices have underperformed profits growth in recent years (see **Chart 13**).

12. US equity prices and corporate profits

Source: Datastream

13. Australian equity prices and corporate profits

Source: Datastream and ABS

After the savage three-year downtrend that saw US equity prices drop 50% (nominal) from peak to trough, prices are again trending higher. And whether or not one thinks US Price/Earnings ratios are "too high", this recent uptrend has coincided with a surge in US profits (in turn, this surge reflects rapid revenue growth on top of minimal new hiring).

Economies and markets are related by mass psychology. Happily, the vicious feedback loop between falling equity prices and falling consumer confidence that lasted for three years and threatened to bring down the global economy down has given way to both rising share prices and rising confidence (see **Chart 14**).

US home prices also continued to trend higher over 2003, although US home-price gains in recent years have been dwarfed by those in Australia (see **Chart 15**). A good part of the outperformance of local home prices since September 1999 reflects the frenzy of speculative activity sparked by the halving of our Capital Gains Tax; extraordinarily, nearly half of all local borrowing for new homes in recent times has

been by "investors" rather than first-home buyers or existing owners "trading up".

14. US confidence and equity prices

Source: Datastream and Conference Board

15. Home prices

Source: ABS and Datastream

For now, most cyclical factors in the US economy are moving in the right direction. Until robust jobs growth arrives, however, the Fed has little choice but to sit and wait patiently with its funds rate at 1 per cent, hoping for the best. Meanwhile, a gnawing issue in the back of some minds is that US macroeconomic policy is already at full stretch, with little left in the tank in the event the US economy stalls unexpectedly. Only sustained jobs growth can make everything right.

Rory Robertson is Interest Rate Strategist,
Macquarie Bank



CORRESPONDENCE

RICHARD WOOLCOTT REPLIES

I would like to offer several comments on John Kunkel's perceptive article/review (*The Sydney Institute Quarterly* Issue 21, November 2003) of my recent book, *The Hot Seat; Reflections on Diplomacy from Stalin's death to the Bali Bombings*.

In his breakout box on my views of "Uncle Joe's Achievements" there is a mistake. My schoolboy "brush with Marxism" was not at Melbourne Grammar, as stated. It was at Geelong Grammar, where I was in the latter years of World War II when the Soviet Union was a major ally. I believe the views expressed in the two chapters on the Soviet Union (chapters 2 and 5) give overall an objective balance between the achievements of the Soviet Union and the evils of Soviet society under Stalin.

The arguments Kunkel advances about the dangers of working with an authoritarian administration in Indonesia (corruption, nepotism and abuses of human rights) are fair but in foreign affairs it is never easy to find a widely acceptable balance between moral principles and other interests. The Howard Government's relations with China are a current example of a similar pragmatic approach (with which I agree), as was its approach to the Soeharto administration between 1996 and its fall.

Kunkel writes that I am "offended" when politicians like John Howard talk about the need for our foreign policy to reflect Australian values. Values are important. It is a matter of definition and I find that I - and many other Australians - are offended when those values appear not to rule out the exploitation of fear (the approach to war or terrorism), latent racism and religious intolerance (the Tampa affair), jingoism (East Timor and Iraq), and the issue of deception to mask real intentions (children overboard and the reason for joining the invasion of Iraq).

Kunkel argues that "Australia's participation in the Iraq war sharpened the distaste of the old policy establishment for Howard's stewardship of foreign policy". It is not just the old foreign policy establishment that opposed Australia's involvement in the invasion of Iraq. Such distaste was widespread throughout the nation, including amongst the ranks of senior service chiefs, for example General Peter Gration who was Chief of the Defence Force during the first Gulf War in 1991, and even within the public service and the armed forces, although the latter cannot speak publicly about this. It is important to draw a distinction between the widely supported

ongoing international action against terrorism and the quite widely opposed invasion on false assumptions of Iraq. Moreover, it is not only Iraq. There was widespread disagreement with the government's approach to the United Nations and to the developing imbalance between our relations with the United States and the countries of East Asia.

I believe the real truth, namely that Australia went to war in Iraq on the basis of false assumptions and misleading the Parliament and the public in an effort to gain support for a predetermined and flawed policy, will progressively and justifiably take hold in the wider community.

Kunkel concludes by stating the days of the influence of a "few Wise Men" in foreign policy "appear well and truly over". I think this may be proved wrong as some of the government's activities and the "spin" surrounding them are properly examined in the months ahead. In fact the Howard Government would have been prudent to listen to its informed, even if retired, critics in the community, including retired service officers, as a balance to their own uncritical, post-11 September enthusiasms and to those of a compliant public service sensitive to Mr Howard's known intentions, than to disregard their considered views.

While being disappointed about the recent ascendancy of such attitudes, I am not discouraged. I may be an optimist but I believe sound objective advice and truth will prevail from whatever source it comes, including from so-called "wise men in exile".

In retrospect the wise men in exile, including Ross Garnault, Stuart Harris, Paul Barrett, Paul Dibb and myself – to mention those few to whom Kunkel refers – as well as many others, including Generals Gratton and Stretton, Air Marshall Furnell and a number of admirals as well as academics, including the usually conservative Professor Owen Harries and many other senior, recently retired diplomats, will be proved to have been correct. It would be curious indeed if they were all wrong. The Howard Government would have been prudent and more credible if it had listened.

I believe that either a Costello or a Latham government will have learned a lesson and will be likely to seek experienced advice against which to test its approaches to foreign, security and trade policies, a course which would be of benefit to Australia.

22 February 2004.

Richard Woolcott AC



NO MORE THE VICTIM

Anne Henderson

"He's such a victim, I just want to hit him," is a line that resonates from the John Waters character in ABC TV's new mini series *Fireflies*. Hearing the line as criticism rained down on US feminist Naomi Wolf, for accusing prominent academic Henry Bloom of groping her while her tutor at Yale, it is clear victimisation fatigue has become widespread.

The "cat fight" over Wolf's revelation in a 6000 word article for *New York* magazine, has ranged from predictable spats from rivals like Camille Paglia ("Wolf ... has made a profession out of courting male attention") and Katie Roiphe ("a desperate power grab") to considered commentary from many such as UK feminist Zoe Williams who reminded the women's movement that "the drive to politicise every ambiguous physical gesture ... is not feminism".

New Statesman editor Christine Odone best summed up this "me too" spat saying Wolf and Paglia had done real victims no good at all. Instead it "... trivialised what should have been a serious investigation into Ivy League misogyny". For Odone, Naomi Wolf had given victimisation a bad name – "We have had Naomi the victim of her youthful good looks (*The Beauty Myth*), Naomi the victim of her sexual allure (*Promiscuities*), Naomi the victim of motherhood (*Misconceptions*). Can we soon expect *Affluenza* in which Naomi describes herself as a victim of her wealth?"

Female writers Down Under joined in the fray. Anne Summers, defending Wolf, drew parallels with a case of work place harassment she herself had advised on years before – "Do nothing I counselled. It will hurt you more than it will hurt him if you take action." But indicated in the article that she regretted her advice at the time.

Australians, observing the tussle over Wolf's comments, could be forgiven for thinking Wolf's critics had a case. A local scandal involving the alleged rape of a young woman by a group of hero worshipped footballers was already filling the headlines. In sharp relief, belated cries of "listen to me I once was groped" from a wealthy, successful Yale graduate paled into self serving publicity seeking when put beside a vulnerable 20 year old's trauma after claiming she had been pack raped just

days before. With a criminal investigation launched over the rape allegations, the real victim wasn't hard to pick.

Sydney Morning Herald columnist Julia Baird scored the two incidents poles apart and took cudgels to the football culture generally, writing, "It is not 'unacceptable', or 'inappropriate' behaviour. It is criminal." And, admonishing Wolf, "Her case would have been better served by a forensic detailing of the problems that exist today, not centring on her own decades-old experience."

For a decade or so now, many of the most vocal in the feminist movement have been frustrated by the lack of sympathy in younger women for the style of feminist agitation begun in the 1950s with women like Betty Friedan and Gloria Steinem. Why the lack of passion in those younger women? While women have come a long way, it's not as if they have achieved the absolute equality the Friedans and Steinems set out to capture.

In late 2003, Australian feminist Anne Summers in *The End of Equality* (Random), a book Natasha Cica predicted would "walk off the bookshelves and into livingrooms from Coogee to Cherrybrook", lamented that some Australian women, "perhaps even a majority ... are worse off than women were in their mothers' time".

The book didn't walk off the shelves anything like Summers' earlier work *Damned Whores and God's Police* and even Cica ended her very favourable review with a note of exhaustion: "Overall *The End of Equality* left me not just flattened – this subject matter is gruelling, sometimes nearly beyond belief – but also a bit flat." What Cica wanted was an agenda for change; the fact that the scenario in *The End of Equality* was so bleak, and without any answers, in an age when women are encouraged to be empowered, left her unconvinced.

Strategies that worked in the sixties and seventies were the strategies of protest. And, at a time, when the notion held sway that women were a single group. But that protest strategy goes down more coolly with generations of women now enjoying many of freedoms Friedan style feminists could only demand.

What's more we live in a more competitive society. Anne Summers rightly points out that some women have undoubtedly achieved all that any man could, in an age where legal, cultural and attitudinal barriers have come down. There are also others who are worse off.

But it's not simply retrogressive government policy, as Anne Summers argues, that leaves some women worse off. It's also that some women, like their male

counterparts with other men, have benefited at the expense of other groups of women. If, for example, the Howard Government allocates more funding to alleviate the financial position of self funded retirees (male and female) or first home buyers (male and female) and this is preferred by a majority of electors over funding for paid maternity leave or more subsidies for child care, some females have undoubtedly voted to make it harder for the single working mum who can't afford to buy that first home.

Caitlin Flanagan, in "How Serfdom Saved the Woman's Movement" (*Atlantic Monthly*, March 2004), challenges the notion that women are a single group. Instead she draws a comparison between the rich white women of an earlier America who ran households where they relied on other females as slaves and the affluent professional American woman of today who sets off to her smart office leaving her children at home with the lowly paid (often illegal immigrant) nanny. In a backhander at Naomi Wolf's disillusionment at her own experience of mothering in *Misconceptions*, Flanagan quips, "She wanted a revolution; what she got was a Venezuelian."

Reversing the "me too" victim story, Flanagan labels as hypocrites those in the feminist movement who see the feminist cause being for all women equally: "I never once argued with my husband," writes Flanagan, "about which of us was going to change the sheets. Or scrubbed the bath tubs, or dusted the cobwebs off the top of the living-room bookcase, or used the special mop and the special noncorrosive cleanser on the hardwood floors. Two years ago our little boys got stomach flu, one right after the other, and there were ever so many loads of wash to do, but we did not do them. The nanny did."

There's nothing new in the better off championing the causes of the less well off. Revolutions to liberate the teaming masses from injustice – whether the fight against poverty, reform of workplaces and working conditions, the push for civil rights or reform of gender inequities. Even Catherine Booth, wife and mission partner of William Booth, the founder of the Salvation Army, liked a good home and its comforts. The Booths weathered precarious religious battles for acceptance of their movement, but never experienced the penury and destitution they worked a lifetime to relieve in others. But there is something phoney about a class or group that has made it continuing to protest as if they hadn't made it. And that's feminism's problem - best illustrated by Naomi Wolf's outrage over a long ago grope from her tutor.

It takes a book like Gail Collins' *America's Women: 400 Years of Dolls, Drudges, Helpmates and Heroines* (William Morrow, 2003) to describe something of the

breadth of the female journey to unshackle woman from societal limbo. Gail Collins, editorial page editor of *The New York Times*, is herself something of a first in US history, being the first woman to take the helm at that establishment icon *The New York Times* editorial board. But she leaves herself right out of her narrative.

One of the great achievements of the feminist movement over the past half century has been how it has written women into history – both contemporary and that long past. The United States makes an ideal canvas for Collins' study - its size, its newness as a nation, its diversity - in the extremes of social contact and experience – and, not least of all, the relative liberal traditions of its past two centuries.

Collins' narrative, rather than analysis, is timely and begins with a blunt observation that rings as true now as 400 years ago – “The history of American women is all about leaving home – crossing oceans and continents, or getting jobs and living on their own ... The centre of our story is the tension between the yearning to create a home and the urge to get out of it.” Australian women will empathise.

Some 475 women get a mention in *America's Women* – about one for each page. Larry McMurtry, reviewing it for *The New York Review of Books*, concludes that the book tells a story that is “not, by and large, a pleasant one. It's principally a story of abuse, heavy drudgery, inequality, violence, suffering, and early death; and the distance travelled, in terms of equality, was purchased at a very high cost ... it would be hard to read this book and not conclude that, for women, things have improved.”

After 400 years, one would certainly hope so. Apart from so many individual stories, some harrowing, some heroic but all compelling in their extremes, it is not McMurtry's predictable discovery that is the most memorable feature of the Collins' study. More importantly is the way such a vast time span of experience throws up patterns that resonate centuries later, and that by viewing all those women, so much less fortunate than women today, we get a better sense of what a tremendous struggle the battle for women's rights has been, of the wretchedness of its opponents and the bravery, even nuttiness, of its champions.

Take away the relative differences of historical experience - the isolated and frontier nature of settlements, clashes with indigenous Americans, the era of slavery, wagons rolling westward in ignorance, penury and disaster, civil war, impoverished immigrants and the like – there are universal moments where women suddenly come into their own, into community focus, benefit quirkily from circumstances

or are permitted to stand in for males when needed. What's new, a woman reader might sigh.

In early colonial society, not only did the isolation strip many communities of old world restrictions imposed on women, but single women could fare better financially than married women who automatically lost their legal rights upon marriage. While most women chose marriage, Margaret and Mary Brent of seventeenth century Maryland never married amidst a community of women-starved men. They owned and managed property and were granted land. They prospered as money lenders. Meanwhile, other women did well out of taking a number of husbands and being left as widows many times over.

In these seventeenth century agrarian settlements, women or wives were valued as household producers. As farms became more sophisticated with cash crops, women gained respect as mothers - a step forward from a mindset that had so long regarded women as lacking intelligence. Now mothers became the first stage of their children's intellectual development as fathers were so often away from home.

From the early nineteenth century, girls' education improved rapidly and by mid century women were accepted as teachers which gave middle class women a chance to earn money if they couldn't marry. Not marrying became fashionable. (Sound familiar?) Others entered factory work – all of which brought on a litany of rules governing women's behaviour in public. Nonetheless, women were gaining a public foothold. Wartime invariably meant women took jobs once reserved for men. The downside was having to surrender such jobs on the men's return. Even so, the notion of woman's work had changed forever.

Liberation for some was slavery for others. For many working class women – black Americans of slave backgrounds or immigrant women – to be able to give up paid employment was a step forward. Being a stay-at-home mother was liberation from servility. For others, with the invention of new household implements, women often found their tasks increased as husbands expected more from them – in the seventeenth century it was fancier food and a greater choice of dishes; in the mid twentieth century it was the laundry done at home rather than being sent out.

America's Women puts some perspective into the debate over notions of gender equality. As McMurtry concludes, it is hard not to agree that American

women have come a long way in 400 years. Compared with the first 350 years of the 400 years covered in Collins' study, the last 50 have been full of breathtaking advancement for American women.

Those changes have been replicated in all Western democracies. This helps explain why younger women today react with indifference to calls to protest their enslavement or inequality, as compared with men. They see more complexities, even while they acknowledge that in many areas there is a need to go further.

It helps explain, too, the critical response to Naomi Wolf's cry of victimisation with her former tutor. In such times of flexibility, opportunity, affluence and pragmatism, women's groups are opting for negotiation rather than revolution. Programs to mentor women, groups willing to activate female friendly websites, women networking, prodding behind the scenes with those who make the rules, overt targets for the number of women MPs, women in high office supporting other women and so on.

In 1987, a handful of women experts in foreign and defence affairs in Washington realised that a formal organisation was needed to promote the increasing numbers of women entering international security and related fields – a male only province from day one. WIIS (Women in International Security) was formed. The organisation now has more than 1200 members - both female and male. Founding members included Madeleine Albright and Senator Nancy Kassebaum Baker. WIIS has partner groups in Europe and Asia. Likewise, Emily's List (supporting pro choice women into parliament) and networks of other, more conservative, women entering the political arena accept that negotiation and the use of power are better ways forward than personal cries of victimisation from well heeled feminists.

