Seriously? Australian diplomatic strategy was unable to endure the withering onslaught of four disapproving columnists?

It’s always interesting to see how newly elected leaders respond to stimuli. And Kevin Rudd gave a clear indication of his tolerance for criticism at the beginning of April.

The Prime Minister’s trip abroad had a peculiar schedule. He was to visit China, which had just reemphasised its military control of Tibet. But he was to shun Japan, whose only crime seemed to be that its citizens like dining on whales. Rudd’s implied priorities—that whales are more important than human rights—is sadly indicative of the warped moral calculus of the modern environment movement. And it is worrying that the Australian federal government is taking its diplomatic cues from environmental populism.

This strange diplomatic decision was identified by Tony Parkinson, writing in this edition of the IPA Review. As he writes, ’any hint Australia is into the business of picking winners, giving undue priority to one over another, would be contrary to the national interest.’

The Institute of Public Affairs’ Executive Director, John Roskam, referring to Parkinson’s upcoming piece, wrote in The Age on March 26 that this contradicted Labor’s election campaign line that the ALP would pursue a gentler, nicer, more loving foreign policy: Australia would do more to uphold international standards of human rights, and we wouldn’t acquiesce so easily to alleged human rights violations committed in the pursuit of the war on terror.’ China’s activities in Tibet, surely, fall under some of those categories. Andrew Bolt in Melbourne’s Herald Sun on the same day, and Greg Sheridan in The Australian on March 27 made similar points.

And so, just a few days later, the Prime Minister announced that he had changed his plans, and was now going to go to Tokyo in June. Parkinson, Roskam, Bolt and Sheridan are excellent writers. Their critiques of Rudd’s initial decision to shun Japan were eloquent and well made. John Roskam’s was particularly good. (He is, after all, my boss).

But: seriously? Australian diplomatic strategy was unable to endure the withering onslaught of four disapproving columnists? Is that really all it takes to change federal policy?

Winston Churchill once said there is no such thing as public opinion—there is only published opinion. But it’s not even as if Rudd was castigated across the board by the commentariat. Other columnists defended Rudd, arguing that China will be a far more important trading partner than Japan over the next few decades. Perhaps this is fair enough—perhaps our relationship with Japan should be sacrificed for the sake of the Labor Party’s green vote.

Kevin Rudd is proud of his diplomatic background. But decisions made as a foreign affairs bureaucrat are very different from the highly public and highly scrutinised diplomatic decisions made as a Prime Minister. Avoiding Japan and flattering China may be great diplomacy—the nuances of high geopolitics are, we are told, a Rudd speciality. But foreign affairs is as much about domestic politics as international diplomacy. As John Kunkel, John Howard’s former speechwriter, reflects in his retrospective of the Howard Project in this issue of the IPA Review, Rudd’s predecessor understood the necessity for foreign policy to be just as democratically minded as domestic affairs. With his Japan stumble, Kevin Rudd may have begun to realise that.

This edition of the IPA Review continues our ’What Next for Liberalism?’ feature, asking whether it is ever going to be possible for government to be shrunk, considering that no Australian government has ever managed to do so. Sinclair Davidson, Des Moore and Alan Moran look at the strategies for reducing the size of the state and its powers. Christopher Pyne argues that only major reform to the Liberal Party’s approach to selecting candidates and leaders will re-engage the party’s supporters, and John Pyke crunches the numbers to find a startling level of support for the republic amongst those who voted against it nearly ten years ago.

Richard Allsop reveals how the left have managed to convert the sporting field into yet another battlefield for the culture wars. Greg Melleuish looks at why smart people believe stupid things, and Scott Ryan looks behind the health debate to the health providers who are holding back reform. And of course, the usual book reviews, regular columns and cultural snippets that have helped the IPA Review become Australia’s longest running political magazine.
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Kevin Rudd might have learned a thing or two from Louis XIV. *The Pursuit of Glory: Europe 1648-1815* is a magisterial new history by Tim Blanning, Professor of Modern European History at the University of Cambridge. In *The Pursuit of Glory*, Blanning examines how the ‘Sun King’ attempted to control and regulate every aspect of his nation’s political, intellectual, and cultural life.

Under Louis XIV (1643–1715) public discussion and enquiry, in what Blanning calls the ‘public space’, was first co-opted, and then subordinated to the service of the ruler. The public discussion and enquiry that did take place was either funded or licensed by the government. Those that engaged in public debate invariably relied upon the largesse of government for their livelihood.

Blanning contrasts the condition of France with that which prevailed across the Channel. ‘In England just the reverse situation obtained. So large and rich was the expanding public sphere and so limited was state patronage that intellectuals were driven to the market by both opportunity and necessity.’ It was during this period that Defoe, Swift, Pope, Richardson and Hogarth flourished. ‘Although not every English intellectual was independent, for royal, ecclesiastical and academic patronage did exist and could be important, London’s unique combination of size, wealth, literacy and relatively liberal censorship created a special culture whose libertarian character was recognised by contemporaries.’

France and England both established key cultural and scientific institutions during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. In France there was an Academy of Sciences (1666), a Royal Academy of Poetry and Music (1669), and a Royal Academy of Painting and Sculpture (1648). In England there was a Royal Society of London for the Improvement of Natural Knowledge (1666), a Royal Academy of Musick (1719), and a Royal Academy of Arts (1768). But: in each case the initiative for the creation of these institutions was private in England but royal in France... The English equivalents came about in haphazard fashion according to the whim of private individuals.

In England the Royal Academy of Musick was a joint-stock company intended to run at a profit for its shareholders, while the Royal Academy of Arts ran its exhibitions at a surplus and didn’t require a state subsidy. The consequences of the ‘public space’ being under government control in France are obvious. There was no diversity of opinion and no competition of ideas. Compared to Britain at the same time, intellectual life in France under the Sun King was barren. The political idea that emerged from seventeenth century England was liberalism. The political idea that emerged from seventeenth century France was absolutism.

In France, the creativity and ingenuity of most of its artists and craftsmen was devoted to a single project—Versailles. For the French aristocracy, attendance at Versailles was compulsory—and there, in Blanning’s terms, it was ‘emasculated’ and then subjected to the ‘political and social control’ of the King.

In Australia the election of the Rudd government has been heralded as initiating an ‘intellectual and cultural’ renaissance for the country’s elites (*The Age*, 29 March 2008). It is a renaissance that is of course government-funded, and government-run. The highlight of the renaissance is the Australia 2020 summit. The 1000 of the country’s ‘best and brightest’ handpicked by the Rudd government know that Canberra is not Versailles, and Australia in 2008 is not the France of the ancien régime.

But those with a historical awareness should be wary. For as Blanning writes, at Versailles while an aristocrat might have enjoyed their dancing, gambling, and gossiping ‘so heavy was the hand of the state that even the most pampered beneficiary could see he was in a cage, however gilded the bars.’

(The Institute of Public Affairs is an independent, free-market think tank—the IPA was not invited by the Rudd government to participate in the Australia 2020 summit. *The Pursuit of Glory: Europe 1648-1815* will be reviewed in next edition of the *IPA Review*.)

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The last summit held at Versailles ended badly when Louis XVI was guillotined.
CHRISTIAN KERR

Canberra local politics barely registers outside the ACT, but Liberals around the country may be taught some rude realpolitik by a group of local party dissidents.

While Western Australia could go to the polls from late June, the next scheduled election is in the ACT, on October 18. It should be livened up by a sudden schism that appeared in the Territory Liberals late in February.

The party governed the ACT between 1995 and 2001. They had the political smarts to hang onto office at a time when their federal colleagues shed 7,000 public sector positions. Their policy settings weren’t bad, either. They presided over the creation of nearly 13,000 jobs and gave a significant boost to Canberra’s private sector employment.

Opposition, though, has been hard. Like their counterparts elsewhere, the ACT Liberals have been characterised by infighting and mediocrity. Like their counterparts elsewhere they have been churning through the leaders. They are on their third in two years—and no one can pronounce the name of the current bloke, Zed Seselja.

Earlier this year a group of party powerbrokers declared that they had had enough. The Liberal fundraising group, the 250 Club, relaunched itself as the Canberra Business Club and announced it would bankroll independent candidates in this year’s election.

There are some subtexts here. Little parties have big feuds. Off the record, some CBC heavies admit that they are hoping to take advantage of the Territory’s multi-member electorates to get their people up and guarantee a business-friendly government.

But there are also some ominous signs for the Liberal Party, in the ACT and elsewhere.

‘The Liberals can’t rely on business support,’ one CBC board member told me. ‘People give money to the party they think will win.’

In other words, ACT business people believe the Liberal brand is weak—and tainted. The same is probably true in all the states. The federal party’s brand has taken a wallop, too.

Robert Menzies’ great success involved bringing a disparate group of parties together and melding them into one. The myriad of organisations that attended the Canberra and Albury conferences became the Liberal Party. And the Liberal Party became Australia’s most successful political brand.

Menzies’ Liberal Party, and the groups it bought together, had two defining characteristics. They were opposed to socialism and opposed to centralism.

In contrast, the Howard government became characterised by big, bossy government that constantly accrued more power in Canberra.

At the election last year, the Liberals were snookered. They could not rely on their traditional pitch. They could not claim Labor technocrats threatened the liberties of ordinary Australians.

The Liberal brand has lost its strengths. Now, it faces dilution, with the demands from Queensland Nationals leader Lawrence Springborg for a new state party.

It’s no surprise that his proposal is being resisted. It represents a return to pre-Menzies days and disparate groups of anti-Labor parties scattered around the nation.

Federal Liberal leader Brendan Nelson seemed to stake his leadership on a merger, only to rapidly back away.

As well he might, after winning his position by just 45 votes to 42.

With his leadership balanced on a knife-edge like that, can Nelson restore the Liberal brand?

He set out on a ‘listening tour’ at the end March, but his very first post in an online tour blog read more like Adrian Mole’s secret diary than Menzies’s essays. It made him look entirely confused:

One of the other things I’ve learned is this country makes a caravan every nine minutes. But also the caravan parks around our coastline and throughout Australia are disappearing and I think there’s a real need for governments to make sure that there’s always going to be a place where you can take your family for a budget holiday.

And caravan parks need I think to be protected and we’ve got to stop developers and people moving in and turning them into money-making machines for apartments and dwellings for people that have got a bit of money. I mean development is good, but I think we’ve got to protect the things that are really important to us.

Budget holidays matter, of course. If Dr Nelson wants to provide space for caravan parks, I suspect it would be relatively easy. I also suspect it would involve an almighty fight with well organised and well resourced environmentalists and the national parks lobby.

The Liberal brand simply isn’t strong enough to wear the fight.

The party mustn’t be surprised if people look for an alternative.

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The party mustn’t be surprised if people look for an alternative.
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What is to stop the baby bonus being spent on rich families’ holidays, teenage mothers’ plasma TVs or drugs for drug addicts?

Social policy

Baby bonus rise bad for babies
Louise Staley

Sometimes a policy is so irredeemably bad that nothing short of abolition is the appropriate course. Unfortunately, sometimes the awful policy is a political superstar, beloved by all but the worst curmudgeon. The baby bonus is such a policy.

Set to rise to a hefty $5,000 from 1 July 2008, it was a Howard government initiative in 2004 and initially set at $3,000.

Since its introduction, successive governments have discovered a very basic law of money; one dollar looks very much like another. What is to stop the baby bonus being spent on rich families’ holidays, teenage mothers’ plasma TVs or drugs for drug addicts? Nothing, apparently. So, since its introduction governments have progressively tightened the screws on the payments. Teenage mothers must receive it as fortnightly payments, as do many aboriginal mothers in remote communities. Now the Rudd government will withhold the payment from ‘irresponsible’ mothers who fail to spend it on the child’s welfare. Problem gamblers, alcoholics and drug addicts will now get vouchers for nappies instead of the cash. These mothers, deemed unfit to decide how to spend the money, are branded problem parents from the start—even though there has never been a requirement to spend the baby bonus on the child. As a result, families on $250,000 a year can still choose to spend theirs on a pre-birth holiday to Queensland.

While the government is very keen to prescribe some mothers’ spending habits, it has been markedly less keen...

Free trade

Labor flirting with neo-protectionism in trade policy
Tim Wilson

It is only early days, but the Rudd government’s pro-growth reform credentials are already being put to the test. Since the 1980s, both major parties have favoured free trade. At the last federal election, then Shadow, now Minister for Trade, Simon Crean, committed a Rudd government to a trade policy overhaul that would promote Australia’s economic interests.

In its election policy ‘A strong future for Australia’s exports’ the ALP complained that the Howard government had failed to make the most of an expanding world economy and resources boom. Now in government, Minister Crean is expected to start delivering on the detail of his policy.

Included in Labor’s trade policy is a review of the effectiveness of Australia’s ‘export policy and programs’, including a flagged expansion of the Export Market Development Grants program. The EMDG is a boondoggle for small businesses who want a risk free opportunity to break into new markets through government subsidies—the sort of policy Australia opposes in the World Trade Organisation because they undermine free trade.

Another review includes the effectiveness of existing bilateral free trade agreements (FTAs). In its policy the ALP committed to ‘commission[ing] independent research to determine the effectiveness of existing FTAs and Regional Trade Agreements in delivering net benefits for Australia and to set benchmarks for future agreements’. Minister Crean is expected to announce the review shortly headed up by a senior Australian business person.

Considering Australia is one of the few countries internationally to negotiate truly comprehensive FTAs, it seems likely the review will achieve little.

In its election policy, the ALP actively questioned the deliverables of the US and Thai FTAs. With such scepticism—coupled with the influence on the Rudd government of the staunch multilateralist Professor Ross Garnaut—it is likely the review will recommend de-prioritising bilateral FTAs to focus on the constantly faltering Doha Round of negotiations in the WTO. Following their announcement, industry should scrutinise the terms of reference of the review closely.

Further, in the days following the recent announcement of the Mitsubishi plant closure in Adelaide and the subsequent Automotive Industry Review media reports suggest a likely outcome will be a tariff ‘freeze’. The outcomes of the trade policy, FTAs and automotive industry reviews will be a big test of Labor’s economic reform credentials and commitment to free trade.

Tariff freezes would be much more palatable if they resulted in cars like this.
to address the serious medical concerns caused by women delaying giving birth for up to two weeks so they qualify for the higher payments. Researchers Andrew Leigh and Joshua Gans found hundreds of women delayed their birth by more than a week. Yet when dismissing the request for government to phase in the higher amount to stop this occurring this year, Minister Roxon said ‘it’s obviously not sensible for people to make decisions based on financial arrangements rather than what’s in the best interests of the child.’ Too true Minister. It is just a shame there is hard evidence that at least some women are delaying childbirth, not by a day or two, but by over a week. Perhaps these are the irresponsible ones who need the $5,000 withheld.

**Education**

**Fear of school profit holding quality back**

*John Roskam*

In Australia, schools are operated either by the government or by not-for-profit private organisations. It is prohibited to run a school to make a financial profit.

In the United States there is no such prohibition. And a recent study published by the Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University, *Impact of For-Profit and Non-Profit Management on Student Achievement: The Philadelphia Experiment*, confirms exactly what would be expected. For-profit schools produce better educational outcomes for their students than government-owned and operated schools and not-for-profit schools.

In 2002 the School District of Philadelphia restructured the management of its 83 lowest-performing schools. Of these schools 16 were simply given more resources, 21 were run by a special division of the education department, 16 were contracted out to not-for-profit organisations, and 30 were contracted out to for-profit companies.

The test scores of 400,000 students were tracked between 2001 and 2006. The result was that after four years students in schools managed by for-profit companies were approximately six months ahead in mathematics than if they had remained in a government-run school.

In reading, while again students in for-profit schools did better than students in the other schools, the difference was not statistically significant. Interestingly, there were no significant differences in the performances of students in government-run schools compared to those in school operated by not-for-profit organisations.

Not surprisingly, these results have proved controversial. Opponents of for-profit education have traditionally argued that private for-profit companies would ‘cut corners’ to save costs and would provide an inferior education to what was offered by the government. Of course there are few, if any, activities in which the government outperforms the private sector—and education is no exception.

For-profit schools have a financial incentive to ensure that their students achieve high outcomes. This study demonstrates that the ban on for-profit schools in Australia is driven by nothing more than ideology.
Climate change

New satellite data casts doubts on global warming models

Jennifer Marohasy

New NASA data from their Aqua Satellite throws doubt on the validity of climate change models currently being used by the United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. For the first time scientists have found a strong negative cloud feedback when there is warming in the lower atmosphere. This is significant as most climate models have always suggested a strong positive feedback.

The findings were presented at the 2008 International Climate Change Conference held in New York in March by Roy Spencer—the scientist who heads up a team analysing temperature and cloud data from NASA’s Aqua satellite.

These findings, published late last year, are still being digested by the meteorological community but overhauled climate models would show greatly reduced warming projections.

Dr Spencer said that natural climate variability has been neglected in much of the research and associated discussion on climate change to date.

President of the Czech Republic, Vaclav Klaus, also spoke at the conference about the ‘robust relationship between carbon dioxide emissions and economic growth’. The President said that ‘the dream’ to reduce emissions in the EU by 70 per cent in the next 30 years could only be achieved if there was a dramatic de-industrialisation of Europe—likely associated with a dramatic drop in GDP, or a significant drop in population or a technological revolution.

Given current technologies, a large cut to emissions in developed countries including Australia is possible, but only if the government is prepared to risk a fall in GDP and limit the individual’s ability to make choices about their energy use.

Urban transport

Parking beyond the pale of planners

Richard Allsop

It took a car users group to blow the whistle on the stupidity of public transport planners restricting the potential growth in public transport.

A recent NRMA report found that a critical shortage of commuter car parking at railway stations is the key factor that stops Sydney car commuters getting out of their cars and onto the rail system. The NRMA found that as many as 40 per cent of current motorists would rather park and ride than drive all the way, if there were adequate safe and secure parking at their local station.

While it is very difficult to find land to provide additional parking in built-up areas, around long established railway stations, it would seem obvious that it should be a priority when building a new line in less developed outer suburbs to maximise the available parking at new stations.

Unfortunately, it is obvious to everyone except public transport planners.

In the past two decades,
Football economics

How many football teams should there be?

Sinclair Davidson

Competition is good for consumers—it leads to lower prices and better quality, with less efficient firms exiting the industry. Sports, apparently, are an exception to that rule. Consumers are better off when teams compete on the playing field, but not off-field. Open slather competition off-field, we are told, would result in a small number of ‘super-teams’ that dominate the league and undermine consumer satisfaction. The ‘solution’ is to allow sporting associations to form cartels. The Australian Football League (AFL) is such a cartel.

In principle, the AFL and its constituent clubs provide an on-field spectacle that results in high attendance at games, greater membership of clubs, greater media ratings, greater merchandising opportunities, and greater industry profits. The objective of the sports cartel—like any cartel—is to grow the market, and ensure that weaker teams (firms) do not fail.

