

arena



THE AUSTRALIAN MAGAZINE OF LEFT POLITICAL,
SOCIAL AND CULTURAL COMMENTARY

06-07 2010

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№ 106

Where to find us

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Arena Magazine accepts unsolicited submissions for each of its sections: **commentaries & debate** up to 1200 words; **essays** up to 4000 words; **features** up to 3000 words; **reviews** of books, film, art, theatre, music and dance up to 1200 words; **photo essays**; and **poetry**.

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Style

We follow the ACPS Style Manual.

The editors reserve the right to change titles and edit for space.

Refereeing

We formally referee any published article as requested by academic authors.

Payment

Arena Magazine does not receive government funding. Published contributors are offered a half-year gift subscription to **Arena Magazine**.



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Two Worlds

The packed hall gathered to hear Tim Jackson—a leading UK researcher on sustainable economies—on the question of ‘Prosperity without Growth’ (also the title of his recent book). His lively presentation and general grasp of the issues enthralled an expectant audience. It is hard to convey what seemed a deep emotional need among audience members, as reflected in their questions, concerns and statements on the night. When joined with the fact that an earlier talk was booked out some days in advance, this seems to be evidence that Jackson is engaging a profound need for at least some publics. Can one reasonably see in this a gathering momentum related to a crisis of the most fundamental kind in our social institutions, related to how we live?

Tim Jackson asks, through a critique of the core commitments of society to economic growth, how it might be possible to build a sustainable economy that can avoid climate catastrophe. Among a large range of concerns, he pursues this question by asking how we might come to radically different concepts of ‘flourishing’ for individuals and communities, notions of flourishing that contrast with those offered by the apparently limitless consumption lifestyles of contemporary global social institutions. His portrayal of the utter disaster that awaits us if we proceed down the road of what is now called ‘Recovery’ is comprehensive and disturbing. He knows any answer will take time and emerge out of practical endeavour, but a visceral need to commence a process urgently is in the foreground of his thinking. For those who attended, this is where it is at.

In Perth in the same week our leading mineral entrepreneurs led demonstrations against a resource tax proposed by Kevin Rudd, a tax that would be used to help reduce government deficits resulting from the Global Financial Crisis of 2008 and related stimulus programs introduced to ensure Recovery. Neither the entrepreneurs nor any of our political leaders—other than Bob Brown—would seem to be on the same planet as Jackson’s Melbourne audience. At the centre of their political and entrepreneurial concerns is the pursuit of economic growth and profit—and more generally the core assumption that expansion is good—the same way of life that Tim Jackson convincingly tells us is doomed and can have no medium-term future. Rather, the official political debate in Australia, excitedly promoted by the media, is a stoush between combatants over the distribution of the spoils from toxic economic expansion. What might be sustainable over time could not be further from their thoughts.

The tunnel vision that characterises mainstream Australia takes a different form in Europe and the United States, where Recovery is far from certain. In Australia the dependence on China, and to a lesser extent India, is stark and anxiety provoking, but for the time being makes Australia look ordered and relatively prosperous. In Europe and the United States the levels

of state indebtedness has flown out of control. Arguably such indebtedness can be managed over time with a regime of economic growth. But in our times at best this could only be a solution at great cost. The powerful states of the capitalist heartlands stand vulnerable and could not sustain themselves in the face of another shock. But we have entered an era where shocks are the order of the day.

The shock of debt crisis in Greece in past months is one kind of experience. The Greek government was forced by the institutions of the EU and the IMF to slash welfare, public spending and workers conditions generally to reduce deficits and maintain EU membership. This association of Greece and the EU had mostly generated positive consumption benefits until the crash. Suddenly, in the aftermath of the GFC, expansion and consumption growth had inverted into debt, unemployment and the collapse of social security. The resulting turmoil on the streets made headlines around the world. But one would be hard put to portray these events as those of a public seeking to live another way. No doubt there are sectors of the Greek polity that would take up this concern. And there are other features of the situation in Greece that are quite specific. Nevertheless expressions of consumer frustration were to the fore in these events.