There will no doubt be a time for protest action in the future, but right now it's more savvy to make better use of the liberation so bitterly and bravely achieved by women like those in Gail Collins' vast tapestry of "dolls, drudges, helpmates and heroines".

Anne Henderson is Deputy Director of The Sydney Institute and author of Getting Even (Harper Collins)



CORRESPONDENCE

PAUL SHEEHAN

On 24 December 2003, Gerard Henderson sent the following letter to Paul Sheehan – by both email and post. As at the time of going to print, Mr Sheehan had neither replied to, nor acknowledged, the correspondence.

Mr Paul Sheehan
Senior Writer
The Sydney Morning Herald
GPO Box 506
SYDNEY NSW 2001 24 December 2003

Dear Paul

On 5 November 2003 - I was approached by Valerie Lawson to provide the *Sydney Morning Herald* with a comment on your book *The Electronic Whorehouse*, which had just been released by Pan Macmillan. I advised that I had only read a few chapters of the book and glanced at the rest. I forwarded an email to Ms Lawson in which I wrote:

Paul Sheehan did not attempt to contact me before writing *The Electronic Whorehouse*. His chapter titled "The Shadow" contains numerous factual errors. Names of prominent Australians are misspelt, demonstrably untrue statements are made about The Sydney Institute and Mr Sheehan makes imputations about me which are not – and cannot be – supported by evidence. I am heavily committed at the moment. However, when time permits, I will write to Paul Sheehan documenting the factual mistakes, non-sequiturs and inconsistent statements in *The Electronic Whorehouse*.

Part of my comment appeared in Ms Lawson's article which was published in the *Sydney Morning Herald* on 7 November 2003.

I put off reading your book in full until just now. I am quite busy and had no particular reason to complete your manuscript. Virtually no one has raised with me your criticisms of me and The Sydney Institute. The two exceptions – one a senior Coalition political staffer, the other a business executive – have volunteered that they thought your critique was both lightweight and over-the-top. In view of this, I can only assume that *The Electronic Whorehouse* has had little impact – so far at least. This may change in the future. However, I thought it only proper to honour

the promise which I had made to Valerie Lawson (and which was mentioned in the *Sydney Morning Herald*) – before the end of the calendar year.

Before going into detail, I should make a comment on your evident double standard in *The Electronic Whorehouse*. At Pages 25-28 you castigate Robert Manne for not having “done what should be routine” when a “serious accusation” is made about an individual – namely to check with the person “prior to publication”. Yet you wrote a whole chapter about me and The Sydney Institute (Chapter 10 titled “The Shadow”) – in which accusations were made against me and The Sydney Institute – without attempting to check the veracity of any of your claims prior to publication.

And now to the specifics.

FACTUAL ERRORS IN THE ELECTRONIC WHOREHOUSE – CHAPTER 10

- At Page 229 you describe me as “part journalist, part corporate cheerleader”. The fact is that, in my newspaper columns, I rarely write on business and only occasionally on economics. Since a lot of the research you have engaged in for *The Electronic Whorehouse* consists of accessing the John Fairfax Library’s NewsLink system (thus making it possible for you to check quotes held electronically, undertake reference counts, etc) you should have been able to establish this.

- At page 232 reference is made to “Henderson’s support for his wife’s book of interviews, *Partners*”. There are three errors here in a mere nine words. First, I have never written about *Partners* (HarperCollins, 1999). Second, Anne Henderson is not the author of *Partners* but, rather, the co-editor – along with Ross Fitzgerald. Third, *Partners* is not a “book of interviews”. Clearly you neither read nor even glanced at *Partners* before citing it in *The Electronic Whorehouse*.

- At Page 233 you maintain that “Henderson used the following terms to describe Mark Latham and his political style in *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 22 July 2002”. You then list the words/terms, one under another for effect. The list commences with “lazy”, followed by “opinionated”, followed by “slothful”.

This is pure invention. The reference to “lazy, opinionated, [and] slothful” was actually a quote from a Mark Latham attack on journalists. They were not my words in the first instance. Note that at Page 17 of *The Electronic Whorehouse* you describe “the manipulation of quotes” as one of “the worst of journalism’s standard operating practices”.

- At Page 235 reference is made to a “Phil Scanlon”. The correct spelling is Scanlan. In view of Mr Scanlan’s role as chairman of the Australian-American Leadership Dialogue, you should have got his name correct. After all, he is listed in *Who’s Who in Australia* and mentioned occasionally in newspapers.

- At Page 236 and Page 244 there is a reference to “David Smorgan” – along with a comment on the “Smorgan Meat Group” (at Page 236) which is described as “one of Australia’s most powerful manufacturing dynasties”. In view of the importance of the family in Australian business, you should be aware that the name is Smorgon (not Smorgan). David Smorgon has an entry in *Who’s Who in Australia*, had you bothered to check.

- At Page 238 you assert that The Sydney Institute “is not required to lodge public accounts”. This statement is manifestly false – as I would have advised you had you contacted me before your book went to print. The Sydney Institute is a company limited by guarantee which files an annual return with the Australian Securities and Investment Commission (ASIC). The Institute, which is audited by a major accounting company, meets all its accounting and reporting requirements as determined by ASIC.

In a speech in the House of Representatives on 11 February 2003, Mark Latham MP alleged that The Sydney Institute failed “to include financial data in its ASIC company record”. I assume that is the source for your (false) claim referred to above. The fact is that the Institute’s reporting meets all of ASIC’s requirements. I respectfully suggest that, in future, you do not treat Mr Latham’s past attacks on The Sydney Institute as factually based – certainly not before you yourself check the facts. I corrected Mr Latham’s inaccurate assertions in letters published in *The Australian* and *The Australian Financial Review* on 14 February 2003 – where I made it clear that Mr Latham’s allegations were “totally and wilfully false”. Neither of my letters-to-the-editor, refuting Mr Latham’s assertions, is referred to in *The Electronic Whorehouse*.

- At Page 243 you write:

For the record, in 2002-3 the Institute’s board was chaired by Meredith Hellicar of the law firm Corrs Chambers Westgarth; the deputy chairman was Robert Ferguson of Bankers Trust...

For the record, Meredith Hellicar resigned from Corrs Chambers Westgarth in May 2001 – she had no connection with the company in 2002-03. Bankers Trust was acquired by the Principal Financial

Corporation in 1999 – in other words, the company did not exist in Australia in 2002-03 when you (falsely) claim that Rob Ferguson was still associated with it. Small errors, perhaps. But they are indicative of a failure to do basic research or to check material before rushing to print.

NON-SEQUITURS IN THE ELECTRONIC WHOREHOUSE – CHAPTER 10

- At Pages 229-230 you cite, with evident approval, Robert Manne’s accusations made against me in 1999. As you describe Professor Manne’s claim, there is an “ambiguity” in my “position” as executive director of The Sydney Institute and my “position” as a newspaper columnist. This is the very same Robert Manne about whom you make the following observation at Page 48:

Robert Manne is an intellectual undertaker. His dour, grim, accusatory and utterly humourless observations are presented with an impregnable sense of certainty, a self-intoxication that prompted the veteran foreign editor of *The Australian*, Greg Sheriden [sic], to step aside from his usual rounds and observe...

If Robert Manne is so flawed a commentator, why quote him as an authority against me?

- At Page 235 you assert that Tony Berg’s support for high levels of immigration is related to the fact that he is a “former chief executive of the giant building materials and energy company Boral”. You continue on Page 236:

Boral supplies the building industry; higher immigration levels means more building; more growth means more business for Boral. It is a happy confluence of beliefs shared by Gerard Henderson.

This overlooks the possibility that Tony Berg might support higher immigration levels because he sincerely believes in higher immigration. The fact is that Tony Berg supported higher immigration *before* he went to Boral (i.e. when he was at Macquarie Bank) and *after* he left Boral (i.e. now that he is chairman of ING). There is no evidence in your book that you have spoken to Mr Berg about immigration – rather you simply make allegations of self-interest. I have discussed immigration with Tony Berg on a number of occasions – and formed the view that he supports immigration essentially because he believes that immigration is beneficial to the economy and to the defence of Australia and has a small but, nevertheless, positive impact on slowing the ageing

process. Also, as a son of immigrants, he has witnessed the success of immigration in a personal way in his own lifetime. Anyrate, this is what he told me. Do you have any evidence of any kind to dispute this interpretation?

- At Page 236 you write:

Sometimes he [Gerard Henderson] has been able to use his columns to support both higher immigration and Israel, two causes dear to the hearts of his major financial supporters.

The (documented) fact is that I have supported both “higher immigration and Israel” since I was in university in the mid 1960s. Am I supposed to change my views because some, but by no means all, leading business figures support them? Or am I to opt for self-censorship in this instance? You tell me.

INCONSISTENCIES IN – CHAPTER 10

- At Page 229 you maintain the fact that, although I “had never worked as a journalist”, I set myself “up as a media critic in the early 1980s”. In fact, I commenced my media critic activities in the second half of the 1980s. In the early 1980s, I was a critic of Australia’s highly centralised industrial relations system – at a time when the IR status quo was supported by, inter alia, Labor, the Coalition, employer organisations and the trade union movement.

The clear implication in *The Electronic Whorehouse* is that someone who is not a journalist has scant credibility as a media critic. However, in Chapter 4, you support the right of Janet Albrechtsen to write a weekly column in *The Australian* – and imply that she would have done a good job as presenter of the ABC TV *Media Watch* program. Pretty inconsistent, eh? Especially since my academic and media qualifications are not dramatically different from those of Dr Albrechtsen.

- At Pages 230-231 you criticise me for mentioning Anne Henderson’s published work in some newspaper columns. You falsely allege that they were “free plugs” – and neglect to point out that they were but passing references to Anne Henderson’s work over a decade. I have never promoted any one of Ms Henderson’s books in any newspaper column at the time of their publication. As a columnist, my practice is to cite as many sources as possible. I do not believe that I should refrain from citing Anne Henderson’s work simply because we are married. In any event, the fact that we are married is well known. It is not as if – say – I was married to, or the partner of, someone with a different surname to my own who was, or is, prominent in the media.

The gravamen of your criticism at Pages 230-231 is that I should never refer to Anne Henderson in my columns. Turn to Page 232 and the criticism changes. Here you criticise me for *not* mentioning Anne Henderson in a column. Really. This is what you wrote at Page 232, with reference to Mark Latham's criticism of Anne Henderson in 2000 – where you argued that I should have referred to her in one of my own columns (despite the fact that the column in question had nothing whatsoever to do with her):

Gerard Henderson returned fire within a week in his newspaper column, without mentioning his wife.

- At Page 232 you wrote: “The Sydney Institute also employs someone called Stephen Matchett, who is evidently a big fan of the Hendersons...”. The Sydney Institute does not “employ” Stephen Matchett. What's more, he is not “called Stephen Matchett”. He is Stephen Matchett. You should be aware of him. Failing that, you could have checked out his identity. Dr Matchett has a Ph.D in history from Sydney University and is currently writing editorials and features for *The Australian*. The term “someone called” is clearly an attempt at denigration. Yet at Page 89 you identify “claiming to be a lawyer” as a put-down. What is the difference between “someone called” and “claiming to be” - when used as put-downs?

- At Pages 232-233 you criticise The Sydney Institute for printing material written by Stephen Matchett which mentions me. This you describe as “shameless”. Turn to Page 242, where a different criticism appears. Now you criticise me for *not* mentioning myself in my columns. This is what you wrote:

While his columns have often listed conservatives in the media, strangely the lists never include himself.

- At Page 238 you argue that the word “institute” at “the end of” a name is an example of “another American import”. You quote an American source in support of this proposition. Turn to Page 244 and the criticism changes. Now, you bag me for not following, or quoting, the work of the American commentator Christopher Jencks – who is a critic of the current immigration policy of the United States. In other words, the criticism is now that I have *not* adopted the “American import” option.

- At Page 246 you write:

In February 2003, after yet another Henderson column criticising Mark Latham, the Labor head-kicker responded in federal parliament with characteristic hyperbole by describing The Sydney

Institute as “a wholly owned Alder subsidiary”.

Here you mention Mr Latham's allegation – but not my response which appeared in letters to *The Australian* and *The Australian Financial Review* on 14 February 2003. I also attempted, unsuccessfully as it turned out, to have a right-of-reply published in the *Hansard*. It is the practice of the House of Representatives Privileges Committee, so far, to refuse all such requests – unlike its counterpart in the Senate. As I have previously pointed out, the Adler annual contribution to The Sydney Institute – while appreciated – was never enough to pay the Institute's telephone bill in any one year.

This is the third occasion in Chapter 10 in which you quote from Mark Latham – thus giving credibility to his past attacks on me and The Sydney Institute. This is the very same Mark Latham whom you criticise in *The Electronic Whorehouse* for making unfounded and scurrilous attacks on individuals “under the protection of parliamentary privilege” (Page 89). And this is the very same Mark Latham, concerning whom you quote Christopher Pyne MP with approval at Page 92:

He [Latham] adds to the most negative stereotype of politicians who come into this House and use the privileges that the House extends to slander other members of the Australian community who do not have the opportunity to come into the House and defend themselves....He can come into the House and slander these people with the paltry evidence that he put into the House and they have no capacity to sue him.

- In fact, your inconsistency is such that you even distort a Mark Latham quote in order to favour him at the expense of me. At Page 234 you quote Mr Latham as commenting:

There are many...mistakes in Henderson's article, errors I will correct elsewhere. My great sin was to publicly identify 30 odd errors in a [Anne] Henderson book in 1999. Gerard has never recovered.

This is totally disingenuous. The fact is that in his letter-to-the-editor from which the above quote is taken (which was published in the *Sydney Morning Herald* and *The Age* on 25 July 2002), Mark Latham made no reference whatsoever to Anne Henderson. In other words, in *The Electronic Whorehouse*, you have added a name, in square brackets, to correct a Latham error. In fact, Mr Latham's letter only

mentioned *me*. So, Mr Latham's claim to have publicly identified "30 odd errors" in one of my books in 1999 was manifestly false. In fact, I did not publish a book in 1999. I received apologies from both the *Sydney Morning Herald* and *The Age* for having published Mr Latham's letter without first checking his claims with me. For the record, Mark Latham did not correct "30-odd errors" in one of Anne Henderson's books, either – but that is another story.

It seems that – according to *The Electronic Whorehouse* - when Mark Latham attacks Janet Albrechtsen, he lacks credibility. But when Mark Latham attacks The Sydney Institute or its staff, he speaks with credibility. This is disturbingly inconsistent – even by your evidently inconsistent standards.

- Then there is the issue of The Sydney Institute. At Page 235 you maintain that The Sydney Institute "is basically a talking shop" and you acknowledge that there is not any evidence "that Henderson has ever taken corporate funding to change or modify his views". Yet you told Peter Thompson on 7 November 2003 (Radio National Breakfast Program) that in *The Electronic Whorehouse* you "criticise not so much Henderson as The Sydney Institute, or his use of it". You do not say how I "use" what is essentially a forum for debate and discussion. As you will recall, I asked you to address the Institute on the occasion of the publication of *Among the Barbarians* in 1998. You declined on the basis that you were "too tired". But, in any event, the offer was made. That's how the Institute works – it is a forum for widescale debate and discussion (as a glance at the Institute's program demonstrates). What's wrong with that?

By the way, even your interests are catered for. Speakers at the Institute on immigration have included Philip Ruddock and Katharine Betts (whose work is referred to approvingly in your book but whose name you misspelt on two occasions). Speakers at the Institute on Israel have included David Pryce Jones and Boaz Ganor – along with Tariq Ali and Mustafha Barghouthi.

As indicated, you should know this. After all, you have attended some Institute functions, spoken up on at least one occasion during the question/discussion period and quote at length in your book from Paul Keating's address to the Institute titled "The Australian Media" (on 14 June 2000). I note, for the record, that *The Electronic Whorehouse* makes no reference to the fact that Mr Keating's speech was delivered to the Institute or that it is published in the Institute's journal *The Sydney Papers*.