But just how competitive is the AFL competition? A well-known measure of competition is the Herfindahl Index where the market shares of firms are used to measure the extent of industry concentration. The inverse of that index is how many equally sized firms would give rise to that level of concentration (in the figure below this is the ‘optimal number of teams’).

Using data from the official statistical history of the AFL, it is possible to calculate a Herfindahl Index based on the number of winning games in the home and away competition for each year from 1974-2007. For example, Geelong with 18 wins in 2007 had about a 10 per cent market share of total possible wins.

Over the 34 year period, the number of teams in the competition has increased from 12 to 16. But the figure reveals that there are, on average, two too many teams in the competition.

The AFL has recently announced plans to grow the market by an additional two teams. That implies an additional game per weekend.

If the AFL is already carrying two teams, is the market strong enough to carry four? Equalisation policies have allowed the AFL to grow the market but have not reduced the number of excess teams. What more can the AFL do to suppress off-field competition?
Reflections on the ‘Howard Project’
John Howard’s former speechwriter
on the successes and failures of the Howard message

John Kunkel

Did John Howard have a specific ‘vision’ for Australia during the eleven and a half years he was Prime Minister?

I would say: ‘No’. For those who believe that governments should go about their tasks modestly, this was all to the good.

There was, however, a ‘Howard Project’ and, in a sense, a project is broader, more complex and more interesting than a vision. The Howard Project spanned the full spectrum of economic, social, cultural and international affairs. It reflected his distinctive blend of liberal and conservative instincts, ideas and values.

In a way no other Australian politician had attempted before, John Howard challenged many of the comfortable verities of late twentieth century Whitlamite progressivism so beloved by Australia’s self-proclaimed ‘public intellectuals’. He was, in an important sense, an anti-establishment politician. Perhaps the most salient feature of the Howard Project was the belief that the political class is no better than the rest of the Australian community; that it is not the role of government to ‘reform’ society by dragging it up to what the intelligentsia defines as an appropriately elevated moral plain.

If, as someone once said, a conservative is a person who doesn’t regard himself as morally superior to his grandfather, then John Howard was indeed a conservative. Of course, in other ways, the former Prime Minister was also a radical. His economic liberalism in government may not have been pure, but it was a core part of his political make-up that, ultimately, tested the limits of what the Australian political system would bear.

Social and cultural issues were central to the Howard Project. John Howard didn’t ‘imagine’ a better Australia. He thought the country was pretty good as it was.

His touchstones were the views and values of what used to be called the ‘silent majority’. To that he welded a pugnacious preparedness to challenge progressive orthodoxies—on issues as diverse as education, drugs policy, the family, citizenship and multiculturalism and indigenous affairs. For this, he attracted unprecedented hostility—especially from left-leaning baby boomer intellectuals whose political heroes will always be Whitlam and Keating.

Part pragmatic realism, part projection of Australian values, Howard’s international policy was also the subject of barely disguised disdain from the ‘Wise Man’ school of Australian foreign policy—the likes of Dick Woolcott, Ross Garnaut and Hugh White. Here, too, Howard was an anti-establishment figure—prepared to challenge settled thinking.

One could almost hear the collective sigh of relief among the great and good on election night 2007—at last, again, one of their men was going to be in charge.

As his speechwriter for almost four years, I basically viewed my job as writing what I thought John Howard would (and should) write if he had the time. I had never tried my hand at speechwriting prior to working for the former Prime Minister. And, as a natural parliamentary orator, John Howard had never really felt comfortable with the idea of someone else writing his speeches.

While the principal needs to have control of the product, for the process to work the speechwriter needs to get something out of it as well, and to leave an imprint on what is said. Yet, I never regarded what was delivered at the end of the day as anything other than ‘John Howard’s speeches’. In settling into the role, I quickly came to the view that a speechwriter should try, to the extent possible, to get inside the speaker’s head. What made speechwriting for John Howard easier than it might have been was that he had been in public life for so long. This meant he had an enormous body of material on the record on pretty much every topic imaginable.

Wherever possible, I made a point of going back and look-

John Kunkel was the speechwriter for the Hon. John Howard from January 2004 to November 2007.
The early years of the Howard prime ministership had a somewhat defensive (at times negative) tone—Australia is not an Asian country; we’re not a racist society; we will not apologise.

ing at his earlier remarks on an issue with a view to ensuring essential continuity. Consistency, after all, was a signature of the Howard brand.

On a personal level, too, John Howard was easy to work for. Unfailingly, he was calm, polite, professional and appreciative, assuming of course you had met his expectations and the work was delivered on time. And he was always conscious that you had a life (especially a family) outside of politics. If he called at home on a Sunday while I was in the middle of bathing my young son or changing a nappy, it was always: ‘That’s much more important; ring me back when you are ready.’

The actual speechwriting process would vary. In the early days I would try as much as possible to talk to him before starting work on a speech. But in the last couple of years it was not uncommon for me to simply present him with a draft so that he had something to react to.

I would borrow ideas liberally from whatever source I thought appropriate. It was sometimes said of John Howard that he was an instinctual rather than an intellectual politician. That’s true as far as it goes, but he was always keen to inject ideas and themes from the ‘broad church’ of liberal and conservative political thought. Edmund Burke, Lord Acton, Michael Oakeshott, Adam Smith, John Stuart Mill, Karl Popper—all got a look in over the years. (I once toyed with the idea of trying to get him to quote Salma Hayek, after Kevin Rudd’s rather strained and unconvincing attempt in The Monthly to portray the former Prime Minister as the latter day incarnation of Friedrich Hayek.) Working for the former PM, and as someone who had spent the better part of a decade enamoured with American politics and history, I came to a much deeper appreciation of the richness of the British conservative tradition.

Generally, I would try and give him a draft of a speech at least four days before it was to be presented. Then we’d go back and forth, extra drafting or tweaking as required.

Usually it was all very orderly, though occasionally you would have to turn on a dime. One Sunday while I was putting the final touches to a Monday night speech, a rather sheepish Prime Minister rang to say that the speech on climate change was excellent but really we should be talking about the burning issue of the day—in this case, the Northern Territory intervention in indigenous communities which had been announced following a cabinet meeting the previous week. With the ABC-Fairfax media complex in mild apoplexy about the intervention, the subsequent speech at The Sydney Institute would be described as one of John Howard’s more passionate and heart-felt addresses.

If an issue broke suddenly, John Howard never needed anyone to come up with ‘a line’. He had a natural politician’s ability to get to the nub of a topic, a strong compass of right and wrong, and unrivalled experience of dealing with ‘events’.

Throughout my time working for him, John Howard still gave the bulk of his short speeches off the cuff, especially (but not only) at informal gatherings. Sometimes he would call you less than an hour before an engagement just to kick around some ideas.

One such occasion was just prior to the opening in Canberra of the national memorial to police officers—state and federal—killed in the line of duty. He asked if I had any thoughts.

On a somewhat abstract level, I said that I was always attracted to the idea that ‘order’ and ‘liberty’ were really two sides of the same coin; that we rely on a foundation of order secured by those in uniform for our essential freedoms. The former Prime Minister immediately launched into a word-perfect two minute oration which captured the idea and communicated it in simple, clear language. It was a humble reminder of why he did what he did and why I was a foot-soldier in support.

Howard’s enemies, of course, invariably portrayed him as a dull and uninspiring speaker. Their failure to appreciate the effectiveness of his plain-speaking style was yet another example of how they underestimated him for so long.

Where I hoped to make a difference was in helping to better articulate the Howard Project in terms of what it was for, rather than what it was against.

My perception was that the early years of the Howard prime ministership had a somewhat defensive (at times negative) tone—Australia is not an Asian country; we’re not a racist society; we will not apologise. Of course, there were positive strands too, but I felt the balance was somehow wrong; that it took too long to shake off the shadow-boxing with Paul Keating. To address this, I tried to understand better the intersection of John Howard’s political instincts and ideas, and put them in more of a positive framework.

Part of the Howard brand was not to sugar coat issues, or to raise expectations about what government could deliver. While this was a strength, it also risked underselling the Howard Project’s full ambition. Of all its strands, the economic dimension was
the most developed. A strong record of fiscal consolidation, tax reform, workplace reform, waterfront reform and the like—all opposed by the Labor Party—provided a ready economic narrative of a government prepared to make difficult but necessary decisions.

Though often portrayed as a tribal politician, John Howard was scrupulous in giving credit to the Labor Party for its record of economic reform in government. No Labor politician has yet seen fit to reciprocate. For all the emphasis on economic reform, John Howard’s proudest boast was the story he could tell of rising living standards for low and middle income Australians. This so-called ‘child of Hayek’ positively enthused about the degree to which the Australian tax-transfer system was geared to assisting the less well-off in our society. At the same time, there was a conscious effort to celebrate the bourgeois virtues—hard work, thrift, self-reliance, striving to get ahead, family orientation. Government was always the handmaiden, never the starting point, of a good society.

More emphasis was given in latter years to speeches setting out the breadth and coherence of Howard’s view of the world. Again, in the early years, the coalition probably spent too long dwelling on the notion that whoever they were they were not Paul Keating.

The core strands of the Howard foreign policy on its own terms were perhaps best captured in the speech at the opening of the Lowy Institute in April 2005. It had several strands: Australia’s place within the family of liberal democracies; why national strength abroad begins at home; why a dangerous world calls for a distinct blend of realism and idealism; why foreign policy should never be conducted over the heads of the people.

This last point was critical. Howard was far more comfortable with a democratic approach to foreign policy than most before him.

Tapping a new mood of national self-confidence—an Australia at ease with the world and with itself—became a more prominent theme of the Howard narrative. The speech that launched the renewal of Australian history teaching in schools—Australia Day eve 2006—tried to communicate this in terms of Australia having achieved a ‘sense of balance’ in the early twenty-first century (on political-economy, foreign policy and issues of national identity).

In talking about Australian values, Howard very deliberately inserted a few lines of praise for the values of what he called ‘the old Australia’; which progressives regularly portrayed as backward, racist, sexist and generally unsophisticated.

To the former PM, the Australia he grew up in was a place of decency and virtue. No apologies there.

When it came to the culture wars, John Howard and I never really discussed how to portray ‘the left’. The speech for the 50th anniversary of Quadrant magazine in 2006 became ridiculously overanalysed as a statement of Howard’s supposedly ideological bent. All it did was recount the
The Howard years extended Australia’s commitment to economic reform through a decade when the politics of reform were both harder in the community and tougher in the parliament.

sorry record of the left—at home and abroad—during the Cold War. Our targets included Manning Clark and Doc Evatt’s former foreign affairs svengali, John Burton. To my amazement, Burton (who I thought was dead) wrote an angry letter to the Canberra Times where he attacked the ‘fascist’ Menzies government and basically substantiated our main charges. Another singular achievement of that speech was having a frustrated David Marr (in a subsequent debate with Gerard Henderson) describe Manning Clark as no more than a fringe academic.

One of the eye-opening things I encountered was the degree to which people who supposedly report national politics didn’t pay much attention to what the former prime minister actually said.

The case of indigenous affairs was a good example. Some who did listen, like Noel Pearson, started to better appreciate where John Howard was coming from. This, in turn, helped develop one of the more interesting relationships in the latter part of the Howard years.

I recall once joking with Howard about what a coincidence it was that those who were regarded as ‘public intellectuals’ in Australia were invariably of the left. We both readily agreed that Noel Pearson was in fact a person who could genuinely be called Australia’s leading public intellectual in that his ideas were new, challenging, and confronted the real issues confronting the nation.

Did John Howard have political heroes? To the extent he did, the Quadrant speech singled them out as Reagan and Thatcher, together with Pope John Paul II. I don’t think he ever looked for heroes though. His appreciation of Reagan certainly grew over time. I think we both thought, however, that Thatcher is in some ways even more significant given the task she confronted in Britain in the late 1970s.

It’s fair to say that by 2007 it became increasingly difficult to ‘freshen up’ the Howard brand and to gain political traction through speeches. More than once, we pondered how to get people to listen again.

As usual with the former PM, the instinct was to take an issue on directly. With climate change, for example, he decided to challenge the notion that it should be elevated to the ‘moral challenge of our time’, recognising that the same crowd who ran this line would have spoken about indigenous disadvantage in the same terms the week before.

We tried to highlight the inevitability of trade-offs and sought to make the moral case for economic growth and social mobility—ensuring a bright kid from a disadvantaged background could get ahead—as being just as relevant as ever. For this we were rewarded with the headline in the Daily Telegraph: ‘PM cool on climate’.

On industrial relations reform also, we tried again to talk in moral terms and to highlight the trade-offs that confront society. As the former Treasurer Secretary Ted Evans once said, high unemployment is a choice. Howard’s very success—that high unemployment was increasingly remote from peoples’ memories—made it harder to establish the links.

To the extent there was a failure of renewal on the part of the former government, I put this down to a combination of two things: first, the Howard Project had reached a natural high tide where it was hard to redefine and extend. Just as importantly, the new generation of Liberals had failed to pick up the mantle and define what post-Howard liberalism would look like.

In the context of speechmaking, perhaps the greatest failing was in not doing more to connect the Howard Project to the idea of a good society—one characterised by virtual full employment, rising living standards, improving social indicators, increased community involvement in areas like volunteering and broad-based national self-confidence.

Still, for all that it is now understated, the Howard legacy remains substantial. It lives on in a transformed economic landscape—everything from the GST to the rise of a new breed of ‘enterprise workers’ basically uninterested in union-based collectivism. The Howard years extended Australia’s commitment to economic reform through a decade when the politics of reform were both harder in the community and tougher in the parliament. It opened up new horizons of choice for Australians on modest incomes, especially in areas such as health and education.

The Howard legacy is to be found also in a new determination to speak candidly and to act boldly in the teeth of social breakdown. Does anyone seriously believe a Labor leader would have had the guts to launch the NT intervention?

Finally, it resides in a renewed spirit of national self-confidence. Echoing Barack Obama’s remark about Ronald Reagan, John Howard ‘changed the trajectory’ of Australia in a way few prime ministers can claim.

As the former PM said on election night last year (unscripted of course), the Australia he bequeathed to his successor was a ‘stronger and prouder and more prosperous country’ than it was eleven and a half years before. Notwithstanding the result of last year’s election, the silent majority of Australians would doubtless agree with this assessment.
After half a century in power, Fidel Castro resigned in March this year. The opportunity for Cubans to get the political, social and economic freedom they desperately need has never been greater.

But who cares? Certainly not the left wing media. Castro’s resignation was greeted by the same Western self-importance that has always infused commentary about Cuba since its revolution. For the left, Fidel Castro was an Eastern dissident, valiantly resisting American imperialism, not a totalitarian dictator, dragging eleven million Cubans further into poverty.

Certainly, the romanticisation of Castro’s Cuba has waned since the fall of the Soviet Union. While it is still the subject of fawning adulation from some quarters—see Michael Moore’s recent documentary Sicko—it has, in the mind of many, become little more than a poor country struggling with the global complexities of a post-Soviet world.

This is quite a different picture to the one of Cuba in the 1960s, with affluent Westerners of socialist sympathies making the pilgrimage to the communist holy land to discover what heights human organisation was capable of achieving. Jean Paul Sartre and Simon de Beauvoir are long gone, but once they walked with Castro around the primitive villages of a hopeful Cuban populace. Cuban analyst Brian Latell described a conversation between the philosopher and the revolutionary in his book After Fidel. Sartre reportedly once asked Castro, ‘All those who ask, no matter what they ask, have the right to obtain?’ Castro, with some pause, proclaimed that ‘Man’s need is his fundamental right over all others’. ‘And if they asked you for the moon?’, continued Sartre. Castro replied, ‘If someone asks me for the moon, it would be because someone needed it’, to which the philosopher was inevitably ‘overcome with emotion’.

The relationship between Castro and the far-left of politics has since eased. There is no split, but neither is there as much admiration. If both were logged on to Facebook, surely their relationship status would read; ‘It’s complicated’.

Indeed, the immediate reaction to Castro’s resignation from the Western media was one of surprising calmness and solemnity. In a retrospective of Castro’s reign, The Guardian did not discuss Castro’s legacy until the final two paragraphs, where arguments from ‘supporters’ and ‘critics’ of the regime were briefly summarised. Good health care and education are cited by his supporters, along with ‘independence’ from the United States. Critics, according to the newspaper, have attacked Castro as a dictator who denies freedom of speech and movement.

Compared with the news story of Augusto Pinochet’s death in 2006, The Guardian’s Castro story is timid, perhaps bordering on sympathetic. The story of the former Chilean dictators death was titled, ‘Glee and grief as man “who brought Spanish Inquisition to Chile” dies at 91’. Its attack on Pinochet was justifiably merciless. It is a shame the same treatment was not given to Castro. One would like to know what arbitrary number of human rights abuses The Guardian has chosen before it categorises these as fact, and not opinion. Even so, R.J Rummel from the University of Hawaii, who has tracked human rights abuses across the globe over the last century, has shown Castro’s regime to be worse than Pinochet’s.

Pinochet, of course, was much closer to the United States than Castro was. The two were ideological opposites, but they shared a distaste for dissent and political freedom. Pinochet infamously tried to adopt free-market economic policies; Castro stuck to the controlled socialist model. Pinochet employed Chicago-School graduates; Castro entertained Sartre. If it is the vanity of human beings to become attracted only to leaders who reflect their own prejudices, then surely these two dictators have had an extended legacy courtesy of Western narcissism.

It was in 1957 when American reporter Herbert Mathews conducted the now famous interview with Castro in the Sierra Maestra. The spirited endorsement of the Cuban revolutionary by the 57-year old reporter was highly electric in its political currents, but horrifically ignorant in its conclusions. Castro was not only ‘anti-communist’, but he was offering a ‘new-deal’ to Cubans. Already the revolution was being described in American terms.

The vanity still continues. Following Castro’s resignation, both the BBC and CNN turned their attention to the question of America’s trade embargo. Matters of domestic reform and the effects on the Cuban populace were again sidelined. It was frequently mentioned that Castro outlived nine different US administrations. Only last year, a plaque was unveiled in the place where Herbert Mathews interviewed Castro 50 years previously. One wonders which person the plaque is really dedicated to.

It is, after all, Cuba’s political relations with the United States that has en- amoured so many westerners. His country was, after all, the centre of a missile crisis that typified the peak of Cold War tensions. It is said that Kennedy had three boxes of mail on his desk—the In-Box, Out-Box, and the Cuban Box. Robert McNamara, serving as Secretary of Defence during the Kennedy years, remarked later that ‘we were hysterical about Castro at the time of the Bay of Pigs and thereafter’.

Andrew Kemp

Andrew Kemp is a researcher at the Institute of Public Affairs.
The ‘independence’ from the United States is regarded by Castro’s supporters as a worthy achievement. It is undoubtedly true that the story of this ‘independence’ is rich in political romanticism, if only for a decreasing minority. But with louder calls for an end to the US trade embargo, it is becoming unclear as to what independence will constitute in the twenty-first century. There certainly remains a degree of political and ideological independence, but there is a greater smell of hypocrisy in the air amongst those on the left who have disparaged trade liberalisation for the last century.