Where people have been drawn into the world of the consumer oriented to commodities and have lost their sense of mutuality with others—or think mutuality can be found on Facebook—they respond in ways consistent with that hyper-individual formation. We can expect similar responses over the coming period in many a city in the West. As Mark Lilla argues in *The New York Review of Books* (May–June 2010) in a discussion of the rise of the ‘Tea Party Jacobins’, there is a new populism at large. Quite unlike the populisms of the past, it is based in the new individualism which is constituted in the experience of the consumption lifestyle.

But the loss of mutuality is more complex than this. ‘Facebook mutuality’ is real but it cannot distinguish between technologically facilitated presence and presence based in place, the senses and tangibility. And this distinction lies at the core of the emerging ‘two worlds’. For the importance of locality, regional economy, generational knowledge of others, together with the critique of the global transport of people and commodities, compose some core elements of the emerging critique of global development. To see this as an advocacy of a return to forms of domination and hierarchy embedded in history—a return, say, to an aristocratic conservatism—is to misunderstand the nature of the contradiction that now faces us, one that has been discussed for many years in *Arena Magazine* and *Arena Journal*.

On the other side of the world another drama is shockingly underlining the contradictions of our times—the massive eruption of oil 1500 metres below the surface of the ocean off the coast of Louisiana. Far larger than the Exxon-Valdez spill and still not controlled, it will foul the fisheries and

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Two Worlds

John Hinkson

the coastline of the immediate East Coast—possibly much of the East Coast—of the United States. Ways of life and pristine environment will be ruined on a monumental scale. Various causes have been identified: corruption and cost-saving inside the corporations, poor technology and inadequate regulation. But most parties, and especially the media, ignore the dependence of the global economy and way of life intimately, in endless detail on oil—from transport to food, from packaging to building. If high tech frames the global Behemoth, oil plays a central role in its growth. For at least ten years it has been known that our world of cheap energy is coming to an end. Dogmatic deniers aside, those who have investigated its future availability come up with the same answer: it has no future. Heedless, a way of life desperate to maintain itself nevertheless launches into dangerous exploration in the deep sea, with what many see as predictable outcomes. One scientific commentator, feeling compelled perhaps to step outside his disciplinary strictures, declared we have opened mythological doors and that nature is now releasing its dark, uncontrollable underside. This is by no means the only underside of the global juggernaut.

While President Obama is signalling (unconvincingly) that the oil spill marks the end of US dependence on fossil fuels, barely believably but illustrative of the social divisions that are emerging, others in the eastern states of the United States are seeking to put aside the temporary ban on off-shore oil drilling because it is causing unemployment in the industry.

Two social worlds are forming. There are many spectators for the time being, but enough people now know that global development is calling into being the stuff of collective nightmares.

Capitalism has encountered a number of social and cultural movements that sought to block its general development. There was Romanticism in the early and mid 19th century, socialism in the mid and late 19th century through well into the 20th century, fascism and Nazism in the early 20th century, and the counter culture of the 1960s and 1970s. It adds little to say that they all failed, but all have nevertheless had effects and continue to influence social thought. They all have to be learnt from in one way or another.

In these instances there would have been no movements of substance without a ferment developing in the universities and institutions of learning. Leading through broad debates about cultural choices, the universities made a crucial contribution to practical transformation. Are there signs of a ferment in the universities emerging today?

The first thing to say is that Tim Jackson is himself a sign of an emerging challenge within the institutions. That he bridges the humanities, the social sciences and the sciences is important. But, to be precise, he comes out of the ecological sciences, where a ferment that has been developing over decades. This gathering ferment

in the first instance is not especially socially oriented. Rather it expresses profound dismay at the implications of what has been discovered about the environment and climate change under the impact of growth-oriented Homo sapiens.