CONCLUSION

Space and time do not permit me to cover all the misunderstandings and misinterpretations in Chapter 10 – in particular, your tendency to quote without any reference to context – or in the rest of *The Electronic Whorehouse*.

In conclusion, I should say that having read *The Electronic Whorehouse* – I'm not too sure what your book is about. In fact, you do not deal exclusively with the electronic media – so it is not clear precisely what your thesis is.

The Electronic Whorehouse commences with the story of the Claire Swire email which found its way around the world. This is a familiar tale – except you take delight in the titillation involved in the case. Gratuitously, you publish all the private sexual references. Is this really necessary?

In your conclusion you complain that the "news media" errs in "constantly patronising or belittling elected representatives of parliament". This from a columnist who has written at length about how Malcolm Fraser "lost his trousers" in Memphis in 1986 (your *Sydney Morning Herald* column of 6 October 2002 refers). And this from a columnist whose discussion on Laurie Oakes' revelation of the Gareth Evans/Cheryl Kernot affair commenced with seven paragraphs about the (alleged) fact that "prominent people" visit Salon Kitty's "bondage parlour on Cleveland Street in Sydney" (your *Sydney Morning Herald* column of 8 July 2002 refers). As with *The Electronic Whorehouse*, there was much in this column of the titillation genre – including reference to "latex", "buttocks", the "BDSM" scene and so on, along with the going rates for such services.

How hypocritical. And how very odd – in a kinky sort of way. Meanwhile, I have to get back to what you describe as the "whorehouse". See you there, perhaps. Or perhaps not.

Yours sincerely
Gerard Henderson



BOOK REVIEWS

John McConnell

Keith Murdoch: Founder of a Media Empire
By R. M. Younger
Harper Collins Publishers, hb 2003
rrp \$49.95
ISBN O 7322 7028 6

When a young Keith Murdoch sought a position in journalism, he received a less than enthusiastic response. The newspaper chief-of-staff conducting the interview turned to Keith Murdoch’s mother advising her to obtain a bank job for her son. “He’ll never succeed in journalism,” he declared. The rest, as they say, is history.

Keith Murdoch did enter journalism. He was so successful in the newspaper industry that he went on to found a media chain. Indeed, Keith Murdoch became so successful that historian Geoffrey Blainey included him in a list of the 20 most influential Australians. Keith Murdoch’s story is a chronicle of Australian achievement.

R. M. Younger’s *Keith Murdoch: Founder of a Media Empire* records how Murdoch gained public admiration and considerable influence during his media career. Initially, Keith Murdoch gained a journalistic position in the Federal press gallery with *The (Melbourne) Age*. The Commonwealth Parliament was located in Melbourne at the time.

Later, Keith Murdoch became editor-in-chief of *The (Melbourne) Herald* and subsequently Chairman of the Herald and Weekly Times. He was to develop the Herald and Weekly Times company into a national media organisation. Today, his son, (Rupert) heads a giant international media enterprise, News Corporation.

Gallipoli, prime ministers and politicians, the conscription debate during the First World War, Australia’s relations with Britain and the United States, Fleet Street, World War II and the early years of the Cold War form just part of the background to the Keith Murdoch story. R. M. Younger credits Keith Murdoch with a crucial role in revealing the reality of the Gallipoli campaign to the authorities. The book presents Keith Murdoch as a dedicated family man and as an inspired and respected leader of an expanding media company.

In addition to his family, Keith Murdoch was devoted to his newspaper craft, the arts and to Australia (he was the first Australian-born member of this Scottish family). He emerges from the book’s pages as a man of integrity and sound character.

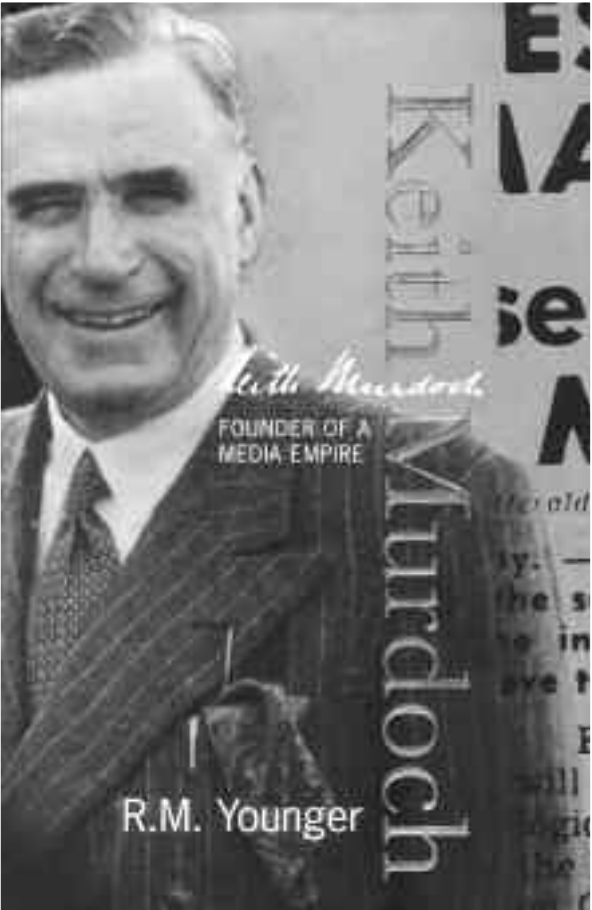
Keith Murdoch possessed a sense of mission. He placed a high value on journalistic ethics and standards. He also placed great stress on advancing Australian perspectives, individual freedom, the importance of listening carefully to others, as well as the need for an independent media in an Australian democracy.

During World War II, Keith Murdoch accepted the position of Director of Information for a brief period. The appointment stirred up controversy and conflict among newspaper and political circles and in the heart of Labor politician Arthur Calwell in particular.

R. M. Younger argues that Keith Murdoch helped to establish a viable newsprint industry in Australia and that he played an influential role in organising the Australian-American Association. Murdoch believed that a nation was on the downward path if it

encouraged citizens to look to government for everything.

Younger concludes the book with a “Dramatis Personae” – brief notes on the individuals who exercised a significant role in the Keith Murdoch story. Not surprisingly, one particular former chief-of-staff fails to make the 22 page list.



Death Sentence: The Decay of Public Language

By Don Watson

Knopf (Random House Australia Pty.

Ltd.) hb 2003,

rrp \$29.95

ISBN I 74051 2065

“Citizens unite!”

“We have a right to a language with verbs and active sentences.”

Don Watson conveys this essential message in *Death Sentence: The Decay of Public Language*. He targets public language – the language of public life, the language of political and business leaders and civil servants. Public language, he argues, now permeates the mission statements of virtually all corporations and companies, government departments and agencies, libraries, galleries, universities, military and intelligence organisations, and increasingly the world of politics.

Public language includes words such as closure, empowered, enhance, commitment, strategic and prioritise. These words, he says, clog the language. They cut us off from thought, feeling and possibility.

There are certain things that you cannot do, Don Watson writes, with this public language. You cannot use it to describe or convey human emotions. You cannot use it to tell a joke. Nor can you use it to write a poem or sing a song. He reproduces examples of public language to demonstrate how speaking in such a code equates to journeying into a fog.

Don Watson is in no doubt that connecting words is an art of deep importance. A former speechwriter to Paul Keating, Don Watson is indeed talented at connecting words and creating images. He penned *Recollections of a Bleeding Heart*, his award winning personal recollection of the Keating Government, and believes that the language of modern politics operates to persuade doubters to conform while helping to confine and constrain those politicians who possess imagination.

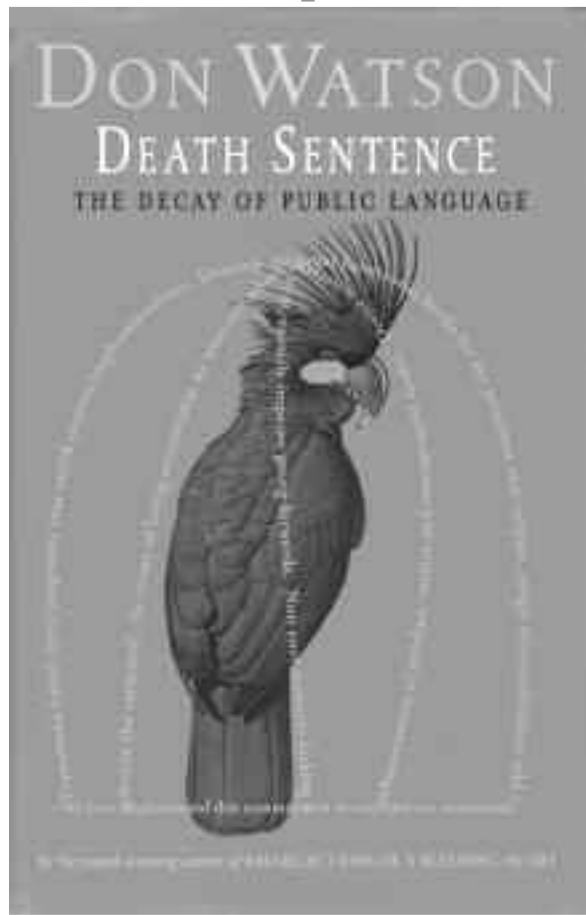
Don Watson believes that democracy depends upon plain language. Public language, however, is the language of power and influence. It is the language of leaders rather than the led. The powerful vandalise the language, he believes, while showing indifference to the weak.

To engage in an argument about public language, therefore, equates to arguing about liberty. While vocabularies narrow and shrink, Watson argues, the English language spreads ever more widely. *Death Sentence* deals with a real problem, albeit not a new problem.

But is *Death Sentence* a case of publishing an essay one draft too soon? Don Watson’s essay contains inconsistencies. It also lacks systematic organisation. The essay is divided into apparent chapters without headings or particular themes. Go after the meaning of words, the author urges readers. Yet the problem, he says, is not too serious. We should not become obsessive about how we express thoughts. We should resist, he says.

However, resistance is futile, he declares. Besides, “powerful forces including possibly the whole tide of history,” Watson states, “are against us.” Whatever that means. Elsewhere, he writes: “The historical view suggests we can relax. English has survived everything that’s been thrown at it ...More than just surviving these upheavals, it adapts and grows, is strengthened and enriched by them.” Pardon?

The author’s list of possible causes for the decay of public language includes schools of marketing and business, communications theory, popular choice, the “fading” of the King James Bible, sport, and sociology. Aussies too. Yes, unlike Americans, we exhibit “a stubborn refusal to be articulate”. This is due, Don Watson suggests, to our gaining self-government without a struggle. It all came too easy. We Australians, he writes, have a pronounced leaning to the practical and the laconic. Consider our national anthem, he says. “Advance Australia Fair” illustrates passivity, monotony and banality. We all need to do more drafting. There!



**FROM INDUSTRY ASSISTANCE TO PRODUCTIVITY:
30 YEARS OF "THE COMMISSION"
Productivity Commission, Canberra
Commonwealth of Australia, pb 2003
ISBN I 74037 139 9**

How is this for timing? Here we move from Don Watson's *Death Sentence* to a report on a government commission. A Productivity Commission booklet no less. Yes it does contain buzz words such as enhance and productivity. The booklet in question is *From Industry Assistance to Productivity: 30 Years of "The Commission"*. Beware! For here is a government institution writing its own history.

However the intention, we are informed, is to seek to avoid political controversy.

Margo Hone was the principal writer guided by Jonathan Pincus. The Industries Assistance Commission (1970s vintage), the Industries Commission (1980s variety) and now the Productivity Commission are the lineal descendants of the Tariff Board formed in 1921.

Following an introductory chapter, there is a chapter on the Tariff Board. Two chapters on the Industries Assistance Commission follow. Chapter 5 looks at the Industries Commission while chapters 6 and 7 focus on the Productivity Commission.

From Industry Assistance to Productivity covers a period in Australian history when the nation began to undertake a variety of microeconomic reforms. It is a period when a shift occurred from a narrow protectionist approach to a more-open, pro-competition focus – with a developing awareness of community-wide implications stemming from the reform process.

The booklet makes it clear that the Productivity Commission has a broader role and scope than its predecessors. The Productivity Commission also analyses and explores adjustment and distributional issues.

Its reports include topics as diverse as gambling, the Great Barrier Reef, indigenous disadvantage, infrastructure services and competition policy.

From Industry Assistance to Productivity expresses a clear preference in favour of three propositions: - there is a cost to other community groups when one group receives preferential treatment; we should not delay reform benefits by waiting for an ideal time; and there are benefits in phased implementation.

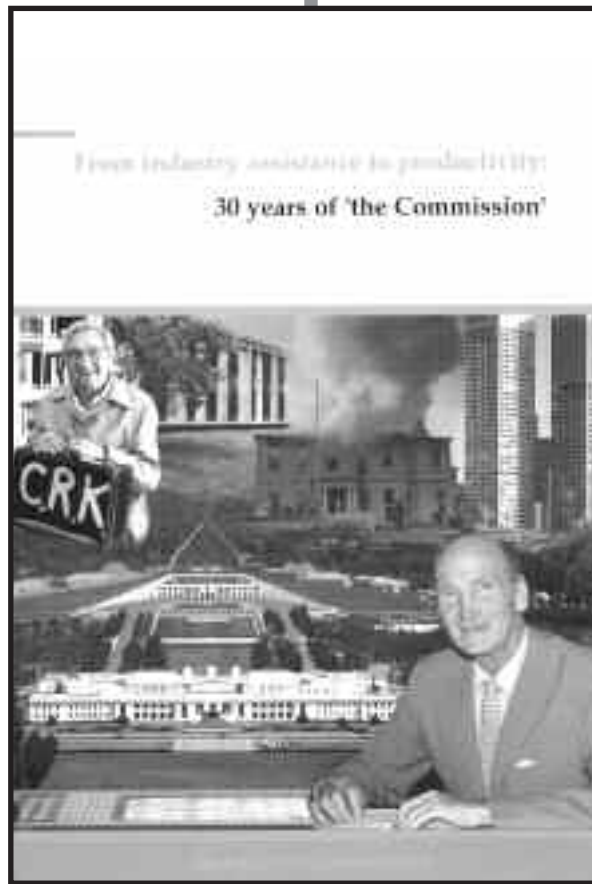
A series of boxes are spread throughout the pages of the Commission paper. They provide brief but useful information on a range of issues such as the Vernon Report, the tariff cut of July 1973, changing Commission staff levels, National Competition Policy and performance indicators for infrastructure.

The Commission has had its roller coaster rides. However, it has played an important role overall in helping to improve national economic performance. It has assisted the spreading of greater awareness of the benefits and drawbacks associated with increasing competition and productivity. It has employed economic tools to analyse important social dimensions of policy issues.

From Industry Assistance to Productivity contains a number of newspaper cartoons. They provide moments of light relief and are a sensible inclusion. After all, some people take the work of the Commission very seriously.

One industry lobbyist informed me that in discussions with government ministers, he referred invariably to the Assassination Commission. Occasionally, he said, he substituted the Annihilation Commission for light relief. I doubt that he will enjoy the cartoons – or the general policy direction, for that matter, in which we continue to move.

John McConnell is the author of several senior textbooks



OBITUARIES

Gerard Henderson

PATRICK JAMES O'FARRELL
17-9-1933 – 25-12-2003

Professor Patrick O'Farrell should rank within the "Top 10" of Australian historians in the 20th Century. Many of his colleagues recognised this. Yet there is no reference to his work in the text or bibliography of Stuart Macintyre's *A Concise History of Australia*, currently the most authoritative general history of the nation. How come? Addressing The Sydney Institute in November 1992, Dr O'Farrell argued that "those who had no religion of their own in the present could never see the importance of religion in the lives of others in the past".

Born in Greymouth, on the isolated west coast of New Zealand's south island, O'Farrell was educated at Marist Brothers High School in Greymouth and at the University of Canterbury at Christchurch. In typical irreverent humour, Patrick told his family that Greymouth "was a great place to get away from, and fast". At Christchurch he met Deirdre MacShane, a student who worked part-time in the university library. They married in 1956 and moved to Australia, where Patrick took up a position at the Australian National University in Canberra.

Patrick O'Farrell's initial work was in labour history. His Ph.D thesis was the subject of his first book, *Harry Holland: Militant Socialist*, a biography of the Australian born political activist who became a key figure in the New Zealand Labour Party.