The United States is populated by 300 million people, leaving Cuba with another 6 billion people on the planet to trade with. Though international trade is not without complications and barriers, this predicament that the Cuban economy is now in highlights the extraordinary economic dependence the country once had with the Soviet Union before its collapse.

This dependence, as with all economic dependence, diverted proper attention away from much-needed domestic reform. Compared with some of its Latin American neighbours, Cuba’s export industry has failed to catch on to the rapid economic growth of the last several decades. By the time of Castro’s rise to power, the total value of Cuba’s exports were almost double in value compared to Chile’s. Today, Chile far exceeds Cuba in exports. Economic independence from the United States is now an impossibility, and Castro has no one to blame but himself.

And if continued ‘independence’ also means continued economic socialism, then it must be recognised that the achievements of Castro’s regime remain questionable. The World Bank’s 1951 publication, *The Report On Cuba*, declared that Cuba’s ‘doctors and surgeons [were] among the best in the world’. Its infant mortality rate in 1957 was the thirteenth lowest in the world according to the United Nations—by 1997 it had become twenty-fifth lowest, with a staggeringly high abortion rate of 0.71 per live birth recorded in 1991.

The post-Soviet period was characterised by a noticeable lack of genuine reform at a time when Cuba’s economy was in tailspin. By this time, enthusiasm for the once ‘grand socialist experiment’ finally died.

As *The Guardian* insinuated (but certainly did not spell out clearly), there is little doubt that freedom of opinion in Cuba has worsened over Castro’s rule. In the late 1950s, Cuba had 58 circulating daily newspapers. This dropped to 17 by 1994.

In one of the many speeches given by Castro long ago, he concluded with the now-famous line, ‘Condemn me if you wish. It does not matter. Because history will absolve me’. Despite the efforts of a loud few, Castro is not yet absolved. History has not turned that way, but it is starting to forget him. What began as a thinly veiled fight for ‘independence’, has gradually now become a footnote in the grander history of Western democracy.
Rudd’s summit misses the point of policy

Wolfgang Kasper:

Kevin Rudd’s government was inspired early into its term to call upon Australia’s ‘one-thousand most intelligent people’ to nominate themselves to be invited to a talkfest in Canberra to harvest ideas. Leading opposition politicians quickly approved.

The purpose of the 2020 Summit was not to give the newly elected government ideas about the immediate future. There have no doubt been decided by Labor’s undertakings to those who spent heavily to help them into office. Instead, these ideas are for Kevin 9-11, the next administration.

But would any great democratic leader—Jefferson, Churchill, Adenauer, de Gaulle, Thatcher or Reagan—have dreamt up such a ploy?

This summit is designed to produce no more than sound bites from the 1000 unelected ego-trippers, pet project promoters, and seekers of government support who will attend.

In the cacophony of a thousand voices, Labor’s ‘idea harvesters’ will probably only hear what they want to hear, and the whole charade will serve as a disguise for doing what the political leaders and their inner circle wanted to do anyway.

If the Rudd team does not have a plan how to go about leading Australia, they can find time-tested instructions in the standard textbooks of political, military and corporate strategy. The ‘rational action model’ offers excellent guidance on how best to develop and implement a long-range strategy.

First, one looks at past trends and forecasts of the most likely future. Care has to be taken that the forecasts are not coloured by wishful thinking and that distinctions are made between what has to be accepted as given and what may be influenced by policy. The leaders then compare the forecast with their own shared values and basic objectives. With the help of allies and advisors, they formulate alternative futures in the form of strategies (or policy options) and select one feasible strategy as their plan for action. During the implementation of the plan, circumstances may change. This requires tactical adjustments, which must, however, always stay within the strategic plan.

This is how governments do their budget cycles, how business corporations develop and implement their strategies, how military campaigns are carried out, and how orderly governments conduct their affairs. Following such a pattern of action ensures that the government keeps the initiative, avoids internal contradictions and ensures that the various policies are mutually supportive.

The logic of the rational-action model was applied in a study of Australia’s medium-term prospects and strategic choices in the late 1970s, which became known as the Crossroads study. It helped to inspire the microeconomic reforms of the 1980s and 1990s, which launched Australia on the path of prosperity and confidence that we have been enjoying.

Policy planners must realise that not everything is feasible. A political community is, after all, not an organisation where the leadership commands. Political mandates are limited in time and extent by constitutional constraints, since the principals of the political venture are the citizens and the leaders are only their temporarily empowered agents. They therefore need to convince us to obtain much voluntary co-operation. Coercion is of course sometimes needed, but should be used sparingly. The communication between the political leadership and the autonomous, diverse citizenry, who pursue their own diverse, self-set purposes, requires clarity, stability, simplicity and coherence—and a modest number of programmes. A great variety of new, possibly unrelated projects, which the sound bite summit is designed to inspire, is anathema to good governance in a free nation.

Admittedly, it is easy to legislate and decree, but in a typical modern democracy, government can at any one time enforce, at best, three to seven per cent of all legal norms by compulsion if the citizens are confused or unwilling to comply.

The conception of the summit indicates that the Rudd team do not understand the need for economy and cohesiveness of action. What we need are politicians with fewer ideas about what to do, and not a fishing expedition among self-appointed elites to conjure up more programmes. The core tasks of government will be hard enough to achieve.

And there are major challenges ahead that require a co-ordinated and strategically balanced approach. For example: how will inflation be controlled, when labour-market re-regulation makes economic structures more rigid when more health and education efforts are collectivised, and when the costs of Kyoto compliance are imposed on Australian households (each having to bear estimated extra annual costs of a few thousand dollars)? What number and quality of immigrants should we envisage in the interest of prosperity, but also long-term social cohesion? How do we cope with the growing brain drain? What are the best policies to improve the living conditions of Australia’s indigenous population? How will we uphold national sovereignty when more collective decisions are delegated to UN bodies?

There are many more such strategic issues, and none have five-minute solutions. Seen against the time-tested norm of a rational, cohesive strategy, the ideas harvest scares me.

I used to agree with Ronald Reagan who said: “The most frightening words in the English language are: I am from the government and I am here to help you!” The new-age concept of Kevin’s ideas harvest now frightens me even more: ‘I am from the government, I have no clue what to do, but I am still here to help!’
How the left made sport the new battlefield in the culture wars

Richard Allsop

Anybody who thought the election of the Rudd government meant the end of the culture wars was not looking closely enough at the summer’s cricket.

While many in the community had strong views about the rights and wrongs of the behaviour of both the Australian and Indian teams, few would have thought to place it all within the context of the culture wars. The left, of course, found a way.

In a recent item in *The Monthly*, Gideon Haigh claimed that:

> *The Australian* reopened the culture war on a new front, passing off hectares of partisan comment in support of its star columnist Ponting as news.

Haigh is an outstanding cricket historian, who has produced many of the best modern works on the game. He is also an enthusiastic club cricketer and, in his *Monthly* piece, he went on to document some recent appalling behaviour that he, and his club teammates, had been subjected to at the hands of yobbish opponents. But Haigh illustrates an increasing trend in sporting commentary—writers desperate to politicise behaviour on and off the sporting field. If, as the old feminist saying goes, everything is political, then surely cricket is too? The left have dragged the sporting field into their simple culture wars paradigm, and they are unwilling to let it go.

Haigh believes, quite logically, that poor behaviour in park cricket is triggered by poor behaviour at international level. Your typical *Monthly* reader knows instinctively that if there is poor behaviour in the Australian community, it has only arisen in the Howard years, and if that behaviour is endorsed by any columnist in *The Australian* (other than Phillip Adams), it is somehow part of the culture wars.

But does condoning boorish behaviour on the cricket field really place you on a particular side in the culture wars? If it does, it is certainly not on the side which Haigh implies. After all, over the past half century, the strongest critics of boorish behaviour from Australia’s cricket team have not been those on the left of the political divide, but those of a more conservative bent.

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While Howard-haters would consider liking John Howard to be an offence, it seemed that even being liked by Howard was enough to earn the ire of the cultural warriors.

It was, after all, under the captaincy of Ian Chappell and during the Prime Ministership of Gough Whitlam that the Australian team first earned a reputation for uncompromising on-field behaviour and sledging. Back in the 1970s the cultural fault lines seemed much clearer.

Young people had long hair, vociferously supported Lillee and Thommo from The Hill, went to Sunbury and voted for Gough. Their parents had shorter hair, sat at the Paddington End applauding good play from either side, drew the line at any music heavier than The Seekers and voted for Malcolm Fraser.

Mark Latham, as a true child of the 1970s, maintained the stereotype into the twenty-first century. In his infamous diary he described a day at the cricket when he was a Shadow Minister in January, 2003:

I organised this as a ‘Back to the Hill’ day … reliving our glory days from the early 1980s, on the piss, on the Hill … matching wits with the Barmy Army and ending the day legless. It must have taken me an hour to walk back to Central Station—two steps forward, one step back.

Latham lamented that his only mistake on the day had been to invite along journalist Matt Price who ‘didn’t fit in, wouldn’t have a go and ended up scurrying off to the Churchill Stand’. Of course, the late Matt Price was not just a political journalist, but also a weekly columnist for The Australian on sporting matters. His crime, in Latham’s eyes, was that he enjoyed his sport sober, rather than drunk. Perhaps Price was closer to John Howard, who one can see more easily in the other half of the 1970s stereotype.

The different sporting attitudes of Howard and Latham were the subject of what was undoubtedly the most asinine Howard-hating piece of writing in the history of Howard-hating. Written by regular Age columnist Martin Flanagan, it appeared on the day of the 2004 federal election. Howard’s imminent re-election had clearly riled Flanagan to such an extent that a desperate rearguard action was required on the back of the sports section.

Flanagan asserted that he had ‘never been persuaded that Howard has the serious interest in cricket that his image people claim.’ He challenged his readers to find anything Howard had ‘ever said that shows insight into the game’.

In Flanagan’s mind, despite the fact that Howard had been attending cricket since he was a boy (and, one can now point out, was back at the SCG this January), Flanagan’s politics preclude him from being able to acknowledge that Howard may genuinely like the game.

Flanagan then turned to football and this time Howard is condemned for trying to make football small talk with a Melbournerian he met on the campaign trail. Howard asked the bloke which team he followed and, when the response was that he did not follow a team, ‘the Prime Minister instantly turned on his heels and was gone’. Flanagan opined that ‘I do not believe he really wanted to talk footy. I do not reckon he would know how’.

Of course, Howard did not really want to talk footy, but was politely trying to make conversation, something that everyone, especially politicians of all hues, sometimes need to do. John Howard would probably not do a great job of talking Australian football, but he has never claimed it was his sport.

However, there is a fair chance he could have a better discussion with a Rugby League fan about the St George teams of the 1950s than the Tasmanian born and raised Flanagan could manage.

Flanagan concluded his piece with the following:

I reckon if you got close to Latham, you would find he would have something to say about sport that was both revealing of himself and the game he was describing. That’s a difference between the two men. How significant a difference depends on your view of sport and its place in Australian culture and politics.

If one had attempted to have a chat about sport with Latham, staggering back to Central after his day at the cricket, the conversation might have been ‘revealing of himself’, but perhaps not quite in the way Flanagan had in mind.

While Howard-haters would consider supporting John Howard to be offensive, it seemed that even being liked by Howard was enough to earn the ire of the cultural warriors. Such was the fate of Australia’s greatest sporting icon, Don Bradman.

Any hopes that Howard’s demise might have stopped the trashing of the Don’s achievements and character were dashed when ex-Latham staffer and current progressive think tank Per Capita head, Michael Cooney, opened up in The Sunday Age.

Cooney suggested that believing the ‘most boring old men’s cricket myth of them all’ about the quality of Bradman’s 1948 Invincibles would have become a condition of citizenship if Howard had been re-elected. Cooney slammed Bradman as ‘a conservative, pedantic captain and … administrator’ and condemned him as ‘aloof in style and a divider in nature’.
**Bingeing**

Cricket is not the only sport to have been dragged kicking and screaming into the culture wars during 2008. Ironically, it was that same journal of cultural warriordom, *The Australian*, that ran a story about the culture wars affecting the AFL. Although strangely, this time *The Australian* was empathising with those who had fallen victim to the Howard government’s cultural crusade, rather than continuing to fight the culture wars in Howard’s absence.

The paper excitedly reported that ‘a senior AFL figure has publicly confirmed for the first time what many in football long suspected: that the league felt as much a victim of the Howard government’s culture wars as its anti-drug crusade’. Retiring AFL Commissioner, Colin Carter, believes that the government’s real gripe against the AFL was not the drugs policy. In fact, it was an Australia Day speech given by League Chief Executive Andrew Demetriou in 2005, in which he attacked the Howard government’s handling of reconciliation, Tampa and immigration, combined with the presence on the AFL Commission of people like ex-ACTU secretary Bill Kelty and former Keating staffer, Sam Mostyn, that prompted the tough on drugs strategy.

The fact that the AFL was full of Labor sympathisers may have added enjoyment to the attacks on its drugs policy, but there is no doubt that the government’s motivation was exactly the same as had been in every other aspect of its tough on drugs strategy—focus groups constantly showed that the punters like governments to be tough on drugs. One only had to spend a few minutes listening to talkback radio, or to conversations on the train, to know that the AFL was on a loser.

If drugs policy is itself part of the culture wars then Kevin Rudd is undoubtedly on the same side as Howard. But at the same time, many who might generally have been on the Howard government’s side of the culture wars, would agree with the AFL on the drugs issue.

Rudd’s social conservatism came to the fore when he recently co-opted the heads of six major sports, including the AFL, to his National Binge Drinking Strategy. According to Rudd, the sporting organisations ‘form logical partners in dealing with a social problem which affects so many young Australians and their families today’.

While supporters of personal choice might regard such a policy as a silly piece of nanny statism, for the hard left, it confirms their worst fears that Rudd is on the wrong side of the culture wars they are desperate to continue fighting. The columnist Guy Rundle recently complained in *The Age* that Rudd in power will be just like the last decade in Britain where ‘New Labour’s trick has been to substitute behavioural coercion for real structural change, so … war is declared on obesity or binge drinking’.

Rudd has already bought into another controversial sporting issue. When announcing federal government support for a bid for the 2018 World Cup, he referred to the sport concerned as soccer, not football. However, while clearly being a ‘culture wars’ sort of issue it might be a little difficult for the cultural warriors of the left to know which side to take. Calling the game ‘football’, and forcing other codes to use other names, could be a sign of respect for the various multicultural communities in Australia or, on the other hand,
a piece of insidious globalisation undermining our national identity.

Some American writers have considered the cultural role of soccer. The globalisation of soccer prompted a book chapter titled ‘How soccer explains the American culture wars’ in which author, Franklin Foer, claimed that for many baseball fans loving soccer is reprehensibly un-American. Yet, in the Australian context that would make the Howard government’s enthusiastic promotion of soccer un-Australian. It vigorously supported the game and implemented an ambitious soccer reform agenda. An interesting aspect of that agenda was the removal of all ethnic-backed teams from soccer’s national league. Again, this could have been seen as part of some cunning Howard attack on multiculturalism, but even the left somehow let that one go past.

Culture and commercialism
The original push for paying sports people clearly came from those associated with the working class and the labour movement. Late in the nineteenth century, increased leisure time gave the working classes the opportunity to play organised sport. It soon became clear that an injury to a manual worker had far more serious repercussions than an injury to a white collar worker, both in terms of ability to continue working and the financial reserves the individual had to fall back on. Changes to the economic rewards of sport were needed.

The most obvious example of how this divide played out is the creation of the separate code of Rugby League in the industrial towns of northern England in 1895 and then in the industrial suburbs of Sydney in 1908. The fact that the Rugby League paid its players made it a game for the working class, as opposed to middle and upper class amateur Rugby Union. The cultural divide it created remains, despite Union turning professional in the 1990s, and undoubtedly will continue for some generations to come.

In the 1970s, cricket administrators wanted to keep their game in its semi-professional, uncommercialised form. These conservatives believed the games should continue to be televised on the ABC, and that players, even at the elite level, should earn little more than expenses. In trying to force a cultural war paradigm on the issue one can only speculate whether the Packer revolution was a battle for legitimate wages for workers, or capitalist commercialisation of a people’s sport.

These days the most prominent battles over sporting pay no longer relate to whether payment of players affects the moral underpinnings of sport, but whether the inputs (amount of training), or outputs (attendances, TV ratings), should determine remuneration. Hence, in recent years, there has been Bill Shorten and the AWU campaigning for elite netballers to receive the same pay as elite footballers, on the basis that they train just as hard. But the trouble with this argument is that it does not recognise the different capacities for each sport to generate revenue.

However, while crusaders for equal recognition of female sporting achievement constantly raise tennis and netball, they never complain about the lack of recognition for the achievements of arguably Australia’s greatest current sportswoman—Natalie Rasmussen. Rasmussen has trained and driven the winner of the past three pace Inter-divisions, competing on completely equal terms with men. However, because harness racing is considered a bit ‘common’ by the elites, it scarcely rates a mention in the broadsheet newspapers, or on the ABC.

This sort of snobbery about aspects of sport is certainly not solely an Australian phenomenon. British sporting writer, Simon Inglis, observed in the 1980s that ‘though architectural books might be full of the dullest churches and faceless office blocks, none of them consider football grounds’.

The intellectual left and sporting snobbery
For many years, much of the Australian left also managed to exclude sport from intellectual discourse on elitist grounds. The historian Tom Stannage has documented how Donald Horne ‘repeatedly tried to define citizenship as a matter of high culture—keeping sport and the arts firmly separated in his interpretation of identity and culture’. Stannage describes how historians, such as Manning Clark and Stuart MacIntyre, while personally interested in sport, were reluctant to give it due weight in their serious histories, as they were ‘often sluggish to accept the place of sport in Australian culture’.

Manning Clark loved cricket, and was a keen Carlton supporter, and yet rarely wrote about sport. On the other hand, when it comes to the most recognised historian on the other side of the culture wars, Geoffrey Blainey, Stannage records how sport is ‘a topic which has long received his attention’ and that he ‘has never been ashamed of the role sport has played in the recreation, culture and identity of the Australian people’. And, indeed, the most famous phrase in the whole of the culture wars—the ‘black armband’ view of Australian history—assumed its current usage after Blainey’s 1993 Latham Lecture, where he used the term as a metaphor, based on the armband footballers use to honour the recently deceased.

One might have hoped that the defeat of the Howard government would have meant the end of the propensity of much of the left to see everything in terms of some vast right wing conspiracy and to deny legitimacy to any view held by an opponent. It would be equally idiotic for someone on the right to argue that because Mark Latham liked to have a few too many drinks at the cricket, or that Manning Clark did not write enough about football in his histories, they did not have a genuine love of sport.

The left is definitely more prone to thinking that if someone does not share their overall world view then therefore that person cannot have a legitimate view on anything. And when it comes to sport, only their intellectual fellow travellers can appreciate sport on the higher plane on which they operate.

