



A Culture War And Peace

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In August 2018 Scott Morrison replaced Malcom Turnbull as Prime Minister, and in September Herald-Sun cartoonist Mark Knight sparked an international media storm with his caricature of tennis great, Serena Williams. Only time will tell which was the more significant for the future of the country.

A leadership spill is a high-stakes game, which makes it a little bit like a US Open final when you're chasing a record-equalling 24th Grand Slam title. Where once you might have said that comparison is fallacious—because one is politics and the latter only sport—the reality is that identity politics has colonised both and law-making is guided by culture.

Whether the leadership transition will matter is a function of what Scott Morrison does with the power and influence entrusted to him. On page 12 Simon Breheny passes judgment on the Turnbull Government, and finds that while it achieved some laudable measures, it crucially suffered from a lack of ambition and failed to live up to its own standards.

The full extent and direction of Morrison's ambition is yet to be seen. By all accounts he would prefer to avoid the so-called culture wars, and concentrate on hip-pocket issues. As Treasurer he argued against changing 18C of the *Racial Discrimination Act* 2018, saying the issue 'does not create one job, doesn't open one business (etc)', counsel which Turnbull—to his credit—ignored in favour of at least attempting a legislative package of reforms.

Morrison, however, has expressed a preference that something be done to enhance freedom of religion (and he would do well to read Richard Allsop's discussion of Protestantism and tolerance on page 58). But the biggest barrier to exercising freedom of religion is nothing other than those very same laws hindering free speech (as Morgan Begg explained in the August 2018 edition of the Review).

REASONED DEBATE IS THREATENED BY TWITTER STORMS AND POLITICAL CORRECTNESS, AND THAT IS WHY IT IS SO PRIZED IN THE INTELLECTUAL DARK WEB

The storms around the US Open and the cartoon by Mark Knight show how difficult it is to maintain a space for reasoned debate in an age of Twitter storms and political correctness, and that is why it is so prized by the members of the so-called Intellectual Dark Web (IDW), examined by Gideon Rozner on page 6. In recent years, the IDW has provided a vital alternative to a mainstream media either enmeshed with identity politics or (with honourable exceptions) cowed by it.

In the tennis imbroglio the stakes have been high, as the cornerstone accusations made (by many, not all) against the tennis umpire and also Mark Knight were of racism and sexism, and the aims of militant identitarians include ostracism, termination of employment, and/or sanction by an arm of the State.

Mark Knight draws satires in the shadow of 18C, a law that can bring misery to the lives of cartoonists, as Bill Leak so sadly discovered. Complaints have already been lodged with the Press Council, and maybe also with the human rights commission (which wouldn't necessarily tell us if they had). Under laws proposed by the Gillard Government, such complaints could also have been lodged with a statutory regulator of the press, with powers to fine and delicense publications and individuals.

With a return to ALP Government in 2019 more likely than not, it is more vital than ever for the values of free speech to be defended, and enshrined in law. Morrison may well prefer to avoid a culture war, but as Prussian military theorist Carl von Clausewitz said (of Napoleon), 'A conqueror is always a lover of peace; he would like to make his entry into our State unopposed'.

With the identitarian army on the march, a stand on freedom of religion would be more than a skirmish, and the culture war may arrive whether the PM wants it for not.