In an article in the April 1991 issue of *The Australasian Catholic Record* (O'Farrell was a long-serving member of the journal's board), he referred to the occasion when he "first turned from labour history to Catholic history in 1966". O'Farrell added that he did so "reluctantly and from a sense of obligation" and not at his "own prompting". This stemmed from the "conviction – and that of my wife who bore both the domestic consequences of the decision and some of the actual workload – that the ...Australian Catholic Church urgently needed a history...". It was some decades before others stepped-up to write accounts of the Protestant churches in Australia.

In 1968 Patrick O'Farrell's *The Catholic Church in Australia: A Short History* was published – followed by *The Catholic Church and Community* in 1977, which was subsequently revised and republished. 1969 saw the publication of the two volume

Documents in Australian Catholic History, which Patrick co-edited with Deirdre. This body of work provided the bedrock for writings on Australian Catholicism which blossomed in the 1970s and 1980s. In 1975 Patrick and Deirdre co-authored the pamphlet *The Status of Women*, the inaugural study of the role of women in the Australian Catholic Church.

In the early 1970s O'Farrell published two important books on Ireland and Britain – *Ireland's English Question* and *England and Ireland since 1800*. All this in addition to numerous articles and his teaching duties at the University of New South Wales (UNSW) in Sydney – where he was appointed a lecturer in 1959 and given a personal chair in 1972. A brilliant career, by any standard – for a traditionalist who wrote in 1970 that "the prime object of history is to know and understand the past, not to praise or blame it".

Not long after, tragedy struck. In 1977, at age 44, O'Farrell entered hospital for elective surgery for a potentially serious heart condition. Following what his family (graciously) describes as a "medical accident", he suffered a massive stroke. He learnt to walk and speak again and taught himself to write with his left hand.

In a letter to lawyer/historian Jeff Kildea, which he dated Good Friday 2003, Patrick O'Farrell referred to his "best part of two years visiting as an out-patient" and commented that his "subsequent 40 hospital admissions (in public wards only) have been a vast education in the human condition...".

In spite of his evident disability, Patrick O'Farrell continued to teach, comment and write – greatly assisted by his wife. The ideas were essentially Patrick's – but were invariably honed following discussion with Deirdre. She also helped with the research and put his now left-handed script into print. It was very much a team effort. There was a stream of journal articles in the final quarter century of O'Farrell's life, along with a number of books – including *The Irish in Australia*, *Vanished Kingdoms: Irish in Australia and New Zealand* and *UNSW: A Portrait*.

Patrick O'Farrell was a committed Catholic but in no sense into hagiography. He was critical of the inability of the bishops – initially Irish, later Australian – "to locate the Catholic faith in a real Australian cultural setting". He saw the Church in Australia essentially as "clerical, authoritarian, non-intellectual...". At times, O'Farrell was critical of two long-serving archbishops – Daniel Mannix in Melbourne and James Duhig in Brisbane.

However, he reserved his harshest assessments for the Sydney Hierarchy. O'Farrell wrote a devastating analysis of Archbishop Michael Kelly (1850-1940) in the *Australian Dictionary of Biography* – objecting, in particular, to Kelly's ostentatious "piety" which he depicted as "narrow, austere and rigidly disciplined".

No surprise, then, that Kelly was “hostile to any lay initiative and insistent on total clerical control”. This was the Sydney way.

Patrick O’Farrell’s New Zealand background (he became an Australian citizen in 1983) placed him in a unique position to adjudicate in the “hierarchy wars” which consumed Australian Catholicism in the 1950s – with Dr Mannix in Melbourne and Cardinal Norman Gilroy (assisted by Bishop James Carroll) in Sydney as the principal antagonists. O’Farrell rejected the fashionable view that Mannix was authoritarian and interventionist – whereas Gilroy/Carroll did not interfere in Australian politics.

He described the Sydney Hierarchy as “no less about power – perhaps more ruthlessly so – in the name of causes which also blurred religious issues and loyalties with factional political positions” than their Melbourne counterparts (who encouraged B.A. Santamaria’s Catholic Social Studies Movement). It was just that Gilroy/Carroll barracked for the ALP – while Mannix publicly backed the breakaway Democratic Labor Party, which was supported by Santamaria.

In 1992 O’Farrell acknowledged that Manning Clark (concerning whom he was, at times, critical) had written a history of European Settlement which “was a first step away from the simple British model” and that “the Aborigines entered later”. He claimed that he had “offered the Irish as a key” but acknowledged that additional contributions to Australian historiography would be made in the future.

John Howard twice quoted from O’Farrell’s work during visits to Australia by the Irish president and prime minister – in 1998 and 2000 respectively. Patrick would have appreciated the recognition. However, he rejected any assessment of his adopted country which focused on its British heritage.

Perhaps O’Farrell’s most important contribution to the history debate was to demonstrate that there was more than one cultural influence, from European settlement in 1788. He maintained that it was the refusal of Catholics (of predominantly Irish background) to be treated as second-class citizens which created the essence of democratic pluralism in Australia. The years 1916-1925 were identified as crucial in this regard, due primarily to Mannix’s defiance of the Protestant Ascendancy.

Patrick O’Farrell’s insistence on the highest standards and essential contrariness, in matters of both church and state, contributed to his skills as a teacher and writer. His disdain of fashion also assisted him to recognise the importance of religion in an ostensibly secular society. He is survived by Deirdre, children Clare, Gerard, Virginia, Richard and Justin, and six grandchildren.

Gerard Henderson. An abridged version of this article was published in *The Age*.

LES HOLLINGS 25-2-1923 – 19-12-2003

Rupert Murdoch’s decision to establish *The Australian* in 1964 – as a national daily newspaper – had an enormous impact on the Australian print media. To understand how, there is no need to look beyond the *Sydney Morning Herald* and *The Age* circa 1963. Each had an effective monopoly of the broadsheet market in Sydney and Melbourne respectively – and each exhibited the signs of laziness and complacency which invariably accompany a lack of competition. The advent of *The Australian* in the markets of Sydney and Melbourne led to an increase in standards of Australia’s two leading newspapers at the time. Put simply, competition resulted in an improved product as the one-time broadsheet monopoly market disappeared.

Initially *The Australian* struggled. It was a difficult task for a start-up newspaper to sell product each day across a vast continent, especially since the potential market was relatively small – compared with the national market in Britain, for example. In the 1960s there was no national broadsheet in the United States. However, over time, *The Australian* improved both its sales and its quality to become one of the nation’s leading newspapers. Moreover, its very existence continued to put competitive pressure on other papers – particularly the *Sydney Morning Herald* and *The Age*. Yet, for some considerable time, *The Australian* continued to make losses.

Les Hollings, a Yorkshireman who was born in Hull, worked on a regional newspaper in Britain and then obtained positions in London with the *Daily Telegraph* and *The Times*. In 1964 he moved with his family (wife Joan and sons Stephen and Nicholas) to Perth where he was employed on *The West Australian*. Les Hollings was interested in Rupert Murdoch’s concept of a national newspaper. So in 1967 he commenced work with *The Australian* – initially in Canberra and then in Sydney (when the newspaper re-located in Australia’s largest city in March 1967) – continuing there until retirement in late 1988.

At *The Australian* and *The Weekend Australian* (which replaced the *Saturday Australian* in 1977 and became the paper’s principal income earner), Les Hollings worked as night editor, deputy editor and editor. He was editor from June 1975 until April 1980 and, again, from January 1983 to December 1984. In December 1984 he was appointed editor-in-chief, remaining in this position until his retirement some four years later. Les Hollings was appointed to the board of News Limited in 1987 and retained this position for some years beyond his retirement from

full-time employment. He also wrote a column for some News Limited Sunday newspapers. His final article was published in the Adelaide *Sunday Mail* on 23 November 2003 – in it he wrote that this would be his last column and wished his readers “farewell”. He died suddenly less than a month later. As ever, Les Hollings’ last column was of the advice-giving genre, this time to John Howard whom he urged to make sure that the United States “does not turn isolationist”. The Prime Minister attended Les Hollings’ funeral in Sydney on Christmas Eve along with many senior News Limited executives and present or past editors.

Les Hollings was a great editor, in the traditional sense of the term. He loved newspapers and believed in the need for a paper to advocate causes. At times his judgment was ill-founded and/or erratic – at other times he was ahead of colleagues in identifying the key issues of the day. He was a person who did not much like discussing money, despite the fact that, as an editor, he had to meet budgets. In any event, Les Hollings played a key role in *The Australian* in the early 1980s when the paper became profitable on a long-term basis. He was not an accomplished columnist but, as an editor, he knew how to identify and encourage talent – and he loved the chase for stories. His contribution to the Australian media, over some four decades, was substantial.

Les Hollings had interests outside the media and beyond cars (his great recreational hobby). He was, for a while, deputy chairman of the Australian National Gallery in Canberra. And he was The Sydney Institute’s inaugural deputy chairman from mid 1989 until September 1993. He was not much of a networker, being somewhat shy in nature, and he did not involve himself in financial matters. Perhaps his most significant impact at The Sydney Institute board meetings was his insistence – from the inaugural occasion – that Institute staff should have complete editorial independence concerning their own writings, comments and activities – and that this independence should extend to guest speakers at Institute functions, whose addresses were subsequently published in *The Sydney Papers*. The Hollings position became official Institute policy from the very first board meeting.

Les Hollings was not really an ideas person. But he was a supporter of the ideas of others and, as such, played an important role in encouraging debate and discussion – that is, public conversation – in his adopted country. Les was much appreciated in life by his many friends – including those at The Sydney Institute. He will be missed.

Gerard Henderson



REVIEW OF THE REVIEWERS

Stephen Matchett

Many scholars of Australian history practise their craft with little regard to the issues of the hour. But others are anxious to ensure that their take on the state of society dominates and seem to believe that whoever sets the historical agenda will make the policy running. The result is that the writing of Australian history is polarised between works of traditional scholarship and books that ransack the past to support a contemporary agenda. The difference between the two approaches is demonstrated by the style and subjects of five new works: Geoffrey Blainey, *Black Kettle and Full Moon: Daily Life in a Vanished Australia* (Melbourne, Viking, 2003), Judith Brett, *Australian Liberals and the Moral Middle Class: From Alfred Deakin to John Howard* (Melbourne, Cambridge University Press, 2003), Inga Clendinnen, *Dancing with Strangers* (Melbourne, Text, 2003), Stuart Macintyre, *The History Wars*, (Melbourne, Melbourne University Press, 2003) and Susan Ryan and Troy Bramston (eds) *The Hawke Government: A Critical Retrospective* (North Melbourne, Pluto, 2003).

But there is more going on in the partisan approach than historians anxious to impose their own contemporary political views using history as a vehicle. The writing of some academics now reflects the bitterness of Robert Manne’s moral middle class – the self-appointed opinion leaders in the public service and universities – whose old suzerainty over public life ended a decade ago. The academic orthodoxy that the most important issue in Australian history and, by extension, contemporary politics is the dispossession of indigenous Australians, has become the issue the historical establishment is using to reassert their intellectual leadership.

The response to Keith Windschuttle’s argument that Tasmania’s Aborigines were the principal architects of their own demise demonstrates the fate that awaits those who question the party line. Windschuttle was certainly dissected on his evidence and his methodology, which was all fair enough. He dished out plenty of criticism and was a fair target to cop some back. But he was also criticised as an outsider who should have left the subject to his scholarly superiors, demonstrating how sensitive some

academics are to any challenge to their status and presumed right to set the intellectual agenda. Thus Stuart Macintyre told The Sydney Institute last winter that writers who disputed the orthodoxy were doing the nation a disservice and that “Australians deserve more from their history” than the conservatives were giving them. So much for attempting to describe what happened in the past without interpreting people’s behaviour by the standards of our own age.

HISTORY AS LIVED EXPERIENCE

Geoffrey Blainey’s book is not the sort of history that politically committed scholars likely to agree with Macintyre will approve. Blainey presents the second half of the nineteenth century as a golden age for most Australians, who enjoyed a standard of living unmatched in most of the world. But it was an age about to end, with the Depression of the 1890s and then the wholesale misery of the first half of the twentieth century reshaping the country.

Blainey’s book does not have much to say about Aborigines. He is silent on crimes against women and non-English speaking migrants. According to the Macintyre credo of history that, “the facts do not exist prior to the interpretation that establishes their significance” (*The History Wars*, 29), Blainey’s book barely makes it as history at all, being a compendium of interesting information on the way a previous generation of Australians lived.

This book portrays a lost world where the absence of electricity made life unimaginably harder than it is today. It describes how the lack of standard time and the cost of travel made their world very local. Blainey talks about the tyranny of the dark, the way moonless nights restricted life and how inadequate common candles were for almost any job. And how the climate shaped diet in ways that we cannot conceive.

Lay readers interested in the hardscrabble lives their ancestors lived will find it fascinating. Social historians will find it a source of immensely useful data on the way we lived then. Blainey does not

burden the text with detailed notes, which would have enhanced the book’s scholarly standing but there is virtually nothing in the text so contentious that it cannot be taken on trust. His estimate that there were 200,000 bicycles in Australia in 1900 (121) may be unsourced but a great deal less depends on it than questionable statements about Aborigines killed in conflict with settlers that asserted by both sides in the current brawl.

If Blainey is guilty at all of the triumphalism attributed to historians who eschew the fashionable orthodoxy of gender and race crimes it is in his celebration of the way Australian life improved in the second half of the nineteenth century. Material

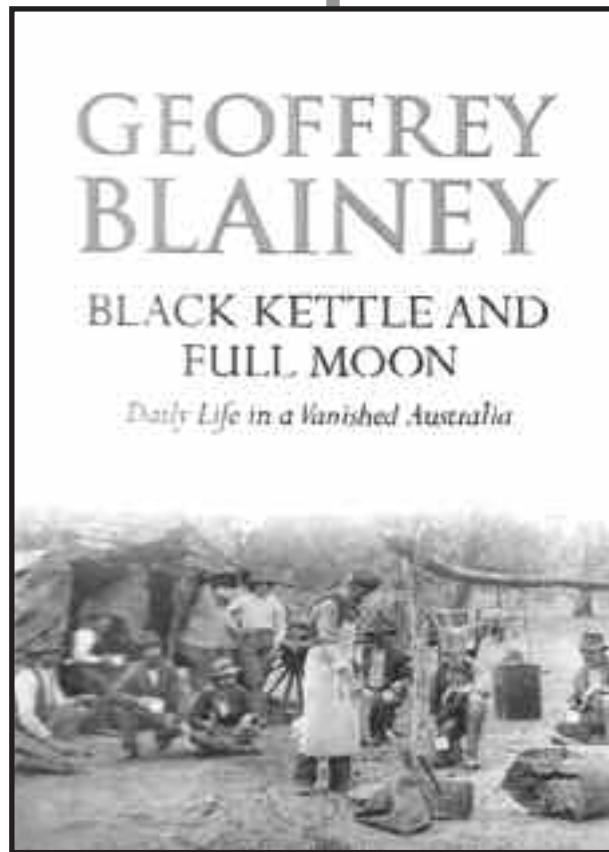
progress changed Australia from a world where life had more in common with the middle ages than today and where technology transformed existence in ways probably more profound than anything we have seen in the last 20 years. Ask people whether they need the internet more than running water.

However, the book’s strengths are also its overall weakness and readers who find the routines of everyday life mundane will find no fascination in the text. Orthodox historians might argue that, by focusing on the lives of ordinary Australians rather than their society’s crimes, Blainey is running a line of his own. But the lived experience of ordinary people in nineteenth century Australia can only be explained in

terms they could have understood. By chronicling not criticising their lives, Blainey shows how scholarship need not turn the record of history into ammunition for contemporary disputes.

HISTORY - AS (POLEMICAL) WAR

Which is what Stuart Macintyre has done in his study of the politics of Australian history over the last 50 years. His argument is familiar to readers who followed the dispute catalysed by Keith Windschuttle’s claims that historians of the dispossession of nineteenth century Aborigines have gone beyond what the evidence can support. Macintyre suggests those who dispute the academic orthodoxy are



reactionaries, intent on imposing their old-fashioned opinions on what sort of country Australia should be on the rest of us. He also argues they are bullies, intent on howling down all those with a different view of Australia's past. The foundation for both arguments is Macintyre's outrage that the authority of academic historians is being questioned. Macintyre may not be an advocate of an intellectual closed shop but, in his attacks on people he does not consider proper historians, he sometimes sounds like one.