In reality, people with something interesting to say about sport can be found across the political and cultural fault lines of the country. And those with something stupid to say seem to have an unerring ability to occupy the seat behind me at the MCG.
THIS GUY MISSED HIS OPPORTUNITY

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Contrast and compare the grandstanding of the Rudd government over Japanese whaling to its relative quiescence on the human rights crackdown in Tibet.

Consider it from the viewpoint of Tokyo, and you begin to understand why there might be rising anxiety, if not anger, about the emerging priorities of Australian foreign policy in Asia under Kevin Rudd.

In one case, you have the raucous campaigning against Japan by Environment Minister Peter Garrett, the dispatching of a customs vessel to the Southern Ocean to monitor the activities of Japanese shipping, the much-trumpeted dissemination by Garrett of (disputed) footage suggesting the slaughter of a mother whale and her calf, and the threat by Australia to bring its key ally in East Asia before the international courts.

Measure that against the softly-softly statements of Foreign Affairs Minister, Stephen Smith, in his response to reports that more than 100 Tibetan protesters had been shot or beaten to death by paramilitary police sent in to quell demonstrations in Lhasa. If you listened hard enough, you might have heard calls on Chinese authorities to exercise ‘restraint’, and a respectful plea for Beijing to allow greater latitude for political dissent.

On March 17, Kevin Rudd finally broke his silence: ‘These are significant developments, and therefore have been the subject of communications diplomatically between our two governments. I imagine those communications will continue.’ He might just as well have stayed mute.

But the problem here was not so much that the Rudd government was being circumspect about unproven claims of atrocities against the Chinese security forces. The problem here was a truly dreadful juxtaposition.

For if symbolism counts for anything in international politics (and Rudd has demonstrated, through the theatrics of his ratification of the Kyoto Protocol in Bali, that he believes it counts for plenty) what are we to make of the symbolism that sees the new Australian government adopt the most macho of megaphone diplomacy when it comes to expressing moral outrage over Japanese whaling while confining itself to the meekest of mouse-like protests when it comes to troops and tanks rolling into Lhasa?

This yawning disparity in the Rudd government’s approach to the two major powers in East Asia has not been a good look, serving only to compound the worst fears in Tokyo about Rudd’s decision to include China, but exclude Japan, as a destination for his first major overseas trip as Prime Minister.

For this reason, Kevin Rudd deserved to be under greater than usual scrutiny as he set off on his visits to Europe, the US and China. Every nuance of his every word and gesture on this trip would be studied intensely, in Tokyo and beyond, for what it said about how the new Australian government was recalibrating its strategic approach not just to the region, but to the world.

In Europe and Washington, NATO chiefs and the Bush administration would be taking careful measure of where exactly Rudd stood on his commitment to the challenges of Afghanistan and Iraq. These are momentous issues of global security and stability, involving life-or-death choices. It is not a debate conducive to the slick soundbites and pantomime heroics Rudd put on show in Bali in December, where he was all but canonised by a misty-eyed media and the cheerleaders of the global NGOs.

This time around, Labor’s foreign policy credentials were to be exposed, for the first time, to a searching and rigorous road test.

For all his efforts to elevate climate change to the ‘great moral challenge’ of our time, the struggle to secure and stabilise Afghanistan was always going to be front-and-centre of Rudd’s trip to Europe. There are tensions and divisions within the NATO alliance over who is, and who is not, pulling their weight.

As ever, the expectation internationally is that it falls to the Americans to do most of the heavy lifting. Not all of NATO’s European member-states are shouldering their share of the burden. Apparently unbeknownst to Labor’s defence minister, Joel Fitzgibbon, as he reinvents the wheel, this problem had been raised repeatedly by Australia within NATO for the best part of two years.

At issue are the caveats several NATO partners place on the deployment of their forces within Afghanistan. The effect has been to leave the US, Britain, Canada and the Dutch to do the bulk of the heavy fighting against the Taliban in the south—and, as a consequence, to suffer the bulk of the casualties. Australian special forces have also been at the sharp end, notably in Oruzgan.

As Australian prime minister, Rudd is entitled to urge a fairer distribution of responsibilities. He is entitled to make the point that
It is in Tokyo, not Beijing, where the new prime minister is in danger of being misinterpreted.

everybody around the table at NATO, not to mention the Afghan people, would pay dearly if Afghanistan was ceded once again to chaos, violence and extremism.

But, in mounting such a case, Rudd has a credibility problem of his own making. The same man who remains committed to the struggle to defeat the Taliban and their al-Qaeda sympathisers in Afghanistan adopts a very different line on Iraq, where he has proclaimed the struggle to defeat Sunni extremists and their al-Qaeda sympathizers as ‘the biggest foreign policy disaster since Vietnam.’ In keeping with this rhetoric, he has ordered the withdrawal by mid-year of 500 combat troops from southern Iraq.

Australia has every reason to be proud of its commitment to the battle for the future of Afghanistan. But if Rudd is to ask others to do more, they might well turn to the new Australian prime minister and ask why he can’t do more to bolster our current commitment of 970 troops? For as long as Australia was also fully engaged in Iraq, that question answered itself. Not so now.

This same debate resonates profoundly in Washington. Australia has been a valuable supporter and ally in these difficult, gruelling and harrowing struggles in Iraq and Afghanistan. Will it remain so?

Rudd has strong networks in the US, across the political divide, due in part to his extensive and long-standing involvement in the Australian American Leadership Dialogue. Up to a point, this buys him some wriggle room. It is also true that he has cleverly tailored his message on Iraq to placate different audienc es at different times. When speaking to his political base in Australia, particularly the Labor left, he parades his decision to withdraw Australian combat troops as delivering on his so-called ‘exit strategy’.

When he speaks to Americans, he is more prone to emphasise that Labor policy does not represent abandonment by Australia of its allies. He has sought to reassure the US that he is not ‘doing a Gerhard Schroeder on them’.

At home, of course, the new prime minister doesn’t make a habit of advertising the reality of our troop deployments in Iraq. For the fact remains that, when combat troops are withdrawn, the Rudd government will leave roughly two-thirds of the Australian contingent in place in the Iraq theatre of operations. This will include the security detachment guarding the Australian Embassy, along with the naval frigate protecting Iraqi oil facilities in the Gulf waters. It’s the withdrawal you have when you don’t have a withdrawal.

In Afghanistan, Rudd is more full-blooded in his commitment. This is welcomed in Washington, although some in the US might be curious about the distinction Rudd draws between Iraq and Afghanistan. The truth is, the strategic effect of defeat in either would be just as bad for global security.

In opposition, Labor persisted with the bogus claim that Australia would be safer from terrorism if it got out of Iraq—yet the same principle did not apply to Afghanistan. In government, Labor is stuck with this flawed logic.

The global Islamist movement makes no distinction between Iraq and Afghanistan. From their perspective, the war front extends from one to the other. Just ask the Canadians, who have sent thousands of troops to Afghanistan since 2001 but not a single soldier into Iraq. Canada has lost 79 troops and a diplomat to violent attacks. Last June, a nest of 17 Islamist terror suspects was arrested in Ontario, on allegations of a major bombing plot, not to mention a plan to storm Parliament and behead the prime minister.

Australia, Britain, the US and the Dutch are among those who have been active in both theatres. So, in its own way, has Japan. It has committed naval destroyers and supply vessels to refuelling operations in the Indian Ocean, in support of the struggle in Afghanistan. Slowly shedding the taboos of the postwar era, it also became a key contributor in Iraq. Indeed, one reason for continuing Australian troop deployments in southern Iraq was to protect Japanese reconstruction teams seeking to refurbish Iraq’s battered and decrepit infrastructure. This tag-team effort represented a quantum leap not only for Japan, but also in military co-operation between the two countries.

Through its years in power, the Howard government sought deliberately to elevate the relationship with Japan from its traditional narrow focus on trade and commerce. Rather than just pocketing the benefits of huge export deals, it was critical to understand Japan’s prominence in the strategic calculus of the Asia-Pacific, not just as a trading power but also as a security partner and a world leader in development aid. Japan is not only Australia’s biggest customer (our $36 billion of exports to Japan last year were half as much again as our exports to China) but also a leading democracy in our part of the world, a key voice in all of the important trade and security debates across the region, as well as a generous and active player in grappling with the development challenges of the island microstates of the Pacific. All this should mean Japan is deserving of respect, not ridicule.

Indeed, how well we balance our relationships with the key powers of the Asia-Pacific is critical to Australia’s long-term security and prosperity. It is not just a question of how we relate to each of them individually. It also requires an adult appreciation of how they interact, or don’t, with each other.

Over eleven years, the Howard government worked assiduously, and
successfully, to strengthen simultaneously all of the most vital relationships—the US, Japan, China, Indonesia and, increasingly, India.

Adding to the formal alliance with the US dating back to the Menzies government in 1951, the Howard government negotiated a free trade agreement with the world’s leading economy. It also bequeathed to Rudd a strategic partnership with Japan, a strategic dialogue with China, and a treaty on security co-operation with Indonesia.

This was a solid and well-balanced edifice. It provided Australia with a framework within which it could work effectively with each of its key partners, and remain a valued and trusted friend to all. Kevin Rudd will tamper with this at his peril. Any hint Australia is into the business of picking winners, giving undue priority to one over another, would be contrary to the national interest.

Of course, there will be sporadic difficulties, whether Japanese whaling or human rights in Tibet. Australia is entitled to raise its concerns forthrightly. But, to keep things in balance, it must ensure its representations are proportionate.

Australian governments do not recognise Tibetan claims for independence. But nor should any Australian government be seen to give comfort to China’s intolerance of internal dissent, or its use of force against civilians.

One reality of China’s stature as the coming world power is its propensity to flex its diplomatic muscle in ensuring its interests and priorities are respected, particularly when it comes to international attitudes towards the hot-button issues of Taiwan, the Falun Gong and human rights in Tibet.

China can be prickly, if not bellicose, on all of these issues. This is tricky territory for Rudd. Amid questions raised about his dealings in opposition with a prominent Chinese telecommunications firm, he is coming under increasing scrutiny over whether he is a little too accommodating of China’s sensibilities.

All the more important, then, that Rudd raise strenuously at the highest levels Australia’s dismay over China’s handling of the unrest in Tibet. China won’t like being lectured for one minute, whether in Mandarin, English or Swahili. But some circumstances demand a bit of backbone and plain speaking.

Rudd should be wary of over-indulging his Mandarin party trick. The strict practice of China’s leaders is to deliver key statements in their native tongue (including Hu Jintao’s speech to the Australian Parliament in 2003). They would expect any self-respecting foreign leader to do the same.

Formal statements of Australian policy should be put to China in concise English, so as nobody should be left in any doubt or confusion—here, in Beijing, or anywhere else—about the meaning or intent of Australia’s position.

In fact, Rudd should consider putting much more effort into brushing up on Japanese language and culture. For, on current form, it is in Tokyo, not Beijing, where the new PM is in far greater danger of being misinterpreted.

The Rudd government’s rough handling of Japan cannot be excused as a sin of omission or forgetfulness. Each of its controversial decisions—on whaling, on its abandonment of the quadrilateral dialogue between the US, Japan, Australia and India, and on the decision to bypass Tokyo on this major overseas trip—involves explicit, calculated policy choices.

All that being so, Japan is entitled to ask whether the Rudd government has made up its mind about how it sees Australia’s future in Asia, and whether part of that design is to draw much closer into China’s orbit than Japan’s.
Breaking through medical myths

Lifting the veil of health ‘stakeholders’

Scott Ryan

Earlier this year, the new Minister for Health referred to the need to ‘rebuild health services after the last decade of neglect’ as only 73.4 per cent of all Medicare services were being bulk-billed. Apparently, it is a disaster that only three quarters of Medicare services were provided at no out-of-pocket costs to patients.

Claims such as this over the last few years have driven an increasing clamour for health reform, greater public spending on health and claims of a ‘crisis’ in our health system. It is therefore no surprise that when the government makes such a significant misdiagnosis in defining the real challenges facing our health system, then the proposed cure also has major flaws.

Kevin Rudd’s National Health & Hospitals Reform Commission contains two former politicians, three health bureaucrats, three academics, two consultants and a doctor. But who speaks for the consumer—the patients?

Apparently the new government has determined that the best way to deal with these claims is to gather a panel of government-chosen experts who will determine exactly what needs to be done and by whom.

But this approach perpetuates two key problems—the dominance of provider and ‘expert’ voices to the exclusion of the consumer or patient, and a seeming reluctance to thoroughly examine and test the various claims made by the groups such people represent.

Health policy affects everyone at virtually every stage of their lives. It often does so at times of high stress, when a health crisis affects themselves or a loved one.

More so than many other policy areas with significant levels of government activity, such as education, policing, even economic management, health policy is often covered by a veil of complexity and inaccessibility that limits debates to experts and excludes the broader community and the patient or consumer. Dominated by these experts with years of training and who are often quoted with a virtual alphabet of qualifications, all claiming to have ‘the answer’ and to be working in the community’s interest, healthcare is continually one of the dominant policy and political issues. It is simply not appropriate that it is an area in which the community at large is excluded from many of the critical debates.

Health policy is also a major driver of voter attitudes, driving the media to report it in the traditional ‘he-said, she-said’ terms familiar to political debate, with various stakeholders quoted as supportive or otherwise of one of the political players. While the claims and pronouncements of political actors are usually tested, insufficient scrutiny is often applied to the claims of these stakeholders.

The reality is that health is just like every other area of government policy. Actors in the health policy arena have their own agendas. Just as the Australian Medical Association (AMA) will express concern about access to doctors, the Australian Nursing Federation (ANF) will outline the need for more and better paid nurses and government will often talk of the need to constrain increasing costs.

Most of these claims are well-intentioned, but are at the same time driven by the perspectives their training, needs and personal interests bring. They must be examined and tested to ensure they are not simply claims representing their own interests, intentional or otherwise, to the exclusion of the needs of the consumer.

Testing the claims and assumptions that underpin a great deal of discussion about health policy and, where necessary, puncturing myths that have developed over time, often simply through not being challenged, is critical to increasing public participation in health debates, and ensuring that the interests of consumers are the driving force behind policy and reform proposals.

Community vs private interest—MYTH

Key actors in the health debate often claim to be acting in the broad interests of the community, virtually to the exclusion of their own. Just as the ANF claims ‘Australia’s nurses are the backbone of our health care system,’ the AMA claims that general practitioners are ‘the gateway to health care for most Australians’. The health policy debate often seems to be dominated by doctors, nurses and other health professionals motivated purely by altruism.

These arguments (and they are far from the only ones) are used to underpin claims for greater resources to support their activities within the health system—the most common examples being claims for increased resources or wages, more beneficial employment conditions or greater numbers of employees within the health system.

Similarly, there are pharmacists, private health insurers, pharmaceutical and medical device and technology companies, and various other service providers that also make claims of their critical contribution to the health system.

All of these have a direct interest in the manner and amount of government funding within the health system, as well as all contributing to achieving the aims of the system.
Health comprises just over 10 per cent of our economy, indeed a strong and growing health sector is part of a modern economy. Thousands of doctors, nurses and other health professionals make their living from healthcare and local and international corporations also make significant profits from providing goods, services and technology.

This should not be something that such groups hide (intentionally or otherwise) when pressing their claims. As health is funded by taxpayers to such a substantial degree, the community should examine whether such claims are a result of both most efficiently servicing their health needs as well as in the economic self-interest of the providers concerned.

**We need a single, national health system—MYTH**

It is an oft-heard claim that the division of health between the Commonwealth and states results in inefficiency, cost-shifting, wastage and duplication.

Indeed, with the Mersey Hospital ‘takeover’ in the last months of the Howard government and the comments from Tony Abbott calling for the Commonwealth to take over responsibility for hospitals, along with Kevin Rudd’s commitment to a referendum if his reform process fails, it could be said that this is a sentiment with supporters across the political spectrum. But does a federal takeover automatically mean we will have a better health system?

The current arrangements are undoubtedly complex—the Commonwealth solely funds parts of the health system such as access to doctors and associated medical services (for example pathology, radiology) through Medicare, jointly funds state-managed public hospitals with the state governments, and jointly funds various community care programs with state and local governments. The Commonwealth funds universities to train the medical workforce, yet their inhospital training is jointly funded by the Commonwealth and states.

The most public aspect of this overlap relates to hospitals. Often the dominant element of the public debate about healthcare due to its political sensitivity, hospital funding is the prism through which health policy is seen and debated.

But would hospitals being run from Canberra necessarily lead to improvement in services, waiting times and emergency rooms? No evidence has been offered to suggest this. The most often quoted benefit is that the costs of duplicated health bureaucracies could be saved, but this is nothing more than a perennial centralist furphy.

Firstly, the bureaucracies at a state level cover more than just hospitals—they also cover public health programs, community and home care programs and many activities not covered by Commonwealth bureaucrats. Many such functions would need to be retained.

Secondly, this alleged duplication in bureaucracies comprises a relatively small amount of more than fifty billion dollars of taxpayers’ money spent on health care annually—the reality is that this is more about rhetorical support for centralisation than real savings that can be poured back into service delivery.

Finally, there is no evidence to suggest that the centralisation of hospital and health policy would in any way benefit consumers. There is a legitimate fear that removal of the ongoing political pressure on both state and federal governments and its replacement with a single authority would actually reduce the responsiveness of policy makers to the community’s needs and demands.

**Hospitals are the most important part of the health system—MYTH**

The health debate often attracts public attention through the prism of public hospitals. While they are undoubtedly a critical part of the healthcare system, and recent incidents, particularly in NSW, as well as the ongoing growth of waiting lists across the country are a very significant issue, they do not represent the most significant part of the broader health system.

In simple numeric terms, access to a general practitioner is much more important to more people, most of the time. In 2003-04, there were 208 public hospital 'separations' (interactions) for every 1000 people. However, there were 1087 Medicare services for the same number of people. While this latter Medicare figure also includes procedures associated with visiting a doctor (such as blood tests or x-rays) and so they cannot be directly compared, it is clear that access to a doctor is the most common interaction people have with the health system.

Accessing a doctor at an appropriate time can also avert the need to visit a public hospital, either immediately or at a later stage. And in many areas of the country, particularly rural and remote areas, accessing a doctor requires a wait of weeks, due to a severe workforce shortage in such areas. To focus purely on public hospitals is to miss the real challenge—access to medical expertise when and where it is required.

**Ageing is the major driver of rising health costs—MYTH**

One of the major elements of the health debate in recent years has been the growth in concern about an ageing population. While Australia’s ageing population is a factor in driving healthcare costs, it is far from the most significant one. The federal treasury’s most recent intergeneration report, published in 2007, conceded this when it outlined that ‘factors other than ageing account for the remaining three-quarters of the projected increase in health spending.’
It is critical that the current health reform debate further involve the most important but under-recognised part of the system—the patient.

The major driver of increasing healthcare costs is the development of new health technologies. All new technology costs money. A generation ago, there were no MRIs or CT scans, and organ transplants were a news item more than a regular procedure.

The second component to rising costs is increased utilisation of health technology. While this is partly driven by an older population, it is overwhelmingly the product of more people generally using the more widely available technology. Whereas sports people a few generations ago retired when they injured a knee, teen footballers these days have anterior cruciate ligaments repaired and continue their careers. Similarly, we have an array of medicines now available that were unheard of a generation ago.

Medicines, medical devices and increasingly complex testing and diagnosis options mean that we are spending more to better treat conditions in people that would previously have not been treated, or not been treated in the same fashion, usually less effectively treating or managing conditions (particularly chronic, long-term conditions).

The results of such costs driving health spending can be seen through population screening programs. Mass-screening programs have reduced deaths from cervical cancer by half over the last decade. Similarly, vaccines against cervical cancer are now part of the publicly-funded immunisation schedule for young women. Both of these have cost more in simple spending terms, but they have ‘purchased’ an improvement in health outcomes—a dramatic reduction in the death rate.

Some increases in spending on new technology in the short term can also lead to lower costs in treating conditions over time. The 2005 Nobel Prize in Medicine was awarded to Barry Marshall and J. Robin Warren of Western Australia for their research into the cause of peptic ulcers. This research led to a dramatic shift in the treatment of ulcers—many people could now be treated with a series of medicines rather than major surgery.

**More government spending will fix our health system—MYTH**

Not surprisingly for an area dominated by government, the debate about how to improve our health system is dominated by demands for increased government spending. This is particularly true when it comes to discussion of the public hospital system. However, the truth is that we actually have very little information about exactly what our health spending delivers in improving health outcomes—that is, the improvement in health for the money we spend. We measure inputs through spending and government programs, outputs through hospital and aged care beds, Medicare services delivered and hospital separations—but we are particularly poor at actually measuring what all these do for the actual health status of patients.

The Medicare system is predominantly managed through a ‘fee for service’ structure. Rather than paying for effectively treating a patient or managing a condition, most interactions in our health system are funded by paying for time or procedures. Simply paying more for such interactions is no guarantee of improving the health status of those being treated. Similarly, substantial increases in funding to public hospitals are no guarantee that more patients are being treated or that such funding is being used in the most efficient manner.

Per capita health spending in Australia increased by over 80 per cent in the ten years to 2003, but at the same time concern about the state of our health system remains unabated. Similarly, over the term of the Howard government, health spending nearly doubled (in nominal terms) but these concerns seemed to increase towards the end of that period.

Little research has been undertaken into the ‘efficiency’ of our recent increases in health spending overall. In this particular area, the influence of the labour force issues is critical. The influence of health sector unions in the state-run public hospital system is particularly strong—and this may in itself lead to extra spending being directed to wage and salary increases that do not benefit patients or the efficiency of the system overall.

The health debate is likely to only increase in importance over time. Health spending is rising faster than inflation, health technology continues to develop, bringing further cost increases, and an ageing population and increasingly aware consumers demand access to the best health treatments available. As long as we retain a predominantly publicly-funded health system this has a direct impact on the public through higher taxes.

It is critical that the current health reform debate further involve the most important but under-recognised part of the system—the patient. Sadly the tradition of provider and expert-dominated debates seems set to continue, as even the Prime Minister’s National Health and Hospitals Reform Commission fails to include a consumer voice.

Expert advice has its place. But experts should guide, not determine, the structure and funding of our health system.
What next?
The 2007 election illustrated clearly how at both the federal and state levels the Labor Party has moved further away from socialism towards the centre of the political stream. In that sense the coalition parties can claim a ‘victory’, albeit a hollow one. But what can the opposition parties do now to differentiate themselves?

Michelle Grattan, recently wrote an article headed ‘Liberals stripped bare’ for The Age suggesting it would be difficult to find a new direction given the precedent set by the abandonment of WorkChoices and the acceptance of the apology and the Kyoto ratification. She might also have pointed out that the Liberal Party had already effectively abandoned its stated objective of small government.

Remarkably, the post-election debates about possible inflationary effects of the tax cuts promised by both sides have not elicited any critical comment (or indeed any comment at all) about the increased burden of federal taxation imposed by the coalition, even though this means Labor has been handed on a platter a substantial additional quantum of funds compared with when it was last in office. As pointed out in the January 2008 IPA Review, federal tax revenue increased by 2.5 percentage points of GDP between 1995-96 and 2006-07. Moreover, the 2007-08 budget estimates indicated that even with the promised pre-election (nominal) tax cuts of $31.5 billion there would be a further increase in the burden of taxation over the following three years. In short, the coalition affected no real tax cuts and sought to implement none in the future (a real tax cut requires a reduction in the proportion of real income paid in tax).

Why has this happened? Nobel Prize winner James Buchanan suggested in his 1990 John Bonython lecture that, while it took about a century for the widespread faith in socialism to die—from mid nineteenth century to sometime in between the early 1960s and the early 1990s—no widely shared organising principle seemed to have replaced it. Rather, the Leviathan of interest-driven politics had emerged, one which he opined as difficult to dislodge. Politicians of all party affiliations have not hesitated to buy votes through spending promises, particularly when the cost of the promises is relatively small per tax-paying individual.

Buchanan’s conclusion was that ‘if we know that politics fails and that its natural proclivity is to extend its reach beyond tolerable bounds, we may be led to incorporate constraints into a constitutional structure’. While this statement was doubtless related to measures in the US limiting governments’ powers to borrow and spend, it also reflected more general concern amongst academic thinkers and others about the working of the democratic system. Interestingly, Australia has experienced one failed attempt—by the NSW government in 1994—to guarantee a balanced budget and the European Union has limits on countries’ budget deficits, although these have not always been observed.

In reality, attempts to put constitutional constraints on taxes and borrowing reveal inherent practical difficulties. Term limits, on the other hand, may be both more practical and have potential, particularly at the state level, to reduce the capacity of politicians to ‘fool the people’ for a time. Recent revelations of ‘cliqueness’ within the NSW Labor government illustrate the problem. Term limits already exist of course for elected representatives in some US states and local governments—and for the President.

However, given that (relatively) Australia has one of the smallest government sectors—equal second with the US—a policy designed to move towards an even smaller government here would require a change in the still widely shared culture of belief that extensive government intervention is needed. Although there are some indications that such a cultural change is happening, further substantive progress would require political leadership.

One development that might be drawn upon is the encouraging sign in Europe of movement in the direction of smaller government in circumstances where economic growth has been sustained for a lengthy period, albeit at only a moderate pace. Be-
What next?

between 1995 and 2007 growth in Euro countries averaged about 2 per cent per annum, even though almost all Euro countries reduced the size of government (as measured by the proportion of general government outlays to GDP). In fact, no less than 21 out of the 28 countries listed in surveys of OECD member countries made such reductions and eleven cut them by more than 5 percentage points of GDP, which suggests that they made reductions in discretionary outlays. Particularly noteworthy were the cuts by the Nordic ‘big spenders’—Sweden (13 per cent), Norway (9 per cent), Finland (13 per cent) and Denmark (9 per cent)—as well as those by Canada (10 per cent), Czech Republic (11 per cent) and the Slovak Republic (12 per cent).

These countries have thus reduced the relative extent of government outlays by 15-20 per cent, resulting in much diminished ‘Swedensation’. The reasons for these developments in Europe are unclear, but they certainly suggest smaller governments have increasingly been favoured. Moreover, while one or two countries with relatively small government outlays have experienced relatively poor economic performances, some academic analysis suggests a favourable relationship between economic growth and the size of government.

In a survey of a wide range of academic studies of the effects of government size, economics Professor Denis Mueller of the University of Vienna concluded that, while too small a government sector can harm economic performance, beyond some point the adverse incentive effects from high levels of taxation and regulation outweigh its positive effects. All of the highly developed countries, Mueller argues, are beyond that tipping point. The country which has maintained one of the smallest government sectors since its inception—the USA—has real per capita income levels that are about 25 per cent above the next highest in the OECD.

In any event, the case for reducing the size of government would not rest simply on the potential for improving economic performance. There is a broader philosophical case that increasing the role and responsibilities of individuals would enhance individual freedom and the functioning of society more generally. Particularly in today’s more educated and wealthier society, a higher proportion of individuals have the capacity to make their own decisions on health, education and retirement.

This, in turn, should mean a reduced need for the provision of government assistance, particularly to higher income groups which currently receive about 30 per cent of various government benefits. From a social perspective, welfare dependency would be reduced as an increased proportion of individuals and families would assume more responsibility for their own welfare. There would be less of a ‘nanny’ state.

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Can we starve the government beast?

Sinclair Davidson

‘This reckless spending has got to stop’. With those words Kevin Rudd outflanked John Howard’s economic policy from the right. Australia’s traditional centre-left party won the 2007 election with smaller government rhetoric than the traditional centre-right party. Of course, the Rudd government is not going to be a small government, but then neither was the Howard government. Voters had a choice of two-large government parties at the election and seemed to prefer the party that offered slightly lower tax cuts with slightly less spending.

Small government is rhetorically popular, yet two paradoxes are immediately apparent. By historical standards Australia now has more government than ever before and the party of big government is in office in every state, territory and Commonwealth government. The right are no longer the party of small government. This phenomena, however, is not confined to Australia. The US administration can be described as being ‘big government conservative’. George W Bush did not campaign to reduce the size of government in either 2000 or 2004 and he has made no effort to do so.

Andrew Norton has coined the phrase ‘conservative social democracy’ to explain the emergence of conservative big government in Australia. As he indicates, market forces have increased income inequality within society, and given our highly progressive income tax system which has translated into massive increases in revenue flowing to government. Rather than reduce taxation, the Howard government directed more funds to favoured social institutions, such as family units—households with children. This was a deliberate strategy. John Howard recently espoused this strategy to the American Enterprise Institute.

We should maintain a cultural bias in favour of traditional families. That doesn’t mean discriminating against single parents but it does mean ceaselessly propounding the advantages for a child of being raised by both a mother and father.

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Marriage is a bedrock social institution—with an unmistakable meaning and resonance. It should be kept as such.

Taxation laws should promote, not penalise, marriage. The taxation system should generously recognise the cost of raising children. This is not middle class welfare. It is merely a taxation system with some semblance of social vision. The tax payment system must also support choice for parents about who cares for their children.

The Commonwealth Treasury has reported that Commonwealth spending has grown 54 per cent since 2000-01. Consistent with conservative values, that spending has been directed at the aged and families with children, while unemployment assistance has fallen. The important point to note is the phrase about having a tax system that includes a social vision. In this regard a centre-right government is little different from a centre-left government. Some details may differ, but overall the vision is identical. Government coercion, applied through taxation and spending, is the primary tool to mould society towards a desired outcome.

James Buchanan famously said that while socialism was dead, Leviathan lived on. In some respects this comment missed the point. Socialism has comprehensively failed as Ludwig von Mises and Friedrich von Hayek predicted in the 1930s. But Leviathan is now a very different beast, manifesting itself as the welfare state or ‘the risk society’. The simple idea that individuals can and should make their own choices is as much under threat today as at any time in human history.

The underlying premise of the risk society is seductive. Government can insure its citizens against a range of risks. This is trivially true—of course. The important question is however, which risks governments should insure its citizens against, and at what price? Should they even be trying to insure citizens against their own choices at all? Advocates of big government all answer in the affirmative but seem to ignore the subsequent price tag. In Australia their reasoning is effective—after all, ‘we’ can afford it, and we live in a ‘society, not an economy’.

The individual in this type of society no longer has self-ownership but is owned by society. How often do we hear that ‘obesity costs us X’ or ‘smoking costs the community Y’ and so on? The consequences of (some) personal life style choices are apparently socialised giving society the right to regulate those activities. This argument is entirely specious. Cost can only be incurred within a framework of ownership. Unless smokers or fat people belong to society their ‘premature’ deaths cannot cost society anything.

Rather than directly controlling society through economic ownership, Leviathan now controls through regulating and altering incentive structures. Advocates for big government argue that once the correct incentives are in place, people will behave as expected—a much easier and less tyrannical method than simply ordering those people around. To the extent that this form of social control succeeds, individuals prefer being bribed to being coerced.

But it implies that, over time the price tag associated with Leviathan will become greater, and the rules and regulations will become more complex.

Hungry hungry government

Standard public choice analysis indicates that governments avoid increasing taxes and avoid decreasing spending. This creates a bias toward big government and budget deficits. The US experience is largely consistent with that analysis. Recent Australian experience, however,
is somewhat different. Here government has been maintaining a budget surplus and not spending as much as it could. This is despite the massive spending that has actually occurred. On the other hand, the Australian government has not cut taxes as much as it could and has chosen to accumulate large reserves that, in turn, will subsidise future spending.

The Australian experience sheds some light on the US ‘starve the beast’ philosophy. That argument suggests that dramatically lowering taxation ultimately leads to lower revenues which will in turn lead to government reducing expenditure. (Bruce Bartlett has traced the recent origin of the phrase ‘starve the beast’ to a 1985 Wall Street Journal article.) In short, this idea has—to date—failed. An anonymous Reagan administration official admitted, ‘We didn’t starve the beast. It’s still eating quite well—by feeding off future generations’. Short run budget deficits are financed by borrowing; the US government is a massive debtor. In the long run US tax cuts are financed by subsequent tax increases and revenue increases. In a careful analysis of the post-war record of US tax cuts, Christina Romer and David Romer find no support for the starve the beast hypothesis. Rather they find that spending increases after tax cuts and ascribe this to either fiscal illusion or shared fiscal irresponsibility.

The Howard government, by contrast, was debt averse. It reduced net Commonwealth debt to zero and even entertained the notion of having no Commonwealth debt at all. This is, of course, sensible and orthodox economic policy which constrained the government to having either a balanced budget or a budget surplus. This self-imposed constraint provided an upper-limit on the growth of government, but did not create any incentive to reduce government.

Leviathan is not going to be shamed into submission. Running massive budget deficits with the associated government debt—and the ability to compulsorily acquire assets in future—has seen off the challenge from starvation.

The beast is alive and well. Leviathan must be confronted in the market for ideas and ultimately engaged at the ballot box. Taxpayers need to understand the excessive burden of their taxation, consumers need to understand the increased prices they pay, and business needs to understand the higher costs they incur due to excessive regulation. It is not enough to simply insist on balanced budgets, nor cutting taxes. Government spending must be checked and reduced; individuals must be empowered to live their own lives.

**Can regulation be reduced?**

Alan Moran

Numerically, Australia now has more regulations than at any time since federation. If we are to pare back government interference in the economy, we need to attack more than just the national income share of government, but also the regulatory web which surrounds the decisions of people and firms. Can this regulation be reduced?

Regulation, like taxing and spending, brings about a redistribution of costs and benefits across the community.

That redistribution can bring net benefits in the case of taxing and spending—most people would see defence and the maintenance of law and order as being public goods that could not be financed except by taxation. There are also, perhaps more controversially, some areas of infrastructure that are best financed in this way.

Such positive attributes of imposing costs to bring about net benefits are less discernible in the case of regulations. Assembling information on their costs is difficult. But it is unlikely that the deadweight cost of regulation—the net negative impost on the nation’s income—is less than is the case with taxation.

It is helpful in developing a strategy for the reduction of these costs to define them into different categories. The most meaningful are ‘economic’ regulations which prevent or impede suppliers from offering goods and services to consumers; and ‘social’ regulations which forbid or restrain certain activities because they may have harmful spillover effects on those not party to them.

The classic example of economic regulation is tariffs; pollution is a traditional justification for social regulations. Often, as in the case of occupational regulations, the two rationales are mingled.

There are no economy-wide net benefits from ‘economic’ regulations. Protecting incumbents from competition has an unambiguously deleterious effect (except, of course, for the producers who are sheltered). Restrictive licensing or reservation of activities for government owned suppliers are hardly less deleterious.

Alan Moran is Director, Deregulation Unit at the Institute of Public Affairs.
There seems to be little disposition to reduce the social regulations that have seen the most rapid growth in recent years.

Many ‘economic’ regulations have been dismantled (including via privatisation) in the past 25 years. Tariffs have been reduced, banking opened up, domestic airline travel liberalised, shopping hours deregulated and so on.

A multitude of such regulatory restraints remains. This is seen perhaps most seriously in the regulation of land, particularly for housing. It is likely that the rationing of land around Australia in the form of planning regulations raises the price of houses in general by an average of some $100,000. As there are some eight million dwellings, this means a regulatory distortion that overvalues housing wealth by a colossal $800 billion, or a level that approaches the level of annual national income. There are many other regulatory cost impositions on housing. But for this one alone, assuming the net deadweight loss was only 20 per cent of the over valuation, over a 100 year life of the property, the net loss in income would average $1.6 billion per annum.

We also have seen a swag of new regulatory bodies which have replaced the previous prohibitions on entry into specific activities with equally damaging affect. Thus regulatory bodies intervene in decisions involving the building of new ‘essential facilities’ like rail lines, telecommunications lines, ports, and pipelines. And they do so by determining a fair price for third parties to use the facilities. The net effect is to markedly reduce incentives to build new infrastructure, which can in some cases—such as with telecommunications facilities—lead to the government having to undertake the activity itself.

Finally there is the raft of regulatory measures designed to combat the so-called externalities. These are dominated by environmental measures requiring savings in land use (an element behind the planning laws), water and, above all, carbon dioxide emissions. Also significant in these regulatory measures are those concerning workplace safety, and health and welfare.

Chris Berg’s The Growth of the Regulatory State: Ideology, Accountability and the Mega-Regulators, published by the Institute of Public Affairs in February 2008, quantifies the growth in Australian state and federal regulation. In line with common international experience the increase has been unrelenting. This is notwithstanding the political rhetoric about reducing regulation and red tape; a brand new batch of which is currently being fermented by Prime Minister Rudd. The fact is that, with few exceptions, regulations derive from political processes—they are there not because of some bureaucratic process divorced from the parliament but because the parliament and cabinet has encouraged them.

Strategies for reducing regulation fall into two camps.

The first, a ‘bonfire of the rules’, can be conducted in two ways. The route used in Australia and overseas in recent years has been sun-setting regulations and requiring them to be re-enacted after due consideration once a specified number of years has passed. Though this might have had some effect it is minor considering the magnitude of the task.

But a more successful regulation Bonfire was the long and systematic culling of regulations that took place in England in the 200 years to the 1870s. It resulted in repealing four-fifths of the acts of parliament passed from the thirteenth century.

Arguably, this was a progenitor and perpetuator of the industrial and commercial revolutions that have created the current living standards of the world today. But it required an enduring political will based on a general faith in market processes and scepticism about political processes.

The second strategy involves the creation of road blocks to further regulatory excess. In the Commonwealth and in Victoria, well resourced and expert bodies have been created to act as an obstacle to ill-thought through regulatory proposals or proposals that are not underpinned by government decisions. Refinements such as one-regulation-in, one-regulation-out are under consideration.