The second thing to say is that while this could support a more general ferment in the arts, humanities and social sciences, it has not done so as yet. It may be bubbling away and could well suddenly take form. One can readily advocate such because it is hard to see how there will be a sufficiently challenging social movement without such a development responding to the rising concerns of the general population.

The third thing to say is that our universities have changed compared to the past and that this change is almost certainly at the centre of contemporary quietism in the face of fundamental challenges. (In this issue of *Arena Magazine* see Rod Beecham and Simon Cooper for a discussion of some of the issues.) During the upheavals of the 1960s, especially in the United States, the humanities and social sciences were outspoken while in the background the hard sciences—or, more accurately, their practical derivative the techno-sciences—together with university authorities were quietly developing relations with industry and government—with capital. This relationship was founded in the new cornucopia that was promised in and emerging from the techno-scientific revolution. Two generations on, it is this relationship that typifies the university. In other words the university as institution has become a central player with capital in the practical development of the global economy and culture—to the point where capitalism per se is no longer an adequate description of contemporary society. The endless cornucopia of material goods and individual lifestyles that lies at the heart of the contemporary crisis is, unlike any earlier social crisis, closely interwoven with the university, and with this shift there has been an inversion of institutional traditions and relations of power and influence.

Every academic working in a university today knows in intimate detail what this has meant for the institution and how it impacts on them as thinkers. It does not mean that they are necessarily contained as individuals by this development but practically speaking, to this time, this has been the collective effect. Tim Jackson will testify to the way this has worked to encourage silence. Until there is a ferment that begins to target this core developmental relationship it will be especially difficult to agitate for a different cultural and economic course into the future.

If there are signs of two worlds developing on the cultural stage, they have not yet taken a mature form within the universities. The need could hardly be more pressing. **a**

John Hinkson

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06-07 2010

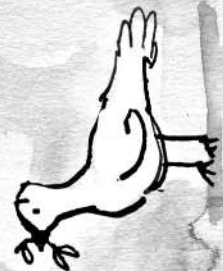
Nº 106

IDENTITY POLITICS...

... AND THAT IS WHAT YOU CALL AN "ANTI-SEMITE"...



KATANSKAS



AGAINST THE CURRENT

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Fiona Katauskas

'Twisted are the hearts of men ...'

Nonie Sharp

→→→

'Twisted are the hearts of men ...'

Nonie Sharp

Nonie Sharp is an Arena Publications editor.

Reflections on life on a new Earth

'So long, it's been good to know you.' It's Woody Guthrie's voice on Melbourne radio yesterday, but he's singing about us now, about the planet we know: a farewell to an era from the legendary figure of the 1960s protest movement. Today another American citizen, Bill McKibben, thoughtful environmental activist of our time, says 'yes': we are saying goodbye to the old earth. It's a different place now. The planet still looks the same, but soon it will look different.

He, Bill, is speaking of 'one of those rare moments, the start of a change far larger than anything we can read about in the records of man'. Willy-nilly we are saying farewell to the old earth. We may usher in the new one without the trumpet sound of joyous rebirth. That's why McKibben's new book *Eaarth: Making Life on a Tough New Planet* depicts the dark green planet with an emergent red-brown centre. Too strong for the faint-hearted; incomprehensibly pessimistic?

Inside *Eaarth* McKibben writes that the weather disturbances happening all around us today—rising floods, bushfires, storms—are not just the well-known disturbances of 'the old random and freakish kind'. They're something quite different. His words speak to only some of us. They are incomprehensible to many, many people today. And they speak important truths to a few ... That balance I believe will change ... Welcome to the era of an overheated planet ...

McKibben's conclusions, which he puts simply and solemnly, speak of the latest findings of leading world climatologists, especially those of James Hansen, head of the climate division of NASA. The surprise melting of the Arctic ice cap in mid-December 2007 led Hansen to conclude that the safe number of 350 parts per million of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere had already been surpassed. In December 2009 it was 387 parts per million. It was at that moment in December 2007, Bill McKibben writes, when he knew we'd never again inhabit the same planet. In that 'light bulb' experience he himself changed irreversibly.