Macintyre is desperate to present his profession, at least those historians who agree with him, as being unfairly attacked by journalists, op ed writers and business lobbyists just for doing their jobs. Some readers might wonder what Macintyre was doing differently when he wrote that anthropologist Ron Brunton's position in the Hindmarsh Island debate was "belied by his own service of interests opposed to Aboriginal rights" (153). Or why he dismissed Keith Windschuttle for lacking compassion for the Aboriginal victims of European settlement (170) - as if the job of historians is to express compassion rather than to simply set out what happened.

He is certainly more temperate in his description of the controversy Geoffrey Blainey generated with his comments on Asian immigration in the 1980s and the way his colleagues in the History Department at Melbourne University ganged up on him. But he gets stuck right into Chris Mitchell, while editor of Brisbane's *Courier Mail* newspaper, for publishing allegations on Manning Clark's connections with communism. As far as Macintyre is representative of his politically engaged and aggressive colleagues, it is hard to see how anybody could ever assume that academic historians are gentle souls, unable to defend themselves in the hurly burly of debate.

But Macintyre is doing more than promoting the orthodox agenda that ignores the achievement of Anglo-Australian settlers, soldiers and explorers. His book asserts the authority of academic historians to set the agenda and he certainly made it plain that

proper historians should be respected because they are the ones with the skills and training to make sense of all the meanings we can attribute to the past. But Macintyre cannot have it both ways, asserting that there are all sorts of constructions of the past but giving short shrift to those that do not suit his political agenda. Macintyre is a polemicist as committed to his cause as the people he criticises, and no more subtle.

DEBATING BOB HAWKE

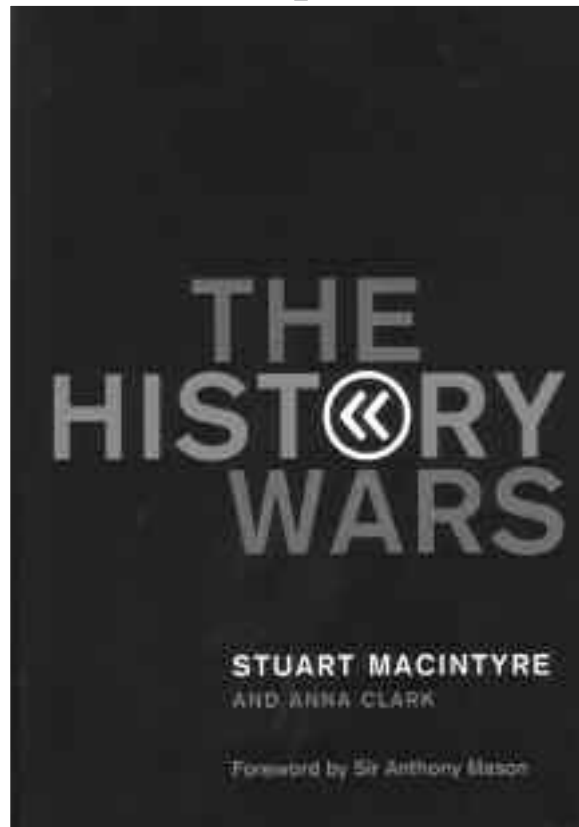
Which also applies to some of the contributors in Ryan and Bramston's anthology, *The Hawke Government*. Ironically, the strongest contributions to the collection are by the journalists and public policy

specialists and some of the most partisan - and badly written - by the academics. For an outrageous exercise in partisan pleading it is hard to ignore Mary Kalantzis' essay on the Hawke Government's immigration and multiculturalism policies. Professor Kalantzis appears to view the past as a useful source of ammunition to hurl at the Howard Government. Her essay sets Hawke's achievements high by contrasting them with the behaviour of "the socially backward-looking government" of John Howard that wants Australia to "hide behind a blustering, bullying, international stance" (311).

There is more of the same from Tony Moore, who argued that the Hawke-Keating economic reforms

debased the rights and prosperity of ordinary Australians, because, "so many of Labor's good policy ideas were blunted or undermined by a poor grasp of class" (125). That Mr Moore could suggest the government that transformed the Australian economy and built the basis for today's job rich, high-growth and low inflation economy did not have the interests of ordinary Australians in mind demonstrates a remarkably dexterous ability to shape history to suit.

Senior historian and biographer of Curtin and Chifley, David Day, pulled a similar stunt, taking it upon himself to channel the consciences of Labor's two



great leaders to give Hawke a blistering serve. According to Day, Hawke took Scullin's road and let down Labor's supporters who believed the ALP should stand for "a fairer and more caring society". In contrast, Curtin and Chifley were reformers committed to using their political power to improving the lives of ordinary people (400). It is a comparison that may suit Day's sense of grievance, but is not supported by all the evidence in his own biographies. Chifley was the Paul Keating of his time, a pragmatic reformer who understood that the true believers had no monopoly on common sense and compassion. However, Chifley helped destroy his own government with the attempt to nationalise the banks. But, as Day's biography shows, he did not act out of levelling zeal but to regulate the economy in an Australia not yet subject to the independent authority of the Reserve Bank.

The idea that the Hawke-Keating government somehow failed ordinary Australians is demolished in the essay on economics by journalists Alan Mitchell and David Bassanese. Their charts demonstrating how structural reform generated growth, and jobs, proved the point that Labor in the 1980s delivered for all Australians.

The most useful contributions to the collection are those which do not have a barrow to push but just set down the detail. Neal Blewett's essay on cabinet government under Hawke is a gem. As a participant, Blewett writes from experience of people and events and also provides an analysis of the decision making process. It will serve later scholars well as a source. Bob Hogg's essay on Hawke's election campaigns was less analytic and more anecdotal but filled in some gaps in the record, and perhaps even settled some scores.

Most of the policy specific essays were rant-free. Journalist Anne Davies made the point that Hawke did not deliver much needed economic reform in all areas, notably failing on the docks and in telecommunications. Julian Disney argued that the internal tensions during the last three years of the Hawke Government contributed to the length and depth of the recession of the early 1990s.

The strength of the collection came from the people who saw the Hawke Government close up rather than those who study it. The irony is that some of the academic contributions to this collection are far more partisan than the essays of people who actually worked with Hawke.

HISTORY - AND SNOBBERY

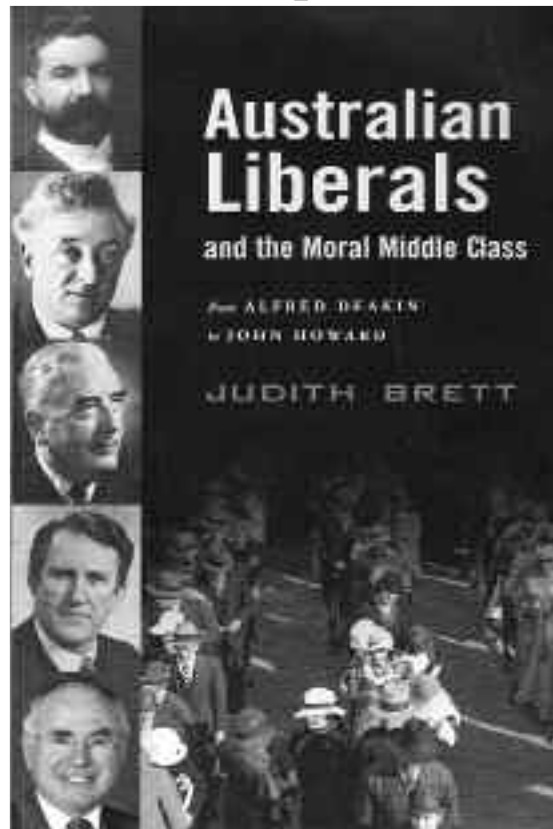
That even senior historians cannot escape the prison of the present is also clear in Judith Brett's long awaited new book. As a successor to her 1992 study on the ideology and salesmanship of Robert Menzies this is an important work, a valuable addition to the thin literature on past political conservatism.

Brett has the academic's habit of over intellectualising,

of explaining her ideas in more depth than they merit and it is easy to lose the magnitude of her achievement in thickets of complexity. But while her new book is occasionally irritating to read, Brett has identified and described the values and characteristics of a lost tribe of Australians. The moral middle class she writes of was motivated in its politics by ideals, often religious. The middle class stood for a vision of Australia as a self-disciplined nation that paid its way and was as good as its word. The horror with which the moral middle class viewed the possibility of Australia repudiating Depression debts is an excellent example of the values Brett describes so well. For generations, historians have dismissed conservative voters as Tory stooges, too stupid to see that only Labor

served the cause of ordinary people. But Brett has now demonstrated the strength of an ideology of self reliance that kept Labor out of national office for most of the twentieth century.

Brett is a superior historian who has illuminated an Australia, gone forever. But when it comes to her own time, she could not seem to help herself and argued for her own tribe. Thus, she writes of the reform of the public sector during the 1980s and 1990s as a moral affront to right-thinking people: "Many of the men and women forced out of the public sector by various downsizings felt justifiably bitter at the rejection of the meaning of their life's



work and the contribution they felt they had made to the common good” (174).

Like Macintyre, she sneers at people who do not hold the right sort of opinions:

There are right wing commentators aplenty on the “op ed” pages of the newspapers and in journals of opinion, but they are eccentric, trading on exaggerated personalities and maverick opinions, rather than representatives of more generally held views or of an identifiable section of the people. (207)

And she dismisses conservative calls for a right-wing broadcaster to match that darling of the left, Phillip Adams: “someone with his capacity to talk intelligently on such a breadth of topics, is not easily imaginable in contemporary Australia”. (ibid)

Her dismissal of people who do not share appropriate public sector values reduces the book’s overall credibility. Much of Brett’s text is concerned with identifying the values of the Deakin-Lyons-Menzies’ moral middle class, Australians suspicious of where the politics of organised labour would take the country. Yet when she writes about her times this moral middle class is transformed into a beast with the same name but very different characteristics, as celebrated by her colleague at La Trobe University, Robert Manne.

Where the moral middle class once espoused an ideology of patriotism and self-reliance it now is an expression of the interests of university educated public servants and their “principled beliefs” on Aborigines, the arts, multiculturalism and the environment. (146) Brett is too subtle a scholar to actually sneer at less educated people whose ignorance ensures they do not share the new moral middle class philosophy. But she comes close in the way she describes differences between the cosmopolitan “educated elites” and other Australians with narrower visions of life, “who learn their skills and knowledge in the university of life through hard knocks, practical experience and submission to authority”. And again: “Cosmopolitans have the social skills and attitudes that enable them to move among people of different cultures with confidence and purpose, where locals, even when they travel, are more attuned to the familiar than the different”.

In line with Manne’s argument that the moral middle class speaks for all that is good and true on the deeply divisive issue of Australia’s obligations to asylum seekers, Brett writes:

... one aspect of globalisation is the development of human rights as a universal language which creates a

universal human moral community co-extensive with the cosmopolitan’s potential field of knowledge. Locals still live inside much smaller moral communities.(210-211).

All of this has less to do with history than Brett’s own politics. It is simplistic and snobbish and dismisses Australians who do not have a particular mindset as parochial, at best. Brett is a proper historian, with the sort of academic skills, and perhaps values that Macintyre seems to believe should be privileged. But this does not make her opinions any more coherent, or superior to those who dare dispute moral middle class wisdom.

HISTORY – AS FOG

In contrast, for work by an historian who goes where the evidence takes her it would be difficult to improve on Inga Clendinnen’s in her new book *Dancing with Strangers*. This is a very different work to Geoffrey Blainey’s but it shares his determination to explain the past on its own terms. Clendinnen says historians should recognise the “fog” through which people in the past “were trying to make their way”. In writing about the contact between the men and women of the First Fleet and the Australians who were here to meet them, she tries to understand all their motivations and does not look to the past as a metaphor for her own time.

Clendinnen is a far more subtle scholar than the boorish ideologues who expect history to conform to their opinions. She says in her introduction to this imaginative reconstruction of the first years of Anglo-Aboriginal contact that she hopes for “social justice between Australia’s original immigrants and those of us who came later” (5).

But she recognises that all her cast were driven by beliefs that are absolutely alien to us now. And she does not attribute good or evil to either side. In particular, the smarter and sensitive British officers emerge as quite extraordinary men, trying to make sense of the Aborigines and their culture. And while it did not occur to them that they were invading another people’s country nor did they wish the inhabitants any harm.

Clendinnen demonstrates how much can be achieved by using the sources that have survived imaginatively. Inevitably, her understanding of what the Aborigines understood of the British is speculative. Her interpretation of the political motives and strategy of the Aboriginal go-between she calls Baneelon, more familiarly known as Bennelong, might be completely wrong - in the absence of evidence yet to be discovered we will never know. But she goes where the evidence takes

her and her arguments are all the more plausible for lacking an overt political motive. Clendinnen does not celebrate the advance party of Europeans who secured the beachhead for the European occupation of Australia. But neither does she describe the Aborigines as noble arcadians resisting immoral attack and happy in a paradise of peace between clans and genders.

Clendinnen does not write to advance any cause and her conclusion presents a plague on the houses of all who would pervert history to suit their own political objectives. "History is not about the imposition of belated moral judgements. It is not a balm for hurt minds, either." (287)

HISTORY - IN REVIEW

The coverage of these very different books demonstrated how politicised the assessment of history can be. The academic establishment did not review Blainey's book in the main media but even the well-disposed writers who did find it hard to analyse. Except Robyn Annear, (*The Age*, 11 October 2003) who saw the key fault, that the book is less than the sum of its parts:

What's missing is the narrative vigour that characterises Blainey's best writing. This must be due, at least in part, to the compendious nature of a book like this one. You still get the direct, engaging voice of Blainey the storytelling historian, but it's undermined by a stop-start, catalogue-ish pace.

But for the most part the reviewers confined themselves to summarising. Christopher Bantick (*Mercury*, 15 November, 2003) demonstrated he had read the book right through before offering a cringe-making conclusion: "It would make an ideal Christmas present – that is, if you can bear to part with it." Christopher Boyd (*Australian Financial Review*, 11 October 2003) contrasted the book "about as benign as history gets" with the way the debate over Australia's past has become blood sport, but did not bother to discuss why this had occurred or where Blainey's work fitted in.

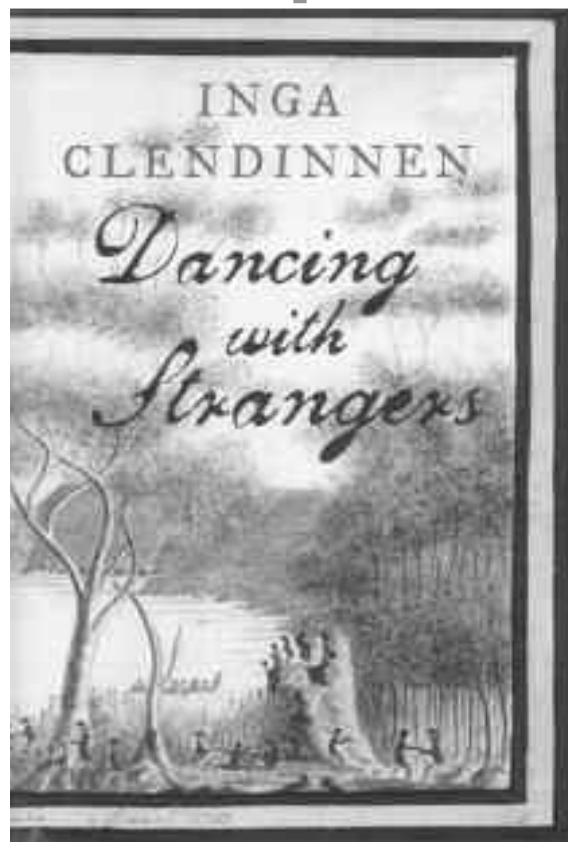
Ross Fitzgerald (*Sydney Morning Herald*, 27 September 2003) added nothing beyond another supportive summary. Only Evan Williams (*The Australian*, 18 October 2003) saw the political dimension. He praised Blainey's ability to connect with the working class Australians, the stuff of whose lives is his subject. And he endorsed Blainey's purpose in the book, to prove that everything before the 1960s was not immutably dull: "As he insists, Australia in the past 200 years has witnessed profound changes in almost every decade."