These require regulation impact statements and reports to demonstrate the efficiency of the proposals. Though they involve some additional resources and may well delay the imposition of new regulations, the outcome has not caused a slowdown in regulatory pace.

Regulations increase or decrease in response to their political acceptance. In Australia there may well be strong support for eliminating ‘economic’ regulations covering price controls, selective subsidies and barriers to competition. This area has been where the great gains have been made in Australia in recent years but, even so, there has been some backsliding with recent pro-regulatory terms of reference given to reviews of motor vehicles and clothing and some pressure to re-regulate the labour market.

There seems to be little disposition to reduce the ‘social’ regulations that have seen the most rapid growth in recent years. Growth in environmental, Worksafe and consumer regulation has been explosive over the past three decades and a vast new panoply of these regulations is foreshadowed in the carbon dioxide emission controls.

Reducing Australia’s regulatory burden will take political will, but, despite the Rudd government’s de-regulatory rhetoric, this will seems absent.
Voting for the leader is next step for Liberal reform

Christopher Pyne

In 2007, the Australian Labor Party successfully created a narrative that the Howard government had lost touch with working Australians. Issues such as climate change and industrial relations reinforced this narrative. During the campaign, this perception was one of the most difficult to overcome around the country.

Regaining the connection with the community will take more than just aesthetic changes to the Liberal Party message—it will require a major change to how the party engages its membership. The Liberal Party needs to embrace participatory democracy.

A political party that is perceived to have lost touch will always be punished at the polls. Every politician will claim to have their ear to the ground—to being in touch with his or her local constituency. Continuing success within the context of a representative democracy depends on demonstrating that the local representative is aware of, and acts upon community issues and concerns. Many politicians rely on constituents or community groups making the first contact to become aware of issues.

But it will be vital to the Liberal Party’s future success that it proactively engages with the community—at a local level as well as a national level. A responsive MP is better than an apathetic one, but a higher standard that must be applied is for MPs to be proactive. Local representatives need to be actively engaged with their community. The opposition leader, Brendan Nelson, is engaged in a ‘listening tour’ of the country.

The new century has given us better tools with which to engage our communities—overseas there are many examples of parties that have more effectively utilised these tools than we have yet seen in Australia. Being in opposition gives the Liberal Party an opportunity to embrace internal change. Taking a look at the examples of overseas experience is part of this.

But we must first be frank about the dire situation in which the party finds itself.

Despite holding federal government for eleven years, Liberal Party membership has declined around the country to unprecedented lows. State branches struggle to retain existing members, let alone recruit and sign up new ones. Many of the continuing members are frail and aged. They simply cannot provide the sort of support the party needs into perpetuity.

Low membership levels mean that the party

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Giving people a vote for the party leader is one process that makes democracy more participatory.

has a diminished ability to raise the funds to fight election campaigns, as well as less support on the ground at the local level. And a small and narrow membership also reduces the scope for members of parliament to be kept in touch with local community concerns by their local party membership. Low membership means the Liberal Party’s policies being more influenced by fewer people rather than bringing the light of many voices to drown out the darkness of ignorance. The Liberal Party’s first priority must be to reverse the evaporation of its membership base. It needs to introduce innovative new ways to embrace our membership and the wider community, and involve people in the democratic process more generally.

To re-engage the membership, all Liberal Party members should be given the opportunity to vote for the party leader. The parliamentary party would select two candidates who would then go to a nationwide ballot. Rather than tailoring their message to the personal preferences of their parliamentary colleagues, candidates would need to travel the country, meeting members, involving themselves in all sorts of issues, and broadening their appeal to a much larger constituency.

Candidates would have to prove their mettle in the glare of national media and they would have to show their energy and capacity to handle a national campaign. The mere activity of running for party leader would ensure that the person elected would be engaged in a way neither major political party has demanded so far. International experience shows that such campaigns also give candidates a handy profile boost as well.

The other important facet of this reform is that it would give the broad community a real incentive to join a political party for the first time. Our elections are increasingly disparaged as ‘presidential’—the vast majority of the electorate votes for their preferred party leader rather than their local representative. Recognising this fact gives us an opportunity to engage them by letting them have a say in who leads the party.

Participatory democracy is the next frontier in the evolution of the political party. The term has been used to describe a number of ways to improve the political process, but in whatever form one is talking about, the fundamental idea is to give more people more opportunity to make meaningful contributions to politics.

In Queensland, South Australia and the ACT, the Liberal Party already gives every member a vote in the selection of candidates for parliament. There is strong support to extend this across the entire Liberal Party.

Giving people a vote for the party leader is one process that makes democracy more participatory in its nature.

The on-going presidential primary process in the United States has encouraged record participation in the party and electoral system. This extraordinary turnout is in part being driven by the intense media and voter interest in the diverse field of candidates competing for nomination. We have also seen an enormous level of engagement through new media, in ways that have only just begun to evolve in Australia. The internet is an amazing political tool that is providing opportunities to network and personally participate in the political process.

Studies are now showing for the first time that weekly internet use has surpassed television viewing. Research released by Nielsen Online earlier this year shows that in 2007, Australians spent 13.7 hours a week online compared with 13.3 hours watching television. In 2006, 12.5 hours a week were spent online and 13.8 hours watching TV in 2006. For the first time more Australians are using the internet as their primary source of news and entertainment. Its interactive nature means that in order to appeal to people using the internet, different strategies are required than those demanded by the passive medium of television.

Political parties cannot ignore these changes in media consumption, and must adapt to allow increased participation in the process. An internet strategy must become as central a part of an overall communications strategy as television and radio coverage, if not more so.

So long as the Liberal Party is aware of this trend, it can harness new media to its advantage. The internet will allow the average punter to easily become involved in the political process. Parties that engage their membership and have their opinions heard through direct participation will be electorally rewarded. When political involvement is more than a burdensome chore, but something that becomes personally worthwhile, party membership will increase.

In many countries virtual town hall meetings are being held bringing together hundreds and thousands of people online who can then directly communicate with a party leader, minister or MP and have their say.

The left wing lobby group GetUp have demonstrated in a limited way that participatory democracy is something that Australians are willing to embrace. Their claims of 250,000 members would suggest that Australians online are willing to engage in the political process, provided there is a perceived value in doing so.

By embracing participatory democracy the Liberal Party will change itself from the bottom up. It could attract more members, younger members and more engaged members. Such a change would change how policy is developed and communicated. It would bring the Liberal Party more closely in touch with the community. This year is the time to make these changes.
Liberal Party politicians probably only have two or three years to decide what to do about the republic issue before the federal government puts it firmly on the agenda. If they want to avoid being completely alienated from their support base, they will need to support a republic with a directly elected president.

Until now coalition politicians—at least the federal ones—have generally been either monarchists or have favoured a republic where the president would be selected by the members of federal parliament. Of all the federal coalition politicians at the 1998 Constitutional Convention, only one (Christine Gallus) voted for the direct election model. Gerard Henderson recently warned the Australian Republican Movement that ‘there is no support—or almost no support—within the coalition for a directly elected head of state.’ If those who vote for the coalition think like those who represent them in parliament, and if Kevin Rudd wants support from across the political spectrum for a republic, then the government, it seems to follow, will have to offer something rather like the model that was rejected in 1999.

However, the best available evidence—the Australian Referendum Survey conducted in 1999—shows exactly the reverse. The preferences of coalition voters as to a republic are totally different from the leading coalition politicians’ preferences. A majority of coalition voters want a republic, and a clear majority among those republicans want to be able to elect the President directly. As the Americans would say, there is a ‘disconnect’ between the politicians and the voters on that side of politics.

There is a disconnect between politicians and the voters on the right of politics

Table 1 looks at how first preferences, as between direct election, Parliamentary selection, or keeping the monarchy, varied between the supporters of the various parties. (Parties with small numbers of supporters, and a similar distribution of answers, are grouped together.)

Of course there are differences between the followers of the different parties, but they are not quite the differences you might expect. A majority of the supporters of every party is republican, and in each case the majority of the republicans favour direct election. Table 1 is organised in increasing order of support for monarchy, and it is clear that as support for monarchy increases, the proportion of direct-election republicans only fluctuates in a small range while the ‘parliamentary selection’ vote—not high to start with—crashes dramatically.

This should not surprise. A defining characteristic of those who can be called, loosely, conservative, is a reluctance to give too much power to politicians. Politicians who get elected to represent the Liberal or National parties may learn to love power, but those who have sent them to Canberra remain uneasy about it.

The left wing icons Clem Jones and Phil Cleary may have led the campaign for direct election in 1999, but many of those who were listening to them were from the other side of the political divide.

The first-preference figures do not translate directly into predictions of ‘yes’ or ‘no’ votes on either republican model. What is important is how dogmatic the supporters of a republic are—would those who prefer one model accept the other model as second preference, if it is the only republic on offer, or would...
Table 1: The republic—first preferences (1999)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Party identification</th>
<th>No of respondents</th>
<th>Republic with direct election of President (DE) %</th>
<th>Republic with Pres selected by Parliament (PS) %</th>
<th>Retain Queen %</th>
<th>No pref %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>‘Other’, Greens &amp; Democrats</td>
<td>219</td>
<td>56.6</td>
<td>31.5</td>
<td>8.2</td>
<td>3.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Labor</td>
<td>1149</td>
<td>59.4</td>
<td>23.8</td>
<td>14.7</td>
<td>2.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘No party’</td>
<td>427</td>
<td>49.6</td>
<td>22.0</td>
<td>24.1</td>
<td>4.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liberal</td>
<td>1070</td>
<td>48.0</td>
<td>16.7</td>
<td>33.0</td>
<td>2.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No answer, One Nation &amp; National</td>
<td>168</td>
<td>50.6</td>
<td>7.7</td>
<td>39.9</td>
<td>1.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total/overall %</td>
<td>3033</td>
<td>53.4</td>
<td>20.8</td>
<td>23.4</td>
<td>2.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1) The question on party ID provided for a ‘no party’ answer, so those who expressly answered ‘no party’ are coded differently from those who left the answer blank. The position of the ‘no party’ people in the table is consistent with them being mainly swinging voters. The ‘no answer’ people seem to be suspicious individualists not unlike One Nation voters.

2) 3431 people responded to the survey, but the cross-correlation program ignored those who failed to answer the relevant questions, leaving 3033 responses. The accuracy of the survey, and whether the results could still be relevant nine years later, are discussed at ozconstinfo.free-homepage.com/republic/survey.html.

The electorate wants a republic more than you think

they prefer to keep the Queen if they can’t get the republic they want? In brief, while only about half of the direct-electionists were happy to vote for parliamentary selection in 1999, nearly all parliamentary-selectionists (except some very vocal ones among their leaders) would be prepared to vote for direct election. Table 2 shows a summary of the results.

The ‘predicted’ vote for a PS model agrees exactly with the actual ‘yes’ vote in 1999. This confirms what everyone ‘knew’ in 1999—that supporters of collectivist parties had voted ‘yes’ but those of the ‘right’ had not. It also, however, reveals that if a sensibly-drafted direct-election proposal is ever put to a referendum, it will likely be supported by a majority of voters from every party. Among the supporters of the Liberals and Nationals, those who vote ‘yes’ because it is their first preference will not quite be a majority, but add those who will accept it as their second preference, and you have a majority across the political spectrum.

To date, federal politicians from all parties have been wary about direct election—those who drafted the Labor Party’s policy refer to a future time ‘when a [community] preference has emerged’. But the evidence presented here shows that a clear one already exists. No doubt the new prime minister’s political strategists will recognise this. When they do, Kevin Rudd will have the perfect opportunity to drive a very sharp wedge between coalition voters and coalition politicians, unless those politicians are paying attention to their supporters.

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Why smart people believe stupid things

Greg Melleuish

February this year I organised a colloquium on what we called ‘Weird History’. It focused on some of the strange and downright preposterous versions of history that are currently floating around. These included Gavin Menzies’ fiction masquerading as fact that a giant Chinese fleet sailed around the world in the early fifteenth century and the very popular writings of the Russian Anatoly Fomenko who apparently believes that Ghengis Khan was actually a Russian.

One of the things that came out of that colloquium was that many of the writers of weird history, and those who take it seriously, are intelligent and sophisticated people. Fomenko, for example, is a leading mathematician. Such a realisation immediately opens up interesting questions about the nature and efficacy of education. The old nineteenth century idea was that education, especially university education, would make individuals more rational, more capable of distinguishing between good and bad arguments, and able to judge if the evidence supported an argument. Put another way, education was meant to inoculate individuals against the foolishness of rumour and unsubstantiated opinion.

Yet we now live in an age in which the level of education is at its peak, but also in which the human capacity to believe in weird and wonderful things has never been so strong. One could almost argue that the advance in education has been paralleled by a growth in human gullibility. Why should this be so?

Three recent books provide different perspectives on the human capacity to believe in things that on close inspection are weird, fraudulent or simply unbelievable. In Counterknowledge: How we surrendered to conspiracy theories, quack medicine, bogus science and fake history, Damian Thompson discusses a whole range of forms of what he terms ‘counter knowledge’, a type of knowledge that runs counter to real knowledge, ranging from strange medical notions to bogus history to creation science and get rich schemes. Christopher Booker and Richard North chronicle in Scared to Death: From BSE to Global Warming the extraordinary number of scares that have erupted in Britain over the past twenty-five years beginning with the various food scares, such as Salmonella in eggs, through to ritual satanic abuse and culminating in climate change. And Rachael Kohn’s Curious Obsessions In the History of Science and

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Spirituality explores some of the more exotic and wonderful religious beliefs, many of them having a scientific dimension, which have been held by individuals, especially of the more educated variety.

Counter knowledge, for Thompson, is essentially a betrayal of the Enlightenment. There is a sound body of knowledge that has been established by an equally sound set of methods, and then there is the dubious counter knowledge that is advocated for a variety of reasons. One reason is ideological; there are groups who want to claim their knowledge as being equal or superior to that of science. Such groups include those who want to make Africa the source not just of homo-sapiens as a species but also of all human civilisation as a means of building up African pride. The only problem is that they can only do so by twisting the facts to fit the politics.

Then there are those who advocate creation science, interpreting the natural world to fit in with their biblical fundamentalism. Thompson points out that creation science is not just a Christian phenomenon and that there are versions of it rampant throughout the Islamic world. There are some eighty ‘museums’ of creationism across Turkey while in most Islamic countries less than ten per cent of the population is willing to accept Darwin’s theory of evolution.

Then there are those who peddle all sorts of quack remedies, both for the body and the soul. These include all sorts of alternative medicine. Such advocates are the descendants of the merchants of the wonder pills of the nineteenth century; in fact, in some cases they are still selling the quack remedies of the nineteenth century such as chiropractic manipulation and homeopathy. The problem with most forms of ‘alternative medicine’ is that they there is no evidence that they actually work. Thompson quotes surgeon Michael Baum to the effect that ‘Homeopathy is to medicine what astrology is to astronomy.’

Finally there are those out simply to make money by selling lots of books, such as Gavin Menzies and the host of diet gurus. Now it may not matter if these were simply eccentrics—part of the rich tapestry of existence—but, as Thompson observes, they are taken seriously. Alternative medicine is now studied in many universities. It is the middle classes who lap it up.

Thompson blames a number of things for the success of counter knowledge, including the way in which the internet spreads all sorts of ideas, the loss of respect for traditional experts and the post modern belief that one form of knowledge is as good as another. People can no longer distinguish between reputable and bogus knowledge. This is despite the ‘fact’, which our educationalists tell us ad nauseam, that today’s students may not know anything, but nevertheless possesses advanced critical skills.

Thompson may be right that one of the major problems is a decline in the authority of traditional science but, as Booker and North argue, one of the causes of the numerous scares to which Britain, along with many other Western countries, have become subject over the past twenty years is a sort of unholy alliance between science and over-zealous bureaucrats. The problem seems to be twofold. The first is that while scientific knowledge generally might be reliable it is invariably provisional and open to further investigation. Of course there are occasions when the science is totally bogus, as in the case of ritualised satanic child abuse where a highly dubious technique was devised to ‘prove’ that children had been ‘abused.’ But generally there is a lack of certainty regarding the science in most matters. Interpreting the evidence, scientists simply make mistakes and draw incorrect conclusions. This would not matter if the interpretation of data was a mere academic matter, but when such judgements are used as the basis of government policy and action the consequences can be disastrous.

The second part of the problem is the way in which these incorrect interpretations are used by activists, particularly those employed by the government, to exaggerate problems, and even to create them. Booker and North point out that it is government officials who are generally more important in driving such scares than politicians who simply follow the advice of their bureaucrats. Once set in motion these scares accelerate for a number of reasons. One is the expectation in the contemporary world that any risk should be avoided and the way in which minor risks can suddenly be blown up. Another is the way in which particular interest groups, such as lawyers, can exploit such circumstances to their advantage. A final factor is the capacity of the media to get hold of a scare and drive public panic forward.

There are two major features of the scares chronicled by Booker and North. The first is how regular they have become. The second is the expense that they cause, particularly to those who get caught up in the attempts by bureaucrats, politicians, journalists and activists to minimise what they see as the risks involved. Something like a million chickens were slaughtered in response to a salmonella scare, eight million animals were slaughtered at a cost of £3.45 billion in response to the BSE scare. This was a small cost compared to the billions in repairs and compensation generated by the asbestos scare. And yet even that is only small change compared to the potential costs of the biggest scare of them all—climate change.

Booker and North demonstrate how the whole climate change scare has been driven by the selective use of
scientific evidence by scientific activists and politicians. Their picture of Al Gore is unflattering, in particular his political manipulation of scientific evidence. Their account raises real problems for people like Thompson who would want to solve the problem of bogus knowledge by placing more trust in the expert. Experts may turn out to be less than model exemplars of the Enlightenment tradition. They not only may choose what to believe on the basis of what increases their career prospects, but also they share in our common humanity and can be carried away by moral panics.

Rachael Kohn provides us with a collection of essays that describe some of the stranger religious obsessions that have taken hold of people. These include such things as the search for the ‘lost’ tribes of Israel in some of the most unlikely places ranging from Native Americans to the Maori. Mormonism is based on the belief that Israelites settled in America in about 600 BC. Then there is Theosophy, like Homeopathy, a nineteenth century concoction, much of which was found to be fraudulent at the time but which nonetheless appealed greatly to certain segments of the educated classes.

What runs through much of what Kohn discusses, from Giordano Bruno (after whom 2GB in Sydney is named) to John Dee to the Mormons and theosophy is the idea of hidden spiritual knowledge, or gnoais, to which the chosen few alone have access. This has long been an attractive idea to a class of educated people who wish to distinguish themselves from the mere masses. This Gnostic tradition runs right through the history of the West, was a subterranean element of the Enlightenment and blossomed in America. As Catherine Albanese demonstrates in her recent study of American ‘metaphysical religion’, Mormonism—now one of the world’s fastest growing religions—incorporated a lot from Masonry and this Gnostic tradition.

All of this suggests that the search for hidden knowledge and the spiritual illumination that goes with it is far from dead in the twenty-first century, a fact illustrated by the large New Age section to be found in most bookshops.

The Enlightenment project saw history as progress, as a path from superstitious and ‘primitive’ beliefs to a state in which human beings have become rational and ‘enlightened’. What these three recent books indicate is just how susceptible human beings are both to believing in weird things and to ‘moral panics’. Education does not ‘inoculate’ individuals against such things. In some ways the educated can be worse than their less educated neighbours, something we already knew from the past fondness of many of them for Communism.

These books raise real problems for anyone seeking their way in the contemporary world. The first is how to decide, even when dealing with science that is apparently ‘mainstream’, whether scientific statement is true, or at least plausible, or just a load of cobblers. We are accustomed to accept much science on authority. After all, who outside of a small minority can hope to understand quantum mechanics in all its complexity? But what happens when that authority is abused? Does any lay individual, no matter how intelligent, have the time and the capacity to master the science relating to climate change? The second is how to make a judgement when confronted by the various scares and moral panics that now seem to erupt on a regular basis. A bogus scare can waste a lot of money.

The lesson is that in a free society the garden will contain as many weeds as it does flowers. Many of these weeds are relatively harmless, and simply make us smile. Others, however, especially when they have a major impact on public policy, have the potential to do a lot of harm.

Despite massive increases in the level of education, human beings are still basically the same creatures that they have always been. The task of arguing for sane and sensible policies and ideas is a never ending one.
John Stuart Mill’s odd combination: philosopher kings & laissez faire

To many, John Stuart Mill was the greatest ‘public intellectual’ of the last 200 years. His topics of interest were limitless—his Collected Works span 33 volumes. His written word remains staggering in its intensity of thought.

And so preparing a biography of John Stuart Mill is an enormous task. The polymath is a dying breed, and a good biography of Mill would require several experts in the field of philosophy, economics, politics and history.

Richard Reeves is a social and political commentator, and perhaps recognising his own limitations, has written a biography that concentrates on the character and values of Mill. This is not an intellectual biography. The reader will not learn of Mill’s influence on modern neoclassical economics, or of the finer details of his System of Logic. The reader will, however, come away with a clear idea of who Mill was as a person, and how his values directed his intellectual conduct.

Seen in this light, Reeves succeeds remarkably well in achieving his intended aims.

There is a clear theme running through Victorian Firebrand. Reeves makes a deliberate effort to move Mill out of ‘left’ and ‘right’ labels of political thought and place him squarely in his own time. It is not necessarily what Mill thought that made him the giant he is today, but the disciplined manner in which he formed his own opinions.

Reeves argues that open-mindedness was perhaps Mill’s strongest virtue. Perhaps in rebellion to the strict utilitarian upbringing which he received, Mill rejected any single philosophical model of institutions that could direct the endeavours of government. Rather, Mill saw that philosophy was to supply, not a set of model institutions, but principles from which the institutions suitable to any given circumstances might be deduced.

Where his contemporaries would identify the radical rationalism of Bentham and romantic conservatism of Coleridge as conflicting opposites, Mill would rather describe them as ‘competing counterparts’.

Of course, like all great intellectuals, Mill struggled to understand those whose ideas deviated from his own. His vulnerability lay in his impatience for reform. His dissatisfaction with the radicals in British parliament was evident by the 1830s—‘now would be the time for knitting a powerful party’, he wrote, ‘and nobody holds the scattered threads of it in his hands except me’.

There was occasionally a self-pitying arrogance to Mill’s writing. Economist Thomas Sowell has gone so far as to suggest that Mill’s central idea in On Liberty—the tyranny of the majority—was born out of his own anger in not being listened to enough. Reeves also hints at this. Whatever his motives, Mill’s work was always alight with passion, and was always directed towards a passionate audience. He deliberately did not write for the less well-educated, and it was the illiterate class that initially made Mill averse to the prospects of universal suffrage.

Indeed, the idea of Plato’s ‘philosopher kings’ often underpins Mill’s perception of the proper structure of society. Particularly in his early years, Mill saw great advantages in having a small but influential intellectual class having the ears of the government. But this elitist attitude did not however dominate Mill’s philosophic and political thought. He was not altogether sympathetic to the redistribution of wealth, noting that ‘all classes are ready enough, without prompting, to believe that whatever ails them is not their fault, but the crime of somebody else’.

Mill was generally opposed to state welfare provision and a paternalistic government. In this however, his biographer is more sympathetic to Mill’s ideological opponents. Reeves argues that ‘the working classes in the 1840s were a very long way from the personal economic circumstances necessary for any reasonable conception of individual choice and agency.’

Indeed, sometimes Reeves empathises with the sentiments of the very people Mill explicitly hated: ‘the social reformers of the age worried about how to get workers more food, money, leisure and health. Mill worried about how to get them more freedom’.

If Reeves is trying to argue that because Mill was arguing for X, he was not thinking about Y and Z, than perhaps a ninth edition of Mill’s The System of Logic is in order.

Reeve’s book is a worthy introduction to Mill’s life and his ideas. But it is far from a definitive biography, preferring to focus on the events that formed Mill’s ideas rather than carefully looking at his intellectual achievements.
In 2000 the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) claimed a species of Cambodian mountain goat, *Pseudonovibos spiralis*, was endangered with a fragmented population of 2,500 mature individuals. The species was included in the 2003 and 2006 edition of the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species.

But the *Pseudonovibos spiralis* never existed.

Cambodian artisans had been fooling collectors for years by removing the sheath from the horns of domestic cattle, soaking them in vinegar, heating them in palm sugar and bamboo leaves before moulding and carving the horns and then selling them as wall mounts. There had been no sightings of the goats, and DNA analysis indicated the skull bones to be those of cattle, but the idea of a rare creature that needed saving captured the imagination of the local Worldwide Fund for Nature (WWF) program manager and he featured the IUCN listing in his fight against land mines and rainforest destruction.

In a new book *Science and Public Policy: The Virtuous Corruption of Virtual Environmental Science* Aynsley Kellow, Professor and Head of the School of Government at the University of Tasmania, uses this and other case studies from conservation biology and climate science as examples of ‘noble cause corruption’. The phenomenon is recognised in law enforcement circles where police officers manufacture evidence to ensure a conviction.

The thesis of Kellow’s book is that noble cause corruption gives as much cause for concern about the reliability of science as the potential influence of money.

Kellow shows that noble cause corruption is rife in the environmental sciences, and he shows how the corruption is facilitated by the virtual nature of much of the science.

After opening with the somewhat comical example of the bogus listing of the mythical Cambodian mountain goat, Kellow gets into the history of conservation biology. He explains how in the early 1980s ecology lacked a scientifically respectable method for studying life. The ecosystem approach potentially provided scientific respectability by supplying ecologists with mathematical tools developed by physicists beginning with the species-area equation and the theory of island biogeography.

While the theory could explain the number of insect and arthropod species colonising mangrove islands off the coast of Florida as a function of their distance from the mainland, the theory’s extrapolation to non-island situations and terrestrial ecology more generally was not justified.

And predicting species loss by extrapolating backwards to suggest, for example, that a reduction in the area of forest will produce the same rate of species reduction as does its growth, has no basis in observational data but is common practice in conservation biology.

It is this approach, in particular the dominance of mathematical models, which makes it possible for groups like Greenpeace to use figures of 50,000–100,000 species becoming extinct every year, with support from the scientific literature, when they would be hard pressed to provide evidence of any actual extinctions.

Furthermore, an ecosystem as Kellow explains is nothing more than a construction: ‘Ecologists tried to study ponds as examples of ecosystems, but soon found even they were not closed systems but connected to the water-table, and affected by groundwater flows, spring run-off and migrating waterfowl.’

In *Science and Public Policy*, Kellow shows how the misguided approach to the complexity of ‘ecosystems’ facilitated the subsequent development of climate science as ‘post-normal’ science. Kellow begins by explaining that climate change is an area of science where models inevitably play an important role—there is little scope for laboratory experimentation.

Climate models are constructed using historical data and then tested against the same data. Until about 1996 they produced a warming climate even with constant carbon dioxide. It is a vast undertaking and many scientists involved in modelling future climates have to assume the results of others are correct, and so it becomes partly a construct—dealing with enormous complexity and non-linear processes.

Furthermore, Kellow details how lapses in scientific standards have occurred—invoking the misuse of statistics on emissions scenarios and the incorrect reinterpretation of tree-ring data—which have had the effect of conveniently contributing to the political case for action to mitigate climate change.

The second half of the book is very much about politics beginning...
Lapses in scientific standards have occurred which have conveniently contributed to the political case for action to mitigate climate change.

with a detailed analysis of the campaign by scientists against statistician Bjorn Lomborg and his book *The Skeptical Environmentalist: Measuring the Real State of the World* and following with a critique of why there seems to be a closer affinity between environmentalism and left-leaning parties in western democracies and greater hostility towards environmental protection from right-leaning parties.

Kellow argues that there are cultural factors associated with the appreciation of nature that align with political ideologies and that these factors become exaggerated by the now virtual nature of many scientific disciplines. This further facilitates the corruption of science and public policy.

Kellow disputes the claim that the rise of environmentalism simply reflects increasing affluence and a progressive agenda, and considers the history of environmentalism and the myth of the balance of nature in the context of a long tradition of Western thought often involving catastrophic decline from some idyllic past—usually as a result of sin.

The idea of the ‘balance of nature’ persists, even though it is not supported by the observational data, because, if we accept this myth, any change in ecosystems can be attributed to human activity and imparted with a deep social meaning.

Within this paradigm, ecology involves all manner of projections of human values onto observed nature including through the use of terms such as ‘invasive species’ and ‘alien’.

Quoting Robert Kirkman, Kellow suggests that a belief in ecologism provides a moral compass pointing in the direction of holistic harmony, but it is an illusion.

This shift of environmentalism onto a religious plane, coupled with the descent of much of ecology into the virtual world of mathematical modelling has seen the marriage of environmental science to political activism. Classic liberalism, Kellow explains, with its emphasis on separation between the individual and the state, can provide a protection against ‘the darker possibilities of environmentalism’.

The book ends with a warning to scientists to not usurp the role of policy-makers. But rather provide those policy-makers with informed choices.

Indeed public policy is almost never resolved by some piece of scientific information. When science is used to arbitrate it eventually loses its independent status and disqualifies itself.

*Science and Public Policy* is an important book as a philosophical and historical analysis of environmental activism particularly over the last 30 years.

It will be especially appreciated by naturalists and biologists who remember the good old days when tramping about in work boots observing wild goats at close range or, in my case, collecting live lepidopteron, was encouraged—that is, before the advent of environmental science and sitting at desks crunching numbers for computer models.
Microtrends may be small, but that doesn’t mean they are important

Tim Wilson reviews
*Microtrends: The small forces behind today’s big changes*
by Mark J Penn
with E Kinney Zalesne
(Penguin, 2007, 448 pages)

On January 20, 2009 it will be clear whether Mark Penn is a brilliant political strategist, or just a statistician with an eye for the unusual. Penn was, until early April, a central figure in Senator Hillary Clinton's campaign for the US Presidency and devised much of her strategy around the intellectual underpinnings of *Microtrends: The small forces behind today’s big changes*.

Penn bases his microtrends theory on the idea that the most powerful forces in our society are the emerging, counterintuitive trends that are shaping tomorrow right before us. *Microtrends* attempts to identify the small steps in the big processes of change throughout American society and connects them to broader themes of change—from why interracial marriage has become more acceptable and how obscure social groups are being brought together through the internet.

And what he identifies is the explosion of diversity within American society. It is a reference guide for a vast assortment of microtrends in contemporary society. While it can be read cover-to-cover, it will probably serve the reader best as one of the select few books that can be quickly cited for counter-intuitive points.

Penn also uses *Microtrends* to explain that, despite their often counterintuitive nature, decisions by individuals are rooted in rational thought.

But for the most part, Penn’s book is simply a collection of sampled data with supporting analysis. Typical microtrends include the political and religious attitudes of ‘moderate Muslims’, to the effect of ‘late breaking gays’ on their heterosexual spouses, to the explosion of ‘uptown tattooed’ Republicans.

The book consists of small chapters that identify and analyse each microtrend bookended by introductory and concluding chapters that justify the need to understand, and the challenges posed from, emerging microtrends.

One of the earliest and most interesting chapters focuses on the increasing trend of one in three women between 40 and 69 dating younger men; without the social stigma of ‘dirty’ old men dating younger women. Penn identifies three of the primary drivers are divorce, professional success and sex becoming for more mature women what it has always been for younger men—recreational.

And women are not the only ones becoming more sexually liberated.

The accessibility and anonymity of the internet has delivered an increased consumption of pornography. As Penn puts it, pornography, not baseball, is becoming America’s past time. Penn also details the rise of the ‘do-it-yourself doctor’—individuals who now self diagnose and treat themselves, evidenced by the growth in sales of over the counter medicines without consultation.

And a trend similarly reflected in Australia where the elite classes no longer care about the ‘economic and strategy challenges’ faced by their society driven by an increased distance from engaging in the day-to-day realities and challenges of modern life.

Penn writes that ‘while today’s elites are reading Tom Friedman’s *The World is Flat*, the rest of America is living it’.

Penn uses the book to detail the challenges for political candidates in America, identifying that an explosion of individual differences and personal expression has significant political consequences.

There is no doubt he is right. The coalitions that make up the US Republican and Democratic parties will become increasingly strained as people demand that their political parties reflect their individual political tastes and preferences.

The microtrends thesis also presents another challenge for politicians.

Should political leaders try to lead social trends, or merely follow them?

Penn never directly addresses this issue in the book, but based on his logic in *Microtrends* it would be hard not to interpret that the political class of America should be poll driven when charting a vision.

Penn identifies the fragility of American society, and justifies classical liberalism as the only political and philosophical system that can hold society together while respecting individualism.

But after reading *Microtrends* there can be no doubt that there is no such thing as ‘One America’.

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**Australian history’s forgotten capitalists**

John Roskam reviews

*Colonial Ambition: Foundations of Australian Democracy*

by Peter Cochrane

(Melbourne University Press, 2006, 600 pages)

Melbourne University’s strategy for marketing Peter Cochrane’s *Colonial Ambition: Foundations of Australian Democracy* is almost as interesting as the book itself. This is a book placed firmly in the centre of politics of Australian publishing, and, indeed, the ‘history wars’.

The publicity blurb on the back cover of *Colonial Ambition* is revealing. The book is described as being written with ‘great brio and verve’ and moving like a ‘fast-paced novel’. (For those who don’t know, ‘brio’ according to the *Shorter Oxford Dictionary* means ‘liveliness’.) Maybe ‘brio and verve’ is what the marketing department of Melbourne University Press believes is these days required to sell books about Australian political history.

MUP must have also assumed that potential buyers of a book about the historical development of concepts such as representative government and parliamentary democracy are also looking for a bit of fast-paced action. Unfortunately, as good a work as *Colonial Ambition* is, and as important as it is, not much ‘brio and verve’ is contained within its pages. Anyone thinking they’re buying a John Grisham thriller will be sadly disappointed.

The full extent of what excitement there is in *Colonial Ambition* are the images of drunken Sydney mobs assembled at the Rocks, and the description of the death of Lady Mary Fitzroy, the wife of Governor Charles Fitzroy, killed in 1847 when the carriage she was riding in with her husband turned over on the road from Parramatta to Sydney.

MUP has taken out an insurance policy just in case promises of ‘brio and verve’ don’t work. On the front cover is an endorsement by none other than Graham Freudenberg, Gough Whitlam’s speechwriter. According to Freudenberg ‘Peter Cochrane has written the definitive account of Australia’s most difficult and enduring political achievement.’ This might be true, but why we need to be told this by Freudenberg is a mystery. No doubt the publisher calculated that more people would be attracted than scared off by his recommendation.

It seems that so far the efforts of the bright young things in the marketing department at MUP have been to no avail. According to newspaper reports up until the end of last year *Colonial Ambition* had sold 4,000 copies. Not a bad result but it pales in comparison to sales of 100,000 for Les Carlyon’s *The Great War* (reviewed in the December 2006 edition of the IPA Review.)

In 2007 the two books shared the inaugural Prime Minister’s prize for history. The outcome was not uncontroversial for it has been reported that a majority of the judging panel believed that *Colonial Ambition* should have been the sole recipient. However, the award was structured in such a way that the panel provided a shortlist to the Prime Minister who then personally decided upon the winner. Following this result, it was claimed by the then Prime Minister’s critics that the shared award given to *The Great War* ‘smacked of a PM over-eager to distribute the spoils of victory in the culture wars’.

If *Colonial Ambition* had been the sole winner there’s every chance those critics would have claimed exactly the same thing. If anything, *Colonial Ambition* more closely fulfils John Howard’s alleged cultural and historical agenda than does *The Great War*. Carlyon writes about the experience of Australian soldiers on the western front during the First World War. In as much as there are political overtones to the book they run counter to those which it is assumed John Howard would favour. Carlyon emphasises the separateness of the Australians from their British commanders, and he compares the resourcefulness of the colonials to the bureaucratic, hide-bound ways of the British. Anyone who took their political cues from *The Great War* would be more likely to emerge a republican than a monarchist, but the politics of Carlyon are subtle.

By contrast, in *Colonial Ambition* the politics is obvious and overt. The story Peter Cochrane charts is the battle between two competing images of the economic and social destiny of Australia. And the small-time capitalists win. Cochrane is accurate when he calls it a victory for a ‘middle class vision’. The furious reaction of the burghers of Sydney to the attempted resumption of convict transportation in the 1850s was not only a product of the humanitarianism. They were reacting against the great landowners and squatters who wanted cheap convict labour to maintain their holdings, and they were reacting against the sort of economic development that the squatters demanded. As Cochrane writes, those who attended the anti-transportation meetings embraced a vision of a new kind of economy—based not on one product [the wool of the squatters] but on many, not just on landed wealth but on a dynamic capitalism in the urban sector. They put the case for a free working class recognising the necessity of mass consumer demand as opposed to the narrow ‘contractor’s economy’ of a penal society. They wanted a
Too often in Australian history the arguments over the franchise have been presented as merely a debate between stuck-in-the-mud conservatives and radical Chartists.

diversified productive sector sustained by local demand, rather than a plantation-type society dependent on the British call for wool.

Cochrane succeeds in placing the debate about the franchise within the broader context of the different conceptions of how New South Wales should develop. Too often in Australian history the arguments from the 1840s and 1850s over the franchise have been presented as merely a debate between stuck-in-the-mud conservatives and radical Chartists. In reality there was much more at play. Squatters defended their disproportionate voting influence because they believed they had to stand against urban mobs that were too easily swayed by appeals from demagogues, and they argued that rural interests, far removed from the temptations of city life were more pure and less corruptible.

To the magnates like William Wentworth and James Macarthur it was entirely reasonable that economic elites such as themselves guide the government of the colony—after all, it was they who generated the colony's wealth. According to Henry Dangar, a squatter with 300,000 acres of leaseholdings 'a man would have to be a maniac to argue that the thousands of idlers who inhabited the alleyways of Sydney were equal to the squatter. The squatter could buy and sell Sydney twice over ... Sydney would be nothing without the woolgrowers of the interior. The woolgrowers were the blood and sinew of the colony, while Sydney and the townships were no more than dependencies.'

The idea that nineteenth century Australian political history is the story of the bosses against the workers has a powerful hold on the popular imagination. But this image—if indeed there is any truth to it—has its origins in the later part of the century: in the industrial turmoil of the 1890s. In the middle of the century the picture was more complicated. It wasn't the workers that the conservatives feared—it was the capitalists. The squatters were no friend of the mercantile class. Wentworth left no doubt as to what he thought of the 'lords of the Exchange':

What interest does the population of Sydney represent? True there are hosts of people in the city calling themselves merchants, and I admit these give employment to a large number of others of lower degree. These merchants, however, are simply engaged in exchanging one commodity for another—in sending the produce of the colony home and getting the goods of foreign countries instead. But they as a class, with the exception of the ship owners, are productive of absolutely nothing to add to the wealth of the colony. There is no urgent necessity for them—the colony could do without them: all that this class of people have done for me, for instance, I could have done for myself.

These words uttered by Wentworth in 1853 would not have been out of place from the mouth of the most ardent socialist (excepting perhaps the reference to the usefulness of ship owners—for without ship owners wentworth would not have been able to get his wool to England). The only words missing from this tirade are bourgeoisie and rentier.

Although Cochrane is not explicit about the parallels, there are similarities in the way the political debate was framed in the United States in the closing decades of the eighteenth century and what occurred in Australia fifty years later. In America the dominant political arguments were between Alexander Hamilton's ideal of economic development based on advanced commerce and industry, and Thomas Jefferson's ideal of individual, self-reliant landowners providing the backbone of the nation's democracy. Some have argued that this debate was not finally settled until the beginning of the twentieth century. In Australia it was a debate started and ended within a twenty year period between the 1840s and 1860s. Although the question of how land should be distributed would be an ongoing saga in New South Wales politics, the question of how the politics and the economy of the colony would develop was decided as soon as the squatters were prevented from gerrymandering the electoral system.

Political ideas are not taken seriously in this country because Australia’s march towards liberal democracy is assumed to have been inevitable. Those ideas that are taken seriously by historians and political scientists are usually just reheated mid-century progressivism. Colonial Ambition demonstrates that politics in Australia started a long time before 1972.
‘God is love’: the politics of bills of rights

Eddy Gisonda reviews 
Bills of Rights and Decolonization
by Charles O.H. Parkinson
(Oxford University Press, 2007, 299 pages)

In 1988, Sir Anthony Mason stood before the Bicentennial Conference of the Australian Bar Association and announced his tentative support for a national bill of rights. It was a watershed moment. No other Australian Chief Justice had before him dared utter such views.

Sir Anthony claimed that human rights had become a ‘rallying cry across the world’, that there had been ‘widespread entrenchment of fundamental rights in constitutions throughout the world’, and that Australia’s failure to follow suit would ‘emphasise our legal isolation’. It was a line of reasoning that would occasion constant repetition in the years to come by fellow advocates.

But those who follow Sir Anthony in demanding some form of constitutional comity amongst nations often pitch their argument at a level too superficial to warrant serious consideration. They fail to acknowledge the basic proposition that the constitutional arrangements of each nation must respond to matters of history and experience unique to that country alone. The existence of a bill of rights in one country does not provide an inherent mandate for the adoption of a similar instrument in another. Often, all such an instrument will do is stand as a testament to the intricate, and at times rather unflattering, political exigencies that existed at the time of enactment.

Bills of Rights and Decolonization provides a clear demonstration of this point. Charles O.H. Parkinson has entered the vast ignorance currently masquerading as bill of rights discourse and provided a masterful study of the constitutional politicking that surrounded the enactment of bills of rights in Britain’s non-Dominion African, Asian and West Indian territories. Set during the end of Empire, Parkinson gives the reader a guided empirical tour, often with the aid of private diary entries and hitherto unseen correspondence and archival material, of the complete reversal of official Colonial Office policy into one that ultimately mandated the insertion of bills of rights in all overseas territories.

To read the details of this metamorphosis is as rewarding as it is startling, with numerous treasures of information scattered along the way. There is the explanation for the absence of a constitutionally protected right to vote in the Sudan (namely the necessity of assuaging traditional Islamic resistance to universal suffrage), Oliver Lyttelton’s ridiculing of the Nigerians (to his mind, the insertion of a bill of rights was the equivalent of writing ‘God is love’ into a constitution), and Lord Reid’s exacerbation that, with respect to the Malayan Constitutional Commission, there ‘never was an important commission for which less preparation was made’. (The contribution of Andrew Gaze to the Diceyan tradition had not yet begun in earnest.)

But the most astonishing feature of Bills of Rights and Decolonization lies in its conclusion: bills of rights were ultimately offered by the British government to its former colonies and adopted by local political interests for entirely political reasons unconnected with any belief in the intrinsic importance of the rights recorded. In fact, the British government was openly dismissive of the capacity for such instruments to offer any protection of minority or individual rights.

The British were correct. Many of the former colonies, notwithstanding their bill of rights armoury, quickly fell apart. Of this phenomenon, Dr Parkinson notes that a ‘bill of rights cannot guarantee the protection of rights or the continuation of a civil society’. South Africa, which has extremely high levels of crime and violence, enjoys the protection of the world’s most progressive bill of rights regime.

People may be quick to dismiss the relevance of Parkinson’s work to that debate on the grounds that the subject matter is little more than a footnote of history rooted in a far away time and place. After all, in New Zealand, Victoria, the ACT, and even the mother country herself, rights instruments have now been introduced, and it is to these far more contemporaneous examples that we should look when deciding our own constitutional arrangements.

But Bills of Rights and Decolonization reveals how the most recent bills of rights, both here and abroad, are not the result of some grand civilising mission, nor are they the result of groundswells of community support, of some widespread consensus that transcends the political, legal and academic divide. Put simply, these instruments do not represent a victory in the contest of ideas. Instead, they are instruments introduced by social democratic parties, over the objection of their mainstream conservative opponents, for the chief purpose of placating that core activist constituency whose support these parties continue to pocket in their accumulation of political successes.

With that in mind, those wishing nonetheless to engage in serious intellectual analysis about the instrumental entrenchment of rights are well advised to read this book. Those who do not may continue to observe that, when it comes to bills of rights, Australia is the odd man out.
This would be an easy book to ridicule. Manning Clark’s granddaughter leaves the politically correct university staff room and discovers that in real world school classrooms students love learning about war and hate learning indigenous history.

However, that would be churlish. Anna Clark deserves credit for actually going out into the field and recording the views of students about the Australian history they have been taught, even when those views clearly disagree with her own preconceptions. On the Anzacs she ‘wasn’t expecting them to express such passion when talking about the topic’ and when they explained their overwhelming boredom with indigenous history ‘to be honest, their views came as a bit of a surprise’.

This is not Clark’s first writing about how the history wars have impacted on Australian schools, having contributed a chapter on the topic to Stuart Macintyre’s highly partisan 2003 book *The History Wars*.

For *History’s Children*, Clark conducted focus groups with 182 students (in groups of five and six), from years nine to twelve, at 34 schools located in every state and territory; with a reasonable mix of government and non-government, and metropolitan and rural. She also interviewed teachers and bureaucrats. While she attempted to talk to education ministers, oddly none were available for interview.

Along with indigenous history and war, the other Australian history topic to which Clark devotes a full chapter is federation; which students find as dull as indigenous history and for similar reasons. It keeps popping up at different year levels, has repetitive and vague content, and lacks the drama and international significance that makes war such an engaging topic for teenagers.

The overwhelming sentiment of the contemporary students is that Australian history is important, but dull. In considering this finding, it would have been valuable if Clark had done some more questioning of students’ attitudes to their experiences being taught the history of countries other than Australia. It is a failing of many participants on both sides of the history wars, that there has been too great a focus on the ideological content of what is taught about Australia, rather than considering the even more fundamental question of what proportion of school history should actually be about Australia.

The other concern with Clark’s work is her unshakable assumption that learning facts is inherently dull. Interestingly, most of the anti-facts comments she reports from the classroom come from teachers, not students. Teachers argue that it is hard to teach facts and dates ‘on a Friday afternoon in a class of noisy, tired teenagers’, as if teaching a more nebulous curriculum would be easier. Yet there is Tahlia, a student at a school in outer Melbourne, who would like to learn more about our Prime Ministers, a sentiment shared by Edie at a public school in central Australia.

Clark at least acknowledges the existence of such children, and cites the further example of Colin, a year twelve student in Perth, who said ‘I like textbooks because the information’s there and you just learn it’. In a spirit of understanding Clark says ‘there’s no doubt these students need to be catered for—they feel much more comfortable with a concrete, content-oriented history lesson’, but hastens to add ‘I want to emphasis (sic) that they were a very small minority of the students I spoke with’.

Naturally, the education establishment share Clark’s anti-facts bias. NSW Board of Studies head and History Summit participant, Jenny Lawless, argues against ‘rote learning facts … is a very lower order skill’. Instead, she wants students ‘to actually engage in history’ as part of what Clark refers to as ‘historical literacy’, something that ‘includes a rich taxonomy of historical skills’.

Nobody would argue that at university—or even in years eleven and twelve—those who have elected to do history should be able to do far more than rote learn facts. However, in trying to develop these analytic schools in earlier years, there is a risk that students learn little actual history. One of Britain’s leading historians, David Strachey, has argued that far too much emphasis is placed on the process of discovery about historical events, rather than the events themselves. He argues that the study of original documents and the search for evidence should not come until university level. He asks ‘what’s the point in having a teacher if not to teach students what the facts are?’

Obviously, the choice of which historical facts and dates to teach can be contentious, but at least armed with a few facts about the history of Australia and the world, students might feel they had gained something from their time in the history classroom.

Clark has performed a valuable service in showing what some of the problems with the current history curriculum and teaching methods are. She may not have the answers as to how to improve the status quo, but that in no way invalidates her findings.
A hatchet job and the Holocaust

Sinclair Davidson

Despite Irene Nemirovsky, author of Suite Francaise, having died in Auschwitz, the left have turned her into a self-hating Jew.

Nemirovsky had been arrested in France in 1942, being a foreign Jew, and deported to Auschwitz where she died of typhus. Her final book, written in the shadow of the Holocaust, survived in manuscript and was recently ‘discovered’ by her daughter. The book has become an international best-seller. Nemirovsky’s other books, long out of print, are now being republished and translated into English. Suite Francaise consists of two novellas set during the invasion of France and early days of the WWII occupation. It is a charming, poignant read that explores the lives of people living in extraordinary circumstances. It is well worth reading irrespective of any other consideration.

In a recent The New Republic article ‘Scandale Francaise’ Ruth Franklin describes the background story to the book as spin and ‘worse, it was a fraud’. Franklin’s article has been republished and translated into English. Suite Francaise consists of two novellas set during the invasion of France and early days of the WWII occupation. It is a charming, poignant read that explores the lives of people living in extraordinary circumstances. It is well worth reading irrespective of any other consideration.

Much of Franklin’s criticism revolves around Nemirovsky’s first major success, David Golder. This novel is not in the same class as Suite Francaise. Golder is a Jewish banker with no redeeming features. Bankers, Jewish or otherwise, are not much loved characters in literature. The opening scene sees him destroying his business partner. He is gruff and money obsessed. Golder, however, is not a one-dimensional caricature. He is surrounded by sponges, and is manipulated by the women in his life—his wife Gloria and daughter Joyce. He sacrifices his health to provide for his family, particularly Joyce. When he dies, alone and unloved, he has nothing to show for his life. Nemirovsky gives new meaning to the word ‘irony’ when she writes:

In an irony that could have come directly from her own fiction, Nemirovsky would die alone in an eastern country, far from her family, and leave behind a fortune in manuscripts—‘thus fulfilling till the end the incomprehensible destiny of every good Jew on this earth’.

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Suite Francaise has no Jewish characters at all. Franklin opines that Nemirovsky might have been incapable of creating sympathetic Jewish characters, but chastises her for creating sympathetic German characters. Franklin argues that Nemirovsky herself was friendly with the Germans occupying the French town where she had taken refuge. Of course, this says more about the average German and about Franklin’s own prejudice than it does about Nemirovsky. Franklin manages to sneer at Nemirovsky’s June 25, 1941 diary entry, ‘I am resolving now never to hold rancor, however justified it might be, toward a group of people, whatever their race, religion, conviction, prejudices, errors’. Franklin should reflect on that statement and its sentiment.

It is possible to read and enjoy Suite Francaise without any knowledge of the author and her life story. This would be surprising to many reviewers, especially post-modernists. Readers who continually look for the missing voice, the missing perspective, or the dispossessed are imposing their own values and prejudices on literature.

Good literature that explores the human condition need not always be written by saints. It is too easy to look back in moral indignation and find individuals wanting. It is lazy thinking and lazy writing.
Louise Staley: ‘Social capital’ is the most important social theory idea over the past two decades. In opposition and now in government, the federal Labor Party has spent a lot of time talking about social capital.

Labor believes that social capital is created by government, not created by the invisible hand of the market and society. Certainly social capital has much to offer government to think about the complexity of civil society. But social capital is not a synonym for the nanny state.

Kevin Rudd enjoyed his time as opposition leader discussing whether or not Adam Smith was an economic rationalist. But Rudd’s Adam Smith is all Theory of Moral Sentiments and no Wealth of Nations.

Some of the ideas of the new government do not bode well for social capital. Prior to his election Mr Rudd spoke of the role of government in creating social capital and the role of social capital in instilling virtue. In the months since he came to power, glimpses of what that means are becoming apparent. For example, the government plans to extend police checks in aged care facilities, despite no evidence that testing staff and volunteers does anything other than reduce volunteering. If the Rudd government really is serious about building social capital a good starting point is the excessively prescriptive government regulation that inhibits volunteering and civic life.

Although not the first to write about it, Professor Robert Putnam of Harvard University is most often credited with the immense popularity of social capital. The themes of his book Bowling Alone—the decline in community and the disintegration of social structures—struck a chord particularly with Americans living with frighteningly random car-jackings and small-town decline.

A few years ago the Australian Journal of Social Issues credited the IPA for bringing the idea to this country—‘in 1994 Putnam’s views were first introduced to Australia, through a paper in the IPA Review, the magazine of free market think tank, the Institute of Public Affairs.’ In the article entitled ‘What makes democracy work?’ Putnam discussed the importance of the development of trust in economic and social development, particularly in the development of credit markets.

Since then social capital has evolved into a mainstream, if controversial issue in public policy research and practice. Governments of all hues have recognised the role social capital has in policy areas as diverse as welfare reform, food safety regulation and town planning. As Robert Putnam put it, social capital is the idea that ‘features of social organisation, such as trust, norms, and networks … can improve the efficiency of society by facilitating coordinated actions.’ Social capital is important because it links economic prosperity with how societies and communities operate. Greater prosperity occurs where there are multiple overlapping voluntary networks and people are civil to each other.

Publishing Putnam in the IPA Review was just the beginning of the IPA’s interest in social capital. Over the past 14 years the IPA has engaged with social capital across a wide range of policy and theoretical areas.

Although some left-wing academics have attempted to redefine social capital as some sort of alternative to sound economic analysis or a panacea for all society’s ills, the IPA has explored the role of social capital within a market based economy with particular attention to the role of volunteering. As long ago as 1995 the IPA commissioned a survey of the condition of Australian voluntary associations and explored the prospects for social capital as the post-war generation of active volunteers wound down their activities. This was the first empirical work specifically tied to social capital theory in Australia.

In more recent times the IPA has moved beyond identifying the causes and constraints on social capital to addressing how social capital can be applied by public policy makers. Ross Fox examined the treatment of civil society organisations by the legal and taxation systems. And Vern Hughes published a groundbreaking reconceptualisation of how disability and mental health services could be delivered. At the heart of Hughes’ argument is a call for a greater involvement of family, carers and civil society in the delivery of services and creation of meaningful social activities for some of society’s most vulnerable people.

Key to all aspects of the IPA’s work on social capital is the understanding that the creation of social capital is from the interaction of individuals, social norms and institutional settings. The state does not create social capital; it creates the environment where social capital can flourish or wither. Social capital flourishes when people have the time, inclination and capacity to invest in their communities. Social capital is eroded when government rules either put up a barrier to volunteering or government meddles in areas best left to individuals and families within their communities.

Louise Staley is a Research Fellow with the Institute of Public Affairs.
Ground breaking gay rights

An Israeli politician, of the ultra-Orthodox Jewish Shas party has blamed a recent stint of earthquakes on parliament’s passing of legislation concerning homosexuals. The politician claims that earthquakes could be simply avoided if parliament stopped ‘passing legislation on how to encourage homosexual activity in the state of Israel, which anyway brings about earthquakes.’ He cites the example of a quake in February which occurred two days after a ruling passed allowing same-sex couples to adopt children. ‘Why do earthquakes happen?’ he asks, ‘One of the reasons is the things to which the Knesset (parliament) gives legitimacy, to sodomy.’

Tasmanian’s are not all related ‘legally’

Perhaps in an attempt to fight back against the discriminatory stereotype that everyone in the state is related, it appears that in Tasmania children and parents are not considered ‘related persons’ for land tax purposes.

When investigating whether a parent could claim principal place of residence exemption on a property they bought for their son the response from the tax department was ‘No—Under the land tax legislation, children are not “related persons” and therefore, unless your son is an owner of at least 50% of the property, the land is taxable. The definition of “related persons” in the Act [Land Tax Act 2000] does not include children or parents.’ This presumably is a consequence of the long anticipated breakdown of the traditional family.

Global warming is important… well, not that important

It seems Australian’s are happy to talk about reducing greenhouse gas emissions. But when it comes to actually thinking about making sacrifices their opinion cools quickly. The Herald Sun asked five Melburnians in March about whether Australia should ‘make sacrifices in reducing greenhouse gases when they won’t have any meaningful impact on global warming?’

The five respondents thought that Australia must make a contribution to combat the problem. Jane said ‘We’ve been far too wasteful in the past and we can all do with less.’ Amy thought that ‘We have a global responsibility.’ Peter wanted us ‘to show leadership within our community.’ Jonathan thought we should do something ‘for the generations to come.’ And Melissa thought we should do something because global warming will have a direct impact on Australia.

Meanwhile, the Herald Sun vote-line on the same day asked respondents ‘Would you be happy to pay a 10c-a-litre carbon tax on petrol?’ Over 1000 people (92.9 per cent) said ‘NO’, they would not be happy to do so while only 85 respondents (7.1 per cent) agreed with the sentiments that Australia should do something about climate change.

What will happen when the global warming symbolism of the Rudd government actually starts to hit the public’s hip pocket?