

# THE DIRTY DOZEN

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## Australia's Twelve Opponents of Freedom

**A** great idea can change the world. But so can a terrible one. And all ideas need their advocates. In this list we've chosen the dirty dozen of Australian opponents of freedom: the most energetic, aggressive, influential, and outright offensive promoters of the Nanny State, restrictions on free speech, constraints on our economic freedom, and illiberalism in general.

They come from academia, journalism, politics, the public service, and the judiciary. Usually they come from a combination of two or more—governments like to reward the promoters of bad ideas with taxpayer funded sinecures. We've chosen seven from Australia's past, and five from today.



## 1 RAY FINKELSTEIN

Ray Finkelstein, a former federal court judge, was appointed by the Gillard Government to head the Independent Inquiry into the Media and Media Regulation.

The inquiry's report, released in February 2012, illustrated clearly, if primitively, the basic paternalism behind proposals to limit freedom of speech.

Finkelstein's recommendations were bad. He proposed a government-appointed 'News Media Council' which could censor and punish media outlets if they were 'unfair' or biased. This, in Finkelstein's view, would make the media more 'accountable'. Accountable to the government, that is.

In practice, Finkelstein's proposal was a de-facto press licensing scheme, of a sort not seen in the

Anglosphere since 1695. His report ultimately led to Stephen Conroy's legislative attempt to regulate the press in March 2013.

But more than the specifics of its proposals, the Finkelstein report expressly demonstrated the deep hostility of the left towards the public it claims to serve. Buried in the 474 page report was an astounding, offensive and deeply undemocratic observation. After citing evidence offered to the committee that 'citizens must have the capacity to engage in debate, in the form of the relevant critical reasoning and speaking skills,' Finkelstein wrote:

There is real doubt as to whether these capacities are present for all, or even most, citizens. And, even if they are, both speakers and audiences are often motivated by interests or concerns other than a desire for truth including, of course, the desire to make money, and personal, political and religious motivations that may render truth of less importance.

The Finkelstein report was written by a former senior judge for the benefit of the Minister for Communications of the Commonwealth of Australia. It is shocking to see expressed, in print, such patronising sentiments about the citizens and voters. Ray Finkelstein should be scorned for his belief. But he also should be thanked for articulating so clearly the undemocratic values at the foundations of the modern left.



## 2 BEN CHIFLEY

Had Ben Chifley got his way Australia would be a far poorer,

less free country. Chifley's vision for a post-war Australia was along the lines of the war-time economy: socialistic and regulated, extremely centralised, all controlled by a Commonwealth government of near-unlimited power.

The list of indictments is long. Chifley nationalised the airlines. He tried to nationalise the banks. He laid the foundations of the welfare state behemoth. He embarked on mammoth, expensive public projects.

As Treasurer in the Curtin government he introduced the Commonwealth income tax and—just as significantly—the pay-as-you-go collection system, which obscures how much tax we actually pay. Labor's unsuccessful Fourteen Powers Referendum in 1944—which of course he was largely responsible for—alone would have opened the door for unconstrained federal involvement across the economy.

When Friedrich Hayek counselled in his 1944 book *Road to Serfdom* that economic regulation leads to social and political regulation, it was politicians like Ben Chifley he was thinking of. It's astonishing that the Labor Party still lauds him as one of their legends.



### 3 STEPHEN CONROY

As Communications Minister in the Rudd and Gillard governments, Stephen Conroy pushed for internet censorship. His proposed mandatory internet filter would have massively expanded government control over the internet.

At the same time, Conroy was proposing the biggest white elephant of Labor's six years in power—a massively expensive, government-administered internet network. The National Broadband Network will cost taxpayers tens of billions of dollars and compete directly with private sector internet service providers.

But by far Conroy's most dangerous idea was his media regulation package. At the urging of the Greens, Conroy and the Labor Party started a process that would have meant basically that the government would licence the press.

The internet filter and media regulation proposals would have been the two greatest restrictions on freedom of speech in recent memory.

### 4 BILLY HUGHES

While Billy Hughes is best remembered as a Labor 'rat', he remained a supporter of all the worst features of the Labor agenda in his five decade federal parliamentary career, whether inside or outside the ALP.

He supported establishing government businesses, nationalising monopolies and played a role in bringing down the Bruce Government in 1929 over its attempt to reform industrial relations. A key part of the Labor agenda was the White Australia Policy, of which Hughes was a strenuous advocate, once labelling it 'the greatest thing we have achieved'.

The only issues on which Hughes differed from his Labor colleagues were war and conscription. Hughes was a particularly warlike imperialist whose career reached its apogee when he played a significant role at the Paris Peace Conference in 1919.

There he demanded that Germany pay crippling reparations, repudiated a Japanese push for a declaration of racial equality, and was a leading opponent of Woodrow Wilson's push for international free trade. Arguably no Australian Prime Minister has ever had a bigger impact on the world stage. The shame is that it was so negative.

### 5 TIM FLANNERY

Flannery's influence on the politics of climate change in Australia is hard to overestimate. He's written numerous books urging radical, costly, and dangerous action to reduce our emissions and energy consumption. He is endlessly feted and promoted by the ABC.

Flannery has been proved wrong time and time again. In 2007 he famously said, 'So even the rain that falls isn't actually going to fill our dams...'

Most recently he acted as head of the Climate Commission. The purpose of the commission was to convince the public to accept the Gillard government's high-cost and economically damaging carbon taxes and renewable energy policies.

Flannery takes a quasi-religious approach to climate advocacy. He told the *Sydney Morning Herald* in 2004 that 'I wake up in the morning thinking there are lots of times when people have woken up feeling like this, like the Old Testament prophets. I try to find a way out of it, but I can't. It's life-changing to realise what is going on.'





## 6 DAVID SYME

David Syme was more responsible than any other individual for post-Federation Australia adopting protection as a key economic policy.

As publisher and editor of *The Age* for almost fifty years until his death in 1908, Syme brazenly used the paper to campaign on political issues, particularly demanding protection for developing local manufacturing industries in Victoria.

The paper had a massive influence on politicians and public opinion. By reducing the price of the paper to one penny, Syme drove up circulation, which reached a remarkable 100,000 by 1890, five times higher than its more pro-free trade rival *The Argus*.

Syme's most significant disciple was the rising politician Alfred Deakin, who not only supported protection in the colony, but did more than any other individual to impose it on post-Federation Australia.

Eighty years of Protectionism and reduced economic performance followed; something which would not have happened if Victoria had adopted a policy of free trade as New South Wales did.



## 7 H.B. HIGGINS

H.B. Higgins was the sole judge in the infamous Harvester case, which established the idea of a mandatory minimum wage.

In the case Higgins held that employers were obliged to pay wages that met 'the normal needs of an average employee, regarded as a human being in a civilised community.'

The Harvester judgement marked the beginning of a successful push for greater government intervention in the relationship between employer and employee.

In part, the minimum wage in Australia owes its existence to Higgins. Restrictions on the ability of enterprising individuals to employ others can take many forms. But perhaps the most paternalistic and singularly most damaging policy is that of the mandatory minimum wage.

Higgins deserves his place as one of Australian history's most virulent opponents of freedom for helping to spread economic illiteracy that still pervades the industrial relations debate more than 100 years on.



**NICOLA ROXON'S  
NANNY STATE  
REGULATIONS  
TREATED INDIVIDUALS  
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**8 NICOLA  
ROXON**

Nicola Roxon presided over two of the biggest assaults on freedom in Australia in the last ten years.

Roxon's attempt to make it unlawful to express a political opinion that offended someone through the *Human Rights and Anti-Discrimination Bill* was an extraordinary attack on the fundamental principle of freedom of speech. The bill also reversed the burden of proof, meaning people would have been presumed guilty unless they could prove their innocence, an unbelievable proposition in a liberal democracy.

Nicola Roxon was responsible for the introduction of mandatory plain packaging for cigarettes, a punitive policy that the public health movement champions.

Despite the fact that tobacco is a legal product and already heavily-regulated, plain packaging perfectly demonstrates how Nanny State regulations treat individuals as if they are incapable of making their own decisions and taking responsibility for their own lives.



**9 H.C.  
COOMBS**

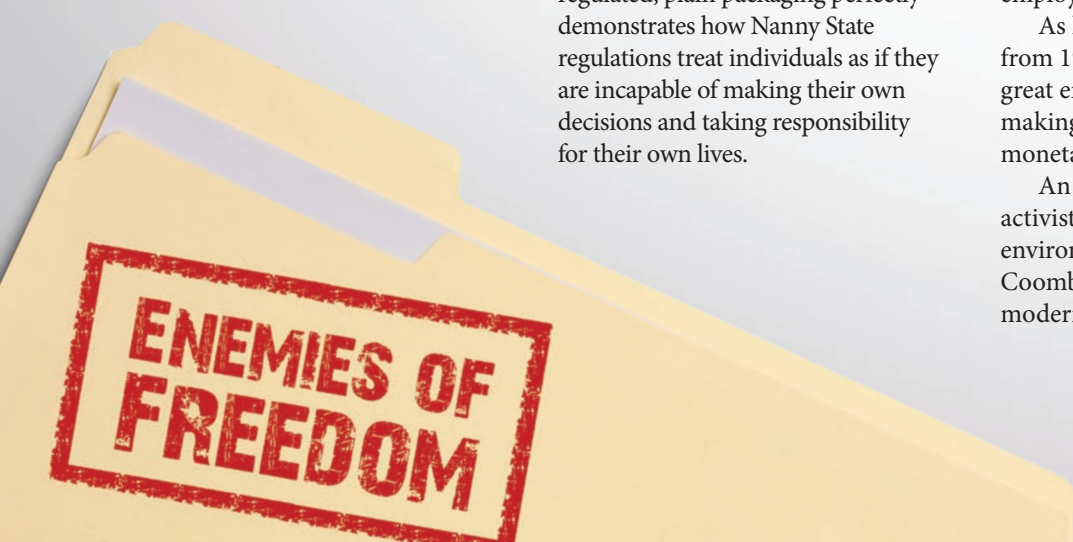
As a senior federal public servant for four decades, Herbert Cole 'Nugget' Coombs successfully pressed for an aggressive expansion of government, the legacy of which continues to harm our freedoms today.

A self-described socialist in his youth who studied under leftist Harold Laski at the London School of Economics during the early 1930s, Coombs quickly progressed within the federal public service as adviser to both Labor and conservative governments.

Coombs embraced the Keynesian approach to economic policy fine tuning, stating in a report on full employment in 1945 that 'governments should accept the responsibility for stimulating spending on goods and services to the extent necessary to sustain full employment.'

As head of the Reserve Bank from 1960 to 1968, Coombs placed great emphasis on the need for making short run adjustments to monetary policy settings.

An Aboriginal land rights activist, arts advocate and environmentalist later in life, Coombs served as a template for the modern Australian progressive.







## 10 JESSIE ACKERMANN

Few Australians will today be familiar with the social ‘reform’ of Jessie Ackermann. But at the turn of the twentieth century, Ackermann was first among those who drove the prohibitionist movement. She wanted to impose upon Australia the attempt at moral control that proved so damaging in the 1920s United States.

Born in America, Ackermann became a missionary for alcohol temperance. She travelled to Australia in 1889 to found the Australasian Woman’s Christian Temperance Union, whose mission was to lobby for legislative restrictions on the alcohol consumption of Australians.

These days Ackermann is remembered by feminist historians as a key figure in the Australian suffragette movement. But she can also be described as the founder of the great Australian Nanny State.



## 11 AL GRASSBY

Al Grassby was Minister for Immigration under Gough Whitlam. Following his defeat at the 1974 federal election, he was appointed as the first Commissioner of Community Relations. This role was to enforce and direct the new *Racial Discrimination Act*—legislation he had strongly argued for in government. The Office of the Commissioner of Community Relations was a direct precursor to the modern Australian Human Rights Commission.

In the last days of the Keating government the *Racial Discrimination Act* was amended to insert the infamous Section 18C which was the law that sent Andrew Bolt to court. The restrictions on free of speech and on the expression of political opinion that Australians suffer under today have their roots in Al Grassby and Gough Whitlam and the 1970s. (The new Coalition government has promised to repeal Section 18C.)



## 12 SIMON CHAPMAN

Simon Chapman is a Sydney University academic and one of Australia’s foremost advocates of the Nanny State.

His greatest success has been promoting and pushing through the Australian political system plain packaging of tobacco products.

Chapman argued for laws that would remove colours and logos from tobacco packaging—a policy which implies that colours and logos are too dangerous to be permitted in a free country.

Now he is arguing that the government require individuals get a licence to purchase cigarettes. Explaining his proposal in *The Conversation*, Chapman wrote:

I’ve lived through advertising bans, smoking bans in workplaces, smoking bans in restaurants, smoking bans in pubs, graphic warnings on packs, and presently, plain packaging, and every time these things came along people said ‘that will never happen’.

He deserves a place on this list for his staunch advocacy of policies that replace personal responsibility with state paternalism. **R**