But while Blainey's neutrality perplexed some, few of the reviewers had any doubts about the stance of Macintyre's book. They were often mean spirited and

almost always partisan, as if what matters in the writing of history is allegiance rather than expertise. Michael Sexton (*Sydney Morning Herald*, 6 September, 2003) demonstrated the dangers of neutrality, his review was dull and added nothing to the debate. He summarised Macintyre's subject before offering a conclusion that tried not to offend: "This book is avowedly polemical and is itself part of the history wars. ... It is also, however, an important contribution to the history of ideas and the idea of history in Australia." Perhaps Sexton meant that future scholars would find it valuable as a source on the state of Australian historiography at the end of the twentieth century but whether he was

convinced by the merits of Macintyre's argument was not clear.

While Sexton tried to stay out of the brawl most of the reviewers were more than happy to get stuck right in. Martin Crotty (*Courier Mail*, 9 September 2003) produced a commonplace piece, explaining history as perpetual motion machine, with each generation creating versions of the past to suit its circumstances. For Crotty "conservative commentators" who use "talkback radio, the mainstream media" and (oh that such wickedness can be) "non-academic publishers" do not understand this and they force their "outlandish claims" on scholars, thus defying



the conventions of civilised exchange. The review read like a claim that only proper persons should practise history. And, inevitably, Crotty argued that the real limitation in letting people outside the club into the debate was that they use history to stop the sort of debates he approves: “The constant shouting, coming from the Right, is drowning out any possibility for meaningful public conversation about the realities and implications of our past.”

Jenny Hocking (*The Age*, 30 August, 2003) ran the same sort of line. The accepted historical wisdom should be challenged because, “no history is all straight lines and it is in its contrariness and unpredictability that all Australian history inspires continued cultural reflection”. But having celebrated independent thinking, Hocking immediately asserted the orthodoxy on indigenous dispossession, which is “the heart of the history wars ... the conflict that is so often still denied.”

Robert Manne (*Sydney Morning Herald*, 8 September, 2003) was in a difficult position, variously an imp of Satan and an attendant angel in the 50 year fight Macintyre records. Remarkably, Manne was only exercised by Macintyre’s treatment of the disputes where they were on opposite sides: “there are aspects of Macintyre’s account of the early phases of the history wars which do not ring true. Although he is not uncritical of his fellow academic historians, Macintyre too easily dismisses the claim that, during the 70s and 80s, many did, in fact, present an overly negative portrait of their country’s history.”

But Manne was as one with Macintyre when it came to the issue that apparently matters most, the treatment of indigenous Australians. How, or why, using the past as ammunition in contemporary debates over the circumstances of Aborigines in the present and future will “seriously affect” the future of Australia is something Manne claimed but never explained. But it gave him an excellent opportunity support Macintyre’s attacks on Keith Windschuttle, a task that is dear to Manne’s heart.

Macintyre’s critics were equally adamant that they occupied the high ground and equally unappealing in

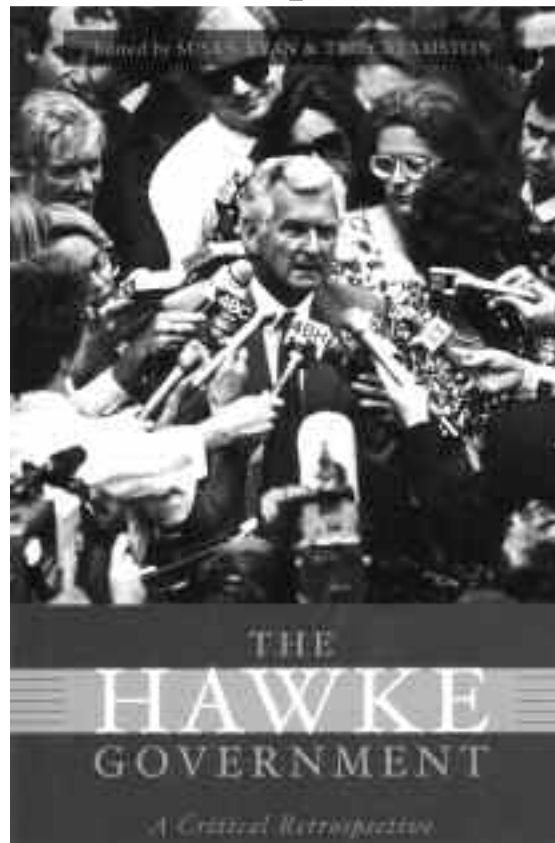
their arguments. Gregory Melhuish (*The Australian*, 3 September, 2003) challenged Macintyre’s version of the way Geoffrey Blainey was treated at the University of Melbourne after his controversial 1984 speech on Asian immigration. He was equally unhappy with Macintyre’s positive opinions of Manning Clark. And he disliked what he said was the “strong left-wing spin” Macintyre put on “the history of Australian history”.

All fair enough. But Melhuish also indulged in a long attack on Macintyre for the influence he allegedly wields in academic history and accused him of wanting to establish his interpretation of Australian historiography as the “received version”. There was a great deal of what read like sour grapes in Melhuish’s review, not helped by generalisations like his charge that “left-wing academics ... single out a person who does not share their views and persecutes them”. More a personal attack than a dispassionate discussion of a controversial book.

There was more of the same from Peter Ryan, (*Weekend Australian*, 6 September, 2003), who at least could claim he was responding to the intemperate names Macintyre had called him in his book. Ryan argued that Macintyre represents the orthodox historical establishment who have set the agenda for the last 30 years and want to keep it that way. It would have been more convincing if Ryan had not returned Macintyre’s abusive fire.

It was left to Helen Irving (*Sydney Morning Herald*, 13 December 2003) to bell the cat of historians who use the past as a moral club to belabour people they do not like: “This, then, is the real issue in the history wars. What does Australian history show us of ourselves in the present? For many recent historians, it shows that the descendants of the white settlers remain responsible for, even guilty of, the past. ... For these historians, history is a kind of political enterprise serving policies of reparation in the present.”

Nor did she let Macintyre’s enemies off the hook, pointing out that Keith Windschuttle missed the bigger picture in his obsession with inaccuracies in historian’s footnotes. Irving’s conclusion made a point that needed to be put: “There is nothing wrong



with political campaigns, but they should not be raised in history books.”

Inga Clendinnen (*Australian Financial Review*, 31 October, 2003) was not having any of Macintyre’s defence of proper historians against conservative ideologues. But this did not mean she endorsed Windschuttle’s revision of the fate of Tasmania’s Aborigines in the nineteenth century. Rather, she came down on the side of Windschuttle’s critics in assessing his argument. However, her statement of the real task of historians can be read as a judgement on both sides of this fight:

The stories made from history always have political implications, but that does not constitute their authority over us. History helps us to know who we humans are. And of what we are capable. It also reminds us that, however complicated the situation, however apparently compelling the circumstances, there is always space for choice: that the individual conscience is our first, last and only refuge. ... historians have a special duty: to resist opportunistic falsifications of the precious record of past experience, from whatever quarter the deforming impulse might come.

There was not much interest in the anthology on the Hawke Government, probably because it is really a book for the desperates who will read anything, absolutely anything, on Australian politics. Tony Barker (*The Advertiser*, 18 October, 2003) briefed it and offered the remarkable judgement that Hawke (the man that is, not this book about him) “has a deserved place in Australia’s history”. Frank Bongiorno, writing on the Sydney University online discussion site, the *Drawing Board* (November 2003), admitted the book was useful but spent much of his space sneering at Hawke from his academic perch at the University of New England:

The Hawke Government was indeed in many respects an impressive performer, and its record of policy achievement is substantial. Yet in 2003, Australia seems to me less compassionate as a society than in 1983, even if its economy is notably more efficient. It is arguably less independent in world affairs, and possibly less respected abroad – at least outside the United States. Something has gone badly wrong.

In comparison, Paul Strangio, sympathetic biographer of Jim Cairns and as such not likely to be wholly in accord with the achievements of the Hawke-Keating Government, was cool but fair (*The Age*, 11 October 2003):

Only political aficionados are likely to find it compelling. Still the Labor faithful could do worse than read it and come to their own conclusion of whether the Hawke years are a source of the party’s present predicament, or alternatively, a basis for moving forward.

While the academic Bongiorno instructed us on what he thought, journalist Mike Steketee gave us the material to make up our own minds. Writing in *The Australian*, (27 September 2003) he produced the only informed judgement and asked the question that haunts the anthology, where is Keating? The black prince of the Hawke Government is “well on the way to sanctification in the same Labor circles where the reception for Hawke often sounds like one hand clapping”.

The treatment of Judith Brett’s book was far less analytic than a work of its subtlety merits. John Rickard (*The Age*, 30 August 2003) at least had a go. He challenged Brett’s argument that the conservatives excluded Catholics from their camp for decades and made the reasonable point that the anti-Labour forces were happy to be led by Catholic Joe Lyons, the personification of moral middle class values (of the Menzies not Manne persuasion). But Rickard did not tackle Brett’s transformation of the moral middle class from solid independent souls, who looked after themselves, to social reforming ideologues who sneer at the small business people who have kept Howard in office. It was a long but inadequate piece that let Brett off far too lightly. But so did the other reviewers.

Norman Abjorensen (*Courier Mail*, 23 August 2003) praised the book for explaining Australian politics more broadly than the traditional historical model of reforming-Labor versus the reactionary rest. Tony Stephens (*Sydney Morning Herald*, 9 August 2003) and Mike Steketee (*The Australian*, 23 August 2003) both produced disappointing summaries that embraced Brett’s argument but did not explain how John Howard could abandon the heirs to the Liberals’ traditional moral middle class support base and still stay in power.

Nor did the best of these books produce the superior reviews it deserved. Despite Inga Clendinnen’s demonstration that the past is not a plaything for use in present politics, some of the reviewers still saw her book as serving precisely that purpose. Whatever Ann McGrath (*The Age*, 1 November 2003) may usefully have had to say about the book was lost in some spectacularly florid writing:

... fleeting moments of communication were epitomised by bodies dancing

together – bodies with different coloured skins, doing different steps to different tunes. *Dancing with Strangers* provides fresh glimpses into this material living world of brutality, sustenance, emotion, grief, cremation and burial that defined the intermittent engagement between strangers at Port Jackson. Tricking, kidnapping, and murdering are among the events that interlace the dance of this intensely humanist narrative.

And so on and so on. When McGrath was not being pompous she was being partisan and conscripting Clendinnen's book into the service of her own world-view:

Not only does the Australian nation deserve a continuing commitment to egalitarian values, it demands that we better develop cross-cultural and cross-historical empathy. No longer strangers, we know each other's tricks and recognise each other's scars. History writing like this can show us a few basic steps.

Robert Manne (*The Age*, 6 October 2003) welcomed the book as a contribution to the struggle for contemporary Aboriginal rights:

Indigenous and non-indigenous Australians are still struggling to find a basis for reconciliation. No reconciliation is, however, possible unless we can discover a version of Australian history that can be shared. Clendinnen's wonderful book offers the most truthful and nourishing first chapter of such a history that we are ever likely to have.

Whether Manne would have so praised the book if its evidence did not suit his own crusading agenda may be moot. But it is hard to tell what he admired more, Clendinnen's scholarship or the uses he hoped her book would serve.

It was left to Raymond Evans (*Courier Mail*, 25 October 2003) to honour Clendinnen for the quality of her work rather than any cause it could serve, "a transparently fastidious investigator of the historical record, rather than being simply the vindicator of a particular interpretative position".

It was a salutary reminder that, whatever the ideologues think, history is not just what we want it to be.

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MARK LATHAM - MEDIA'S BOY OF THE MOMENT

Installing new Labor leader Mark Latham was seen as a risky move by Labor. Stephen Matchett takes a look at how Australia's media have been mesmerised by the change.

*I*t was editorial-writer heaven. Last December's Labor leadership change generated ample opportunities to indulge in all the rhetorical devices beloved by practising pontificators.

There were warnings to offer, mainly of the "last chance for Labor" kind, predictions to make, generally qualified with variations of, "only time will tell" and rhetorical questions to ask, including the *Herald Sun's* (3 December) gem, "who is Mark Latham?"

And there were statements of the most bleedingly obvious, such as the *Townsville Bulletin's* (3 December) insight: "Mr Latham is young and a fighter and the party has taken a punt on new blood versus experience."

But some of the assessments were astute. *The Advertiser* (3 December) warned that the Party had to back the new boss on policy, or fail yet again:

Mr Latham has the opportunity to meld a new-look Opposition which could pay off in spectacular fashion or crash and burn. It is now up to the party to determine which of these stark choices it is to be.

With the caucus new-class left now nervous over some of Latham's ideas on families and education, rather than just fracturing on factional lines, it was a sensible assumption.

However, to remind us all what a provincial paper it can be, *The Advertiser* abandoned policy for parochialism when it returned to the Labor leadership (18 December). It was outraged that Mr Latham had failed to rush to Adelaide and that his schedule may not include a visit till February:

Fairly or not, he has created a lingering doubt that he, and indeed Federal Labor, do not regard SA as important.

The *Herald Sun* (4 December) was equally anxious that Mr Latham demonstrate a convincing commitment to the fair state of Victoria:

If he is to have any hope of winning government he must convince Victorians and those in other states that he can see beyond the harbour views.

Perhaps Mr Latham will also give the editorial team at the paper an electoral atlas so they can see for themselves how far his seat of Werriwa is from Port Jackson.

The *Courier Mail* (December 3) also warned Mr Latham that too many of his ideas were Sydney-centric and that:

The problems of Sydney's outer western suburbs are not the same as those of the people in Queensland, or elsewhere in Australia.

Given that Mr Latham has scored most points with his musings on the need for fathers to engage more with their sons and for parents to take responsibility for their kids, hardly schemes focused on the emerald-city, the Brisbane broadsheet was off the mark. And its comparison of his election with the elevation of John Gorton to the Liberal leadership in 1968 was far fetched. While their parties turned to both men in desperation, Gorton was never the policy thinker, or fighter, that Latham is. Overall, the paper was pessimistic. "The problem for Labor is that its leap into a Mark-Latham led future might turn out to be a gamble which it can ill afford".

Perhaps it is because Mr Latham is such an unlikely leader compared to his party rivals, people who look like they check the polls and consult with caucus before they comment on the state of the weather, that there was little confidence that his was a win that would get Labor back in the race.

The *Canberra Times* (3 December) thought the electorate would welcome a leader who at least stood for something, "someone who articulates ideas around core Labor values rather than slogans confected from focus group meetings". But warned that while Mr Latham is a whiz at coming up with new ideas he also has:

a well developed record for erratic behaviour ... His crash-through or crash style has not been of the calculated Whitlam variety, but has often been self-indulgent. ... He has not a great sense of proportion. He has more personal enemies in his own party than he has friends or enemies on the other side of politics.

There was more of the same, making for a scathing character assessment, which made the conclusion, "Latham has it in him to succeed if he can discipline himself" look half-hearted.

The Australian (3 December) set the new leader a very high bar, demanding that he demonstrate his fitness to lead by placing policy before politics and allowing the government's health, education and welfare reforms passage through the Senate. But whatever he decided to do, the paper liked him for what his election said about Australia:

Ordinary Australians will likely respond well to a young father who grew up in working-class western Sydney, but who is now the alternative prime minister, and it does illustrate that we live in an egalitarian nation.

Yet the paper was concerned that too many of Mr Latham's big ideas looked like they came from a social engineer's blue print for big government and it fell a long way short of praising the new leader. At least until the end of the first week when it (6 December) returned with a qualified "so far, so good" compliment of sorts and some more advice:

Mr Latham faces an enormous challenge. He must demonstrate he has curbed his tongue and his temper for good. And he must translate his mass of ideas into coherent policies, and sell them – to Labor politicians suspicious of his emphasis on individual responsibility and the primacy of the market economy, as well as to the electorate.

The *Sydney Morning Herald* (3 December) had a bob each way. It suggested that Mr Latham had "a lot of ground to make up" and as shadow Treasurer "showed no aptitude for economic management and has made no dent on the Government's electoral command in this key area". Yet, seemingly in spite of itself the paper also had the foresight to suggest that between Kim Beazley and Marl Latham Latham's energy and innovation the task was probably too hard:

Mr Latham has a lot of talking and a lot of convincing to do, inside his party and to the Australian people ... as he begins the all but impossible task of rescuing and rebuilding Labor's fortunes.

The Age (3 December) was more interested in style than substance and suggested that while Mr Latham may be a mass of ideas in search of a policy the voters might decide to like him:

This may be more important electorally than many earnest analysers of policies, undeniably more important though these

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DATE: Wednesday 28 April 2004
TIME: 6.30 for 7.00 pm
VENUE: Grand Harbour Ballroom,
Star City, Sydney
ENQUIRIES: PH: (02) 9252 3366 FAX: (02) 9252 3360

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are, are able or willing to acknowledge. ... Style must ultimately be backed by substance, but is also more immediately persuasive. If Mr Latham can quickly persuade voters, as he did MPs, that he is made of the right stuff for leadership, simply by restoring Labor's belief in itself, they may also be willing to take a chance on him as prime minister.

It was left to the *Australian Financial Review* on the Saturday before the party room vote to define Labor's crisis and set out what was to be done by virtually endorsing Mr Latham for the leadership (*Australian Financial Review*, 29 November). Unlike *The Age*, for the *AFR* policy mattered most:

Opting for Mr Beazley would confirm that Labor has given away the next election and wants to preserve its next generation of leaders for the poll after that. This may be realistic but it sells Labor's supporters short. Labor would have little to lose by moving straight to the next generation. Of these Mr Latham has done best by putting Chifleyite principles in the modern context and spelling out what this means in policy terms, lower taxes, decent prospects, opportunities and reward for effort for hard-working Australians, and so on.

There was more of the same when the Labor caucus followed the *Fin*. While starting a long-way back Labor under Latham could not be written off, the paper said, (*Australian Financial Review*, 3 December): "If Mr Latham can fit every policy into a coherent whole, he might stand a chance."

But it was the Hobart *Mercury* (3 December) that was most on the money in predicting what Mr Latham could accomplish, if he stayed on-song and gave up his talent to abuse:

Australians are yearning for a viable Opposition to keep a government that is coasting on its toes. If Labor is a policy wasteland, the Government is at times not much better. Time is running out for Labor to meet the people's aspirations. ... But by opting for Mr Latham and generational change, MPs may have set alight political debate in this country.

Three months after his election the Labor leader is turning around this election year.

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GERARD HENDERSON'S **MEDIA WATCH**

TALKING TURKEY - WITH ALAN AND PHILLIP

The *Sydney Morning Herald* columnist Alan Ramsey is perhaps best known for his VERY LONG QUOTATIONS – from somebody or other. And, on occasions, it seems – from anybody. Your man Ramsey has been known to lead-up his circa 2800 word Saturday column (which consists of a main article followed by a briefer side-bar) with quotations which, on occasions, occupy up to 85 per cent of his copy. Really. Then he tops and tails his columns with a bit of Ramseyspeak. Who could forget Mr Ramsey's main article on 22 February 2003? Well, many a reader – alas. Out of a total 1650 words there was one quotation containing 970 words – from a speech made in the United States Congress by Democrat Senator Robert Byrd, no less. Pretty relevant, don't you think?

Then there was the Ramsey contribution to the *Sydney Morning Herald* on 13-14 December 2003, for example. The first sentence referred to Ian Smith, the one-time prime minister of Rhodesia who now resides in Zimbabwe. On this occasion Alan Ramsey managed to write some eight paragraphs of his own. Well done. There followed ten VERY LONG paragraphs quoting from an article originally written by Guardian journalist Simon Hoggart on, wait for it, Saturday 9 February 1980. Yep – over two decades ago. Hoggart's piece focused on the relationship in Rhodesia in the late 1970s/early 1980s, between Ian Smith, the then British Governor Lord Soames and Robert Mugabe's Patriotic Front. The Hoggart quote went on and on and on. After SUCH A LONG QUOTE, Ramsey concluded:

Mugabe has outlived Soames (he died in 1987) but not Smith. Power corrupted all three. Mugabe never was the only despot. The parallels with elsewhere are obvious.

Well, er, no they're not. Not all. Such questions come to mind as : "What parallels? Where is "elsewhere"?. Was the late Lord Soames really corrupt? Is it accurate to depict Mugabe's manifest corruption on a moral equivalence basis? And so on.

Having waded through QUOTATION-AFTER-QUOTATION to complete his main article, the reader then moved to the shorter side-bar entitled

"Feed them with plastic, with a glaze on top". Once again, Ramsey topped his piece with his own thoughts – followed by lotsa quotations from others:

Hear about George Bush's plastic turkey? No, not his rubber duck. His turkey. Even John Howard, under the blankets in the dead of night, must be starting to wonder what in George's name he's got us into... We now learn Howard took this country into war at the bidding of a US President who makes a complete goose of himself by "feeding" American troops in Baghdad a plastic Christmas turkey. Yes, really.

Well, no, actually. For starters, Mr Ramsey should have known that Christmas falls in late December – and Thanksgiving Day a month earlier. When George W. Bush visited Baghdad on Thanksgiving Day last year (27 November 2003), he was filmed holding a turkey. Ramsey maintained that the turkey was "plastic". His evidence? It consisted of two VERY LONG QUOTATIONS – one from *The Guardian*, the other from a letter which leftist film director Michael Moore sent to President Bush. According to *The Guardian*, the big-bird in question "was the kind of plastic model used by butchers and Hollywood set-dressers". According to Michael Moore, this was a "fake bird" with a "fake honey glaze".

Soon after, Phillip Adams took up the story. Writing in *The Australian* on the following Tuesday (16 December 2004), Mr Adams devoted his entire column to the shock/horror of the fake turkey scandal. Wrote Adams:

...it has been revealed that the turkey wasn't a turkey. Well, not a real turkey. It was a prop turkey, a pretend turkey. Just as ketchup replaced blood for violent scenes in movies, and mashed potato substituted for ice-cream in *Happy Days* (to prevent its melting under the studio lights), the President had taken a plastic turkey – one used for gourmet magazine shoots – to the mess hall. Which added another level of the fake, the tawdry and the sham to the whole lamentable exercise of Operation Perfect Freedom or Operation Democratic Orgasm or whatever it is they've called it.

There followed a quote from, you've guessed it, Michael Moore's letter to President Bush – re which, see above. After that came a you-beaut pompous declaration which your man Adams told us all just how truthful he really is:

Years ago, hand on heart while gazing at a portrait of my patron saint, Bertrand Russell, I swore to always “talk turkey”. That is to get to the heart of the matter and tell the truth at all times. Which is why I talked turkey here today. In contrast to the unreal turkey that Bush showed the world in Baghdad.

But Phillip Adams and Alan Ramsey did not “tell the truth” in this instance. The turkey that Bush showed to the TV camera in Baghdad was real – dead real, in fact.

It is a tradition within the US Forces to prepare a “trophy turkey” on Thanksgiving Day. This acts as a decoration – while troops eat turkey pieces from cafeteria trays. As the *Washington Post's* Mike Allen subsequently reported, it was a “real, actual roasted turkey”. He cited US military sources as saying that “a trophy turkey is a standard feature of holiday chow lines”. It turns out that the trophy turkey was not prepared in anticipation of President Bush's visit and the US military had not anticipated that he would pick it up and show it to a camera crew.

So what happens to Alan Ramsey's theory that Australia's support for the Coalition of the Willing in Iraq must be questioned on account of President Bush's (alleged) act of feeding a plastic turkey to US troops? And what about Phillip Adams's belief that “a fake turkey is the perfect symbol for a fake President”? Well, not much it seems. For neither columnist has bothered to correct this Michael-Moore-induced howler. Don't hold your breath.

On Tuesday 9 December 2003 – just before “plastic turkey” “big story”, broke Down Under, Alan Ramsey was interviewed by Philip Adams on the latter's ABC Radio National *Late Night Live* program. Here Ramsey restated his belief that the Gulf War is likely to “destroy” Tony Blair's “prime ministership”. In early December Ramsey prophesied such an eventuality subsequent to Lord Hutton's report into the circumstances surrounding the death of scientist Dr David Kelly. As Alan said to Phillip on 9 December 2003:

We're going to get his Hutton report, inquiry, down very shortly. And, you know, Tony Blair will be in monstrous trouble again because it's going to be a terrible report for him.

No doubt Phillip Adams was interested in such a prophecy. After all, on 21 October 2003 Adams wrote a column in *The Australian* where he foresaw the arrival of Air Force One in Australia sometime in the

future. The US President Wesley Clark alighted from the plane – to be greeted on the tarmac by Prime Minister Simon Crean. Mr Crean stood down as Labor leader on 28 November 2003, General Clark withdrew as a Democratic Party candidate for the US presidency the following March. Clearly Adams' crystal ball needs a spring-clean.

Subsequently, Adams reacted with disdain at criticism of this particular column – declaring that “the response...confirmed that the conservatives have absolutely no sense of humour or irony”. Not at all. *Media Watch* finds the wish-fulfilling-but-false-prophecies of a Ramsey or an Adams most amusing. Keep them coming, chaps.

THE SPECTATOR'S AUSSIE-PHOBIA

And now for some balance. If Aussie commentators can get the US wrong – so can the Brits misread Australia. Especially if they write for the *Spectator*, currently edited by Conservative M.P. Boris Johnson.

On 30 August 2003, *The Spectator* published an article by Anthony Daniels titled “The perils of Pauline Hanson”. Dr Daniels writes the “Second Opinion” column in *The Spectator* under the nom-de-plume Theodore Dalrymple. Anthony Daniels visited Australia in mid 2003 – and then returned to London where he filed a story for *The Spectator*. His visit Down Under co-incided with the imprisonment of Pauline Hanson – the founder of the extreme right-wing populist One Nation Party. Ms Hanson was subsequently released from prison when her conviction was overturned on appeal.

You wonder just who Dr Daniels spoke to in Australia. Anyrate, his *Spectator* piece was littered with errors – of both fact and interpretation.

Claim: “Pauline Hanson irrupted [sic] on to the Australian political scene in the early 1990s.”

Fact: Pauline Hanson only became known in Australia in the immediate lead-up to the March 1996 Federal election. She was not involved “on the Australian political scene in the early 1990s”.

Claim: “...a former convict was reported as saying that since Hanson had asked for longer sentences, it was only right that she should receive one”.

Fact: The only like statement was made by the (then) Labor Opposition Shadow Treasurer – Mark Latham MP. He is not “a former convict”. In any event, Australian word usage in this instance is similar to that in Britain – men and women in jail are commonly referred to as “prisoners”. The term “convict” relates to the convict system, which ceased circa 1860.

Claim: “...[Pauline Hanson] allowed Mr Howard to do what before her advent would have been impossible, namely to restrict Asian immigration by

putting would-be immigrants and asylum-seekers into camps, where their applications to reside in Australia are lost in the deep entrails of bureaucracy. Films about the camps are played to target audiences in Asia, to discourage any impromptu efforts on the part of its huddled masses to reach Australian shores.”

Fact: Mandatory detention for unlawful arrivals was introduced in Australia in 1992 – during the time of Paul Keating’s Labor government. This was four years *before* John Howard came to office and/or Pauline Hanson’s “advent” on the political stage. Mandatory detention is not specifically directed at restricting “Asian immigration”. In fact, in recent times, most of those seeking to enter Australia unlawfully come from the Middle East and Central Asia (Iraq, Iran, Afghanistan). Afghanistan, Iran and Iraq may be technically regarded as part of greater Asia. But Afghans, Iraqis and Iranians are not commonly regarded as Asians. It’s just that many asylum seekers attempting to enter Australia by sea transit through Southeast Asian nations (especially Indonesia). Only two groups of Asians have attempted to enter Australia in large numbers as asylum seekers. Namely Indochinese (after the communist victories in Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos in 1975) and East Timorese (between 1975 and 1999).

There is reason to critique the administration of the mandatory detention system in Australia. But Dr Daniels’ claim that “applications” by asylum seekers “to reside in Australia are lost in the deep entrails of bureaucracy” is simply not true. Nor is it correct for him to allege – without any supporting evidence of any kind – that what Daniels terms the “huddled masses” of Asia are attempting “to reach Australian shores”. Very few Asians attempt to enter Australia unlawfully.

Claim: “Support for Hanson...surged after her sentence”

Fact: Newspoll is Australia’s most respected opinion polling organisation. Its survey, which was published in *The Australian* on 2 September 2003, measured support for Australian political parties as follows:

Liberal	39 per cent
National	4 per cent
Total Coalition	43 per cent
ALP	37 per cent
Democrats	1 per cent
Greens	6 per cent
One Nation	2 per cent
Others	11 per cent

Pauline Hanson is identified with the One Nation Party. In mid 2003, its support – as measured by Newspoll – averaged 1 per cent. After Pauline Hanson’s jailing, support moved to 2 per cent. In

view of the low starting point, this is hardly evidence for Anthony Daniels’ assertion that support for Hanson “surged after her sentence”.

Claim: “For a time [Pauline Hanson] was Australia’s answer to Jean-Marie Le Pen.”

Fact: Mr Le Pen is a serious and unpleasant ideologue, in the tradition of the European anti-semitic right. Sure, Ms Hanson has exhibited intolerance. But she is in no sense an ideologue. Pauline Hanson could only be compared to Jean-Marie Le Pen by someone who did not understand her – or the Hansonism phenomenon. Like Anthony Daniels, for example. It is also a mistake for Daniels to describe Pauline Hanson’s one-time supporters as “proletarian”. Her support base did not come from what remains of the working class in Australia but, rather, from among disaffected small business types and self-funded retirees on the suburban fringes of Brisbane, Sydney and Perth and in the provincial towns of Queensland, New South Wales and Western Australia.

Dr Daniels is a psychiatrist who spends a lot of his time working in the British prisons. In fact the Theodore Dalrymple column is, in effect, Daniels’ prison diary. Maybe this explains his fixation with the prison system and, in particular his assessment that:

Hanson, being something of a political outsider, is bound to get sympathy in a country that has always mistrusted constituted authority, every Australian believing that he is descendant, spiritually at least, from convict stock.

It’s the familiar “convict stain” depiction. Maybe Dr Daniels has some evidence to support his (somewhat hyperbolic) claim that “every Australian” believes they are descended from convict stock – either in a birthing sense or “spiritually”. But he did not produce any supporting data in his *Spectator* article. In any event, the theory did seem to impress some of Daniels’ colleagues.

The Spectator did not choose to correct any of Anthony Daniels’ howlers. Rather, on 8 November 2003, it printed another article on Australia. The author Rod Liddle wrote under the title: “Why do the Aussies hate us? Can it be because they feel inferior?”

It seems that Mr Liddle went Down Under to follow England’s fortunes in the Rugby World Cup. He soon sent Boris Johnson a collection of generalisations which could have been put together in a pub on any one evening. In fact, they probably were. Readers of *The Spectator* were told that “what the Australians seem to want more than anything else, these days, is to be ‘Asian’”. All 20 million of them, it seems. He added:

Australian politicians regularly pretend to be Asian and cringe before any real Asian politician who will offer succor to such an aspiration – even to the extent of inviting utter nonentities to address the Australian Parliament in Canberra.

Mr Liddle did not manage to name one Australian politician who pretends “to be Asian”. Only one Asian politician has ever addressed the Australian Parliament – namely China’s president Hu Jintao on 24 October 2003. He may be the leader of a communist dictatorship – but he is scarcely an “utter nonentity”. Moreover, it is a myth to maintain that Australian politicians “cringe before any real Asian politician”. It is well known that former prime minister Paul Keating and John Howard both clashed openly with Dr Mahathir Mohamad during his time as Malaysia’s prime minister.

There was more. Australians were depicted as “15 year olds” who “seem to be suffering from both an identity crisis and an inferiority complex”. Australians act like “humiliated” adolescents. John Howard exhibits “teenage angst”. Australians are neither “diligent” nor “cultured”, they whinge and they whine, they have “an enormous inferiority complex” and the “few...clever Aussies” leave Australia. All this seems because of a Liddle induced conversation in some Australian pub somewhere or other – during which the following exchange (allegedly) took place:

I was in a bar a week or so ago and saw a chap watching one of the Rugby World Cup games on television. Who’s playing? I asked him. “It’s Ireland versus Australia,” he replied. “Oh,” I replied, without thinking, “if only it were possible for both sides to lose”.

And what followed was a torrent of abuse and whingeing about England and how they should be kicked out of the tournament because of their arrogance. My companion wasn’t an Aussie – he was, of course, Irish. Ireland versus Australia – two countries English people would tend to cheer on if they were playing anyone other than England. Two countries which would cheer on the opposition no matter whom England were playing. Maybe the Irish should try to become Asian as well.

Apparently, to Boris Johnson, such a pub conversation deserves publication in *The Spectator*. A Brit (Rod Liddell) talks to an Irishman (unnamed) about something or other. And, somehow or other, from this one (perhaps apocryphal) conversation, conclusions can be drawn about a nation’s (alleged) “enormous inferiority complex”.

BOB ELLIS – ALSO RANN

While on the issue of hyperbolic overstatement, consider the comments made by South Australian Labor premier Mike Rann at the ALP national conference in Sydney last January. Taking part in a debate between Labor premiers on the relative merits of their States – and the demerits of other States – Mr Rann went for Sydney, with a vengeance. Highlights of the Rann debating points (as reported in *The Australian* on 30 January 2004 and the *Daily Telegraph* on 31 January 2004) included:

[Sydney’s] shallow, venal and vulgar.

Relationships are as brief as a chance encounter...between two gigolos bound for different hemispheres.

It’s a fact that within 40 seconds every Sydney conversation turns to real estate prices.

In Sydney their heroes are Singo and Richo, and Lawsie and Kerry and Rene; and the gold-diggers of ’61; and the cricketers who sledge; and the footballers who high tackle; and the athletes on steroids; and the shockjocks on kickbacks...Sydney is stuffed, people are toothcapped, cosmetically adjusted, sexually re-engineered...crooked, thrice divorced, siliconed.

Sounds familiar? Sure does. In fact, the exaggerations and the writing style reminds the listener/the reader of Sydney’s comic/writer Bob Ellis. It just happens that Mr Ellis is on some kind of retainer with the South Australian government.

The Adelaide born, and now Sydney based, Helen McCabe was none too impressed by the Rann view of the Adelaide vs Sydney debate. She reminded her *Daily Telegraph* readers that Mr Rann is a “divorced Premier who seems to have a different girlfriend at every election”. And, somewhat tastelessly, she referred to Adelaide’s reputation as the murder capital of Australia.

For its part, *Media Watch* is delighted to see that the pecuniary-challenged Bob Ellis is getting some writing gigs, even of the hyperbole-induced genre. It might help to build up his financial coffers – and make it possible for him to pay up on the remaining \$750 due on two (losing) bets – at \$500 a throw – with this column. This wager turned on the False Prophet’s predictions – made in the presence of Canadian writer John Ralston Saul, no less – that John Howard would lose his seat of Bennelong at the 2001 Federal election and that Australia would become a republic by May 2003. Quite courageous, eh?

The \$250 down-payment was gratefully received – and sent to the Australian Jesuit Mission in India. The remainder is to be split between the Jesuit missionaries in India and Geraldine Cox’s orphanage in Cambodia. Surely your man Ellis sees virtue in financially supporting the poor and downtrodden of India and Cambodia. Here’s hoping the most famous resident of Sydney’s (exclusive) Palm Beach – where real estate prices are a constant topic of conversation – puts that remaining cheque-in-the-mail. ASAP.

YESSSS! RACHEL LOVES MARK

The change in the Labor leadership in Australia seems to have facilitated a surge in hyperbole – of the political kind.

Actor Rachel Ward felt the need to declare on *The Age’s* Opinion Page (25 February 2004) her love for new ALP leader Mark Latham. Ms Ward commenced her 1000 word gush with an account of how she told her husband Bryan Brown about her new love interest. Then it all got even worse:

Yep, I had to tell him this week. After all, what with my sudden twittering and fluttering about, my shopping spree for new underwear, and the usually sloppy grey roots vanishing, he was bound to guess. “Er, Bryan, I feel I should tell you before you hear it elsewhere, but I’ve fallen in love with someone else.” Well, he wasn’t particularly interested: “Oh yeah, good oh.” Didn’t even want to know who it was. So I’m going public because that’s the nature of being in love. You want the world to know.

Rachel Ward then proceeded to advise *Age* readers that she had not “actually met the fella in question”. But she had seen him address the National Press Club in Canberra: And then she actually named the object of her infatuation:

...just hearing him speak has been enough. You know how it is – how everything he says just makes you want to jump up and down and slap your thighs with the excitement of mutual understanding... Call me a romantic, a pushover, a slut even, to be turned on by this “fusillade of clichés” (to use Alexander Downer’s phrase) from Mark Latham. But that’s the sort of pillow-talk that really turns us community-minded folk on big time. And anyone who says different is just jealous they couldn’t pull off an orgy of collective orgasms from their own National Press Club speeches.

So there. The success, or otherwise, of a National Press Club address turns on the ability of the speaker to “pull off an orgy of collective orgasms”. Somehow, you wonder how John Howard ever made it to the prime ministership.

OH, NO – PIERS (NOW) LOVES KIM

The Labor leadership change, from Simon Crean to Mark Latham, led to another almost another declaration of love – from Piers Akerman, no less. For Kim Beazley, no less.

Appearing on the ABC TV *Insiders* program on 30 November 2003 – on the eve of the ALP leadership contest between Kim Beazley and Mark Latham – Piers Akerman declared his opposition to Mark Latham. And proclaimed his support for Mr Beazley’s leadership abilities. Let’s go to the videotape of the *Insiders* panel discussion (comprising compere Barrie Cassidy and Piers Akerman, Annabel Crabb and Matt Price).

Matt Price: Piers, your new found devotion for Kim Beazley, I, I,

Piers Akerman: Well, Matt. Might I suggest you do some research. We’re both West Australians. I’ve known Kim Beazley for many years and I’ve had a lot of respect for him.

Annabel Crabb: I hope somebody’s just hit “record”.

Sure had. So there you have it. On 30 November 2003 – on the eve of the Beazley-Latham leadership ballot – Piers Akerman declared his “respect” for Kim Beazley. Can this be the same Piers Akerman who made the following comments about Kim Beazley in the lead up to the 2001 Federal election? :

Howard, Immigration Minister Philip Ruddock and Foreign Minister Alexander Downer – and their departments – found a solution [on East Timor] that evaded the hopeless time-servers of the United Nations and escaped the petty, partisan, flip-flopping Kim Beazley.

- *Sunday Telegraph* 2 September 2001

Labor’s handling of the corporate disaster [the collapse of Ansett Airlines] has again demonstrated why Opposition Leader Kim Beazley is not ready to govern Australia.

- *Daily Telegraph* 20 September 2001

...even the most childlike, dyed-in-the-wool, true-blue, dinky-di Labor voter doesn’t believe Mr Beazley has captured the Magic Pudding market. There are limits to everything and Mr Beazley has stretched them to breaking point. If these examples [of Kim Beazley’s (alleged) inconsistencies] were not sufficient illustration to demonstrate a certain disregard for hard facts, a couple of other loose remarks underscore the problem. Try, perhaps, Mr Beazley’s claim on July 22

[2001] that: “I was the minister who invented competition!” This could stand with former United States vice-president Al Gore’s statement that he was the inventor of the Internet... Recent polls have shown Labor’s standing ahead of Mr Beazley’s personal popularity, and Mr Howard’s standing ahead of that of the Liberal Party . In Mr Beazley’s case, the polls reflect the popular view that the leader is not leading.

- *Daily Telegraph* 30 September 2001

So there you have it. In November 2003, when Kim Beazley was running against Mark Latham for the Labor leadership, Piers Akerman declared his “respect” for Mr Beazley. However, in September 2001, when Kim Beazley was contesting against John Howard to become prime minister, Piers Akerman proclaimed his disrespect for “petty, partisan, flip-flopping Kim Beazley”.

JOHN PILGER’S CIA CONNECTION (HO, HUM)

While on the topic of flip-flops, consider the case of middle-age leftist John Pilger. The term “middle age” is used for want of a precise reference. You see, unlike most entries in *Who’s Who In Australia*, there is no reference in Mr Pilger’s brief biography to his date of birth. Since *Who’s Who* publishes only the details which are provided by the men and women whose biographies it prints, it seems that John Pilger is now somewhat sensitive about his age. Fancy that.

Right now – the 60 something – John Pilger is busy campaigning against the Coalition of the Willing in Iraq (under the leadership of the United States and Britain). In an interview with *Green Left Weekly* on 28 January 2004, Pilger urged the “anti-war movement” to “support the resistance” in Iraq. You know, the same “resistance” which bombed the United Nations’ Baghdad headquarters in August last year and bombed Shi’te mosques in Baghdad and Karbala in March this year. In other words, the Iraqi “resistance movement” which commits acts of mass murder.

Then, in an interview with Tony Jones on the ABC TV *Lateline* program (on 10 March 2004), Pilger urged that the US should be “defeated” in Iraq.

Tony Jones: Can you approve in that context the killing of American, British or Australian troops who are in the occupying forces?

John Pilger : Well, yes, they are legitimate targets. They’re illegally occupying a country. And I would have thought, from an Iraqi’s point of view, they are legitimate targets. They’d have to be, sure.

Tony Jones: So Australian troops you would regard in Iraq as legitimate targets?

John Pilger : Excuse me but, really, that’s an unbecoming question.

It wasn’t really. After all, it was John Pilger who introduced the reference to “legitimate targets” at this point in the *Lateline* conversation. Anyrate, it is clear that John Pilger advocates the military defeat of Coalition military forces in Iraq. Somewhat ungrateful, when you think about it. For, just a quarter of a century ago, it was the US Armed Services which rescued Mr Pilger from the Vietnamese “resistance” – which was then waging war on the US backed South Vietnamese Government. At the time John Pilger supported the Vietnamese resistance – still does in fact.

This (strange) story is told in Chapter 17 (“The last day”) of John Pilger’s book *Heroes* (Pan Books, 1986). It is 30 April 1975 and Pilger is staying at the Carvelle Hotel in Saigon, reporting what turned out to be the final day of the Vietnam War. Later that day, the South Vietnam Government fell when North Vietnam’s tanks (supplied by the Soviet Union) captured the presidential palace in Saigon.

So John Pilger had a real chance. He could have stayed on with what he termed the liberation movement in Vietnam – i.e. the resistance which had prevailed over the US backed South Vietnamese government. However, instead, Pilger decided to do a bunk – having come to the conclusion that he “wanted to leave” since he had his “fill of the war”. So your man Pilger fled – in his own words - “to the American Embassy” in Saigon. Here he pushed in ahead of others – including local Vietnamese – who were hoping to get a US helicopter to lift them from the roof of the US Embassy. As he later wrote in *Heroes*:

As I struggled through the crowd, pushing and using my strength in order to get my free ride away from the war, I felt only shame.

Quite so. Anyrate, Pilger kept on pushing and managed to get inside the US Embassy compound. Soon after, he clambered aboard what he termed a “Jolly Green Giant” – meaning a US military helicopter. Pilger fled Vietnam. Other evacuees at the time included “Tom Polgar, the last CIA station chief in Saigon”. Convenient company, to be sure. The Jolly Green Giant landed on the US command ship *Blue Ridge* (which Pilger incorrectly described in *Heroes* as an “aircraft carrier”).

So, there you have it. Given a chance to hang around with the communist resistance in Vietnam – and celebrate with the communist “liberators” – John Pilger embraced the bosom of Uncle Sam. The US taxpayer paid for both the US Jolly Green Giant helicopter flight from Saigon and his evacuation per courtesy of the *Blue Ridge* to Subic Bay in the Philippines. How jolly for Mr Pilger.

John Pilger is very much a conspiracist. Using his logic, a few questions come to mind. Why was Pilger admitted to the US Embassy in Saigon in the afternoon of 30 April 1975? Why was he air-lifted out of Vietnam on a US helicopter ahead of local Vietnamese who had supported the US and opposed the communist resistance movement? What was CIA operative Tom Polgar doing on the *Blue Ridge* with Pilger? What did Pilger do when he disembarked at the US base in Subic Bay? Suspicious, eh?

UM. OSCAR HUMPHRIES – SON OF BARRY

Talking about suspicious instances, there is reason to be suspicious about whether Australia's newest columnist has anything to say. At all.

Here's how the *Sunday Telegraph* introduced its new 22 year old columnist on 7 March 2004 under the heading: "Oscar Humphries joins *Sunday Magazine*":

Oscar Humphries – son of Barry – joins The *Sunday Telegraph's* *Sunday Magazine* as a regular columnist from next week. His column, "Oscar's Date" will hilariously chronicle the ins and outs of the Sydney and Melbourne social scenes, as well as Humphries' turbulent love life.

In his first column, Humphries, 22, happily reveals that this is his first proper "job". "If I end up on a yacht off Palm Beach, with amazing, sexy people at five in the morning playing strip Scrabble, I'll put it in this column," he writes. "Girls might ask themselves, 'Will I feature in this column?' and 'Can I trust him?' The answer to both these questions is yes. I'm having a ball writing this column. I'm well aware the person who will come under the most fire from this is Oscar Humphries, but I'm ready for it. I'll try to be funny and honest, and not make too many enemies."

That was the puff-piece. So, come Sunday 14 March 2004, what did young Oscar say in his first column? Alas – much the same as what was forecast the week before. In the middle of a brief column, there was all that guff about the "yacht off Palm Beach", "strip Scrabble" and "girls" asking themselves about whether or not they will feature in the column. And these bits were the highlights.

"Oscar's Date" started badly, with OH kicking off with this particular piece of self-indulgence: "Let me introduce myself. My name is Oscar Humphries. My father is famous. Some of my friends are famous and, although I am not famous, it has been a constant in my life." How about that? As in "My Daddy's famous – so give me a column." The conclusion was no better: "The person who will come under fire most in this

column is Oscar Humphries – even though I'm his biggest fan. Just remember, it's not the size of your column that counts". Just as well – since the inaugural "Oscar's Diary" did not quite make 500 words.

Come to think of it, the rest of the column was not much good either. OH went on about how he is into Coke (i.e. the soft drink) and the more Cokes he devours the more "glibbering" he becomes – so much so that Coke-fired "dating" is not really his "forte". So what's OH doing writing a column about the consequences of his dating experiences? You tell me. Anyrate, here is what OH told his readers:

Writers don't usually have groupies. Perhaps I've chosen the wrong profession. But I've been going on dates and, until now, when the object of my lech-um, affections asks what I "do", I dodge the question and suck more Coke.

Now that could be the problem. Just as "too many brothels spoilt the cook" – as the saying goes [Ed – does it really?] – so, maybe, too many Cokes make OH so "glibbering" that he does not warrant a column. How many Cokes did it really take OH to write this para in his inaugural column?

I will share with you the, um, ins and outs of my fabulous and deliciously enviable life. I've spent my life loving me – now you can, too. When I first started putting my thoughts down on paper, my editor told me to "write what you know". I know myself. I know what I like. I like women and travelling and great weather.

Apparently OH likes to use the word "um" as a way of highlighting certain naughty bits. So the reference to OH's "my lech-um affections" when "lech" means lechery. Horror. And so the reference to "the, um, ins and outs" of his life. Get it? – well, yes. Anyrate, at least we know all about the advice OH's editor gave him. Namely "write what you know". Which, no doubt, explains why Oscar's Date is a really small column. When a columnist has little say, size really does matter. Um.

DAVID!!! FLINT!!!

Finally, the answer to last issues' quiz. How many exclamation marks are there in David Flint's book *Twilight of the Elites? Media Watch* counted two score! Yes!! Two score!!! The highlight is at Page 147 – which contains three exclamation marks! Really!! Including one each in successive sentences!!! Well done David!!!! Flint!!!!