Of course, if we stopped putting more carbon dioxide into the atmosphere right now we could halt this descent into irreversible disaster. But we won't. Most of us go on being simplistically optimistic. A few even say let's just adapt to whatever temperature changes arise in the future. Both are immoral, and both are lunatic ...

What are the predictions of other thoughtful scientists? In his *Requiem for a Species*, Clive Hamilton cites the recent predictions of Kevin Anderson, director of the Tyndall Centre for Climate Change Research. Put all too briefly here, Hamilton is saying that with a 3 per cent decline in carbon emissions—the maximum rate consistent with continued economic growth—the world has a 50:50 chance of only a four degree rise by the 2070s or 2080s.

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Bill McKibben became an activist some twenty years ago. In 1989 he wrote *The End of Nature*, an early book on the advance of global warming. Himself down with dengue fever in Bangladesh, he watched other people dying; behind their sickness he saw a warming earth—and fever on the rise. 'Something in me snapped.' Writing books was not enough for him. He began an unfinished pilgrimage; following the 2007 Arctic meltdown, he began the organisation '350' with a circle of college graduates and global action in 1400 places. He is a man whose example, conviction, and imagination calls others to his side.

Fortunately there are like-minded women and men are now aware that we're speaking of 'the habitability of the earth', in Clive Hamilton's words: an emotionally challenging task. Knowing that truth behoves us to act ethically; doing so 'may redeem our humanity before the future is taken out of our hands'.

For Bill McKibben, Clive Hamilton, like George Monbiot, many others, the Copenhagen meeting marked a turning point for the future of the planet; the last hope 'to pull back from the abyss' was lost there, and we face the grave outcome of the deepest of human failures. So for these writers the question now is how to make a life on a tough new planet in the face of a rapidly warming world. Clive Hamilton writes that being mindlessly optimistic may be emotionally tranquilising, but it is also shockingly irresponsible. While hope is an eternal message of our social being, in circumstances of looming catastrophe, blind hope is terribly dangerous.

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Sadly in our epoch 'dark powers' have come to possess us. Over time exploiting the earth as a resource has triggered an epochal transformation where techno-scientific-based processes can yield an open-ended material abundance and lifestyle that shapes and refines an individualist ethos. For all its underlying complexities (and this is the subject of original scholarly work not my own) this transformation finds everyday expression in the individual pursuit of freedom, the consumption of things and places. In the name of individual freedom an invisible process reshapes what it is to be human. So the problem becomes us: humans who go on wanting. Clive Hamilton and others see this process as the growth fetish, 'the creed of the cancer cell' in Judith Wright's late words.


spirit of co-operation, take on the character of moral virtues. Perhaps that's where Tim Jackson's thoughtful if controversial answer to the fetish in *Prosperity Without Growth* comes in: halt the latter and save the planet!

Of course, Jackson is aware of the challenge he is making. 'Questioning growth is deemed to be the act of lunatics, idealists and revolutionaries. But question it we must.' This is all too obvious to McKibben or to Clive Hamilton. Non-growth is anathema to economists. In this era growth is anathema to ecologists.

At Copenhagen the facts were plain and the leaders made their choices. And just as the leaders at Copenhagen turned their backs on the slowly drowning low-lying states of today—the Maldives, Kiribati and more—so, as the tragedy unfolds, will they find ways to ensure their descendants' survival while the rest drown or just starve. Clive Hamilton sees that once the powerful grasp the seriousness of the threat to themselves and their families they will move to protect themselves and sacrifice the rest of us. This is just what happens in George Turner's 1987 literary fiction, *The Sea and Summer*, in the drowning towers of Melbourne after the Antarctic ice caps have melted.

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McKibben believes we are not able to prevent hideous damage because 'The momentum of the heating and the momentum of the economy that powers it, can't be turned off quickly enough to prevent it. We must then 'build the architecture for the world that comes next, the dispersed and localised societies that can survive the damage we can no longer prevent.' For a man who believes the worst thing is to give up, this is the voice of deep sorrow. But he concludes, we still must live on the world we've created—lightly, carefully, gracefully.'

A time to heed the wisdom of the ancients: 'Twisted are the hearts of men—dark powers possess them.' A Sanskrit text, probably from the Vedas, inspires Judith Wright's late poem 'Patterns'. She inscribes there a recent warning—from the atomic scientists in the glare of a thousand suns ... 

Like-minded women and men are now aware that we're speaking of 'the habitability of the earth', in Clive Hamilton's words: an emotionally challenging task. Knowing that truth behoves us to act ethically; doing so 'may redeem our humanity before the future is taken out of our hands'.

Even a couple of generations ago intermediate institutions stood between us and the urge to pursue our individual desires. They continued to play an active part in mediating, sanctioning our actions, providing an intellectual and ethical framework through which people lived in and interpreted the world. Today that social fabric supporting a moral life has receded with individual achievement, consumption (of places as well as things), moving into the foreground.

Fortunately though (but sadly too), the loosening bonds that feed a sense of the common good have by no means entirely dissolved. Between the cracks left by the accelerated expansion of individual self-interest, fresh shoots can be seen where the light shines in. Using less energy, turning away from fossil fuels (energy descent) and transitional projects are young yet active: care for the earth, care for others are visible in a multitude of different places (as Bill McKibben and others perceive well). In the new circumstances energy descent, the

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'Twisted are the hearts of men ...'

Nonie Sharp

Gaza and the West

Guy Rundle

→→→

Gaza and the West

Guy Rundle

Guy Rundle is a consulting editor for *Arena Magazine*.

The flotilla and a hardening identity politics in Israel

Perhaps it was a mistake to subscribe to Melanie Phillips' RSS feed. The UK columnist, beloved of Australia's right-wing think tanks, is not known as 'Mad Mel' for nothing. As a reliably hysterical proponent of Western decline, encapsulated in her book *Londonistan*, a near science fictive account of the city's 'takeover' by radical Muslims, her blog is always entertaining. So when the Gaza flotilla was raided it was always likely that she would jump into action. To put it mildly. She must have been at her desk for thirty hours straight; my email account eventually sent new entries to the spam folder. 'Peace flotilla? This was an Islamist terror ambush!'; 'The truth about the Turkish terror convoy'; 'A global pogrom in the making'; and on it went. Like someone painting a bridge, she appears to have started on a new post as soon as the last one was finished.

It was impossible to believe that Phillips, an adamant global warming sceptic and a believer in the discredited vaccination-causes-autism argument, was not forestalling a certain degree of anxiety occasioned by the Israeli government's hairy-chested attack. Yet any comfort/amusement one might have gained from watching Israel's supporters running round like chooks was inevitably diminished by the spectacle of many of the flotilla's supporters, for which the brutal and stupid attack became a fresh occasion for the construction of a unitary and uniquely malign Israel. The rhetoric directed against Israel—that it had crossed a 'line of civilisation' and such—was a mirror of the country's overblown claims to the threat represented by the flotilla.

The event revived calls for a boycott of Israeli goods, which began in an ad-hoc sort of way. In Turkey, the justifiable anger at the killing of nine Turkish citizens was accompanied by rallies at which the swastika was reasonably prominent. In France things got weirder—one small independent cinema chain suspended the showing of an Israeli film, prompting the intervention of the culture minister. And globally an already entangled debate was made crazier by the comments of veteran White House reporter Helen Thomas that the entire Jewish population should go back to Germany and Poland.

The stymied debate over the flotilla, Gaza, and Israel—Palestine was an expression of the profound impasse into which the issue has fallen—and the consequent manner in which it has become a proxy fight for the Western Right and Left. On the latter side it has now become imperative to sort out the genuine critical case against Israel from the great deal of bad faith that has sprung up around it.

The clear anti-imperialist argument against Israel remains: it is a country created on the land of an indigenous population within living memory, its borders created by a Western-dominated UN, without the

consent of people living there, who were subsequently cleared by indiscriminate civilian terror designed to create a refugee flight. It survives off Western aid, much of its military funds are hidden in foreign aid budgets, and both its government and its global network of supporters draw on its Western origins as a source of legitimacy and claimed solidarity. Within the 1967 borders it has largely erased a two-thousand year Arab heritage in a number of cities (the flotilla's arrestees were taken to Ashdod, a planned city near the destroyed town of Isdud, depopulated by refugee flight and then expulsion), and the West Bank territory is being carved up to make any sort of genuinely independent Palestinian state unviable.

This comprehensive late-stage colonialism, extended to cultural and historical revision on the ground, and claims of legitimacy abroad suffices to make the conflict one of particular focus. The Israel government's and lobby's repeated special pleading on the matter—pointing to the brutal suppression of the Tamils by the Sri Lankan government, or even the sinking of a South Korean naval ship by the North Koreans—is transparently ridiculous, the assumption of a legitimacy that is precisely in question. Much of this is stating the obvious, but it is worth restating the objections, if only to clarify the way in which they have flowed into a construction of Israel that is as obsessive and mythologising as the regime itself. To identify Israel and its vociferous supporters as something to be relentlessly challenged is one thing; to construct it as some unique evil is something else entirely.

There's no doubt that at least part of this intensity arises from the need of an ossified section of the radical Left for a clear moral-political focus. Israel is a European colonial state, and its conduct towards the Palestinians inside and outside the post-1967 borders re-emphasises that character. But it is one of the last such situations in a world which offers far less clear lines of moral-political division. In this, the Left is entirely outdone by the pro-Israel Right, for whom the Zionist state has become a fetish object *sans pareil*. For commentators such as News Ltd's Greg Sheridan, the US-based *National Review* or the UK 'Churchillian' historian Andrew Roberts, Israel is a surviving remnant of a Western sense of militant purpose, one long since lost in the decadence of mini-skirts and skiffle music. There was always much talk of 'plucky little Israel' (the phrase became so self-parodic



it was changed to 'doughty' some years ago) but in the wake of repeated failure in Iraq and Afghanistan—wars, which, at their base, had a degree of purposelessness in their projection of power—Israel became the only game in town.

But for the battered neo-cons of the West, Israel became an increasingly tough customer to front up for. Its centre-stage role in the drama of the beleaguered West occurred at a time when the country appeared to be losing its capacity for judicious self-interest in its military adventures. The 2006 invasion of Lebanon, the decimation in Gaza, and finally the flotilla attack all give the appearance of incidents in which the desire for spectacle, however bloody, has overtaken any judicious or proximate response to incidents such as cross-border rockets or kidnappings of soldiers. Nor is there much mystery as to why this would have developed. In recent years the Zionist project has changed its character, slipping from a nationalist (or pseudo-nationalist) politics into a politics of identity, which is quite a different thing.

The obsessive focus on the meaning of Israel in the United States, and in Israel, has come not from a position of purposeful strength, but from a reversal in the way the Zionist project is defined. Rather than as a positive (if naive and chauvinistic) vision of 'making the desert bloom', it has become increasingly defensive, defined against the opposition to it, attached to an uncompletable project of colonising to the Jordan and, in the dreams of ancient Revisionists, all the way to the other side.

The shift is in part a product of changed immigration flows, increasingly drawing fundamentalist Jews from the United States, and ever-larger numbers from the comprehensively anti-Semitic southern part of the former USSR. The former are decisively fundamentalist rather than merely Orthodox, fleeing the anomie of contemporary America for the literalist vision of a promised land, as dictated by various and increasingly dodgy versions of early Jewish history.

Far from fleeing pogroms in New Jersey, the new arrivals settling in the West Bank are coming to a place of more danger and contestation, rather than less—they are seeking out boundaries and antagonisms by which an identity can be defined. Earlier forms of Zionism regarded Arabs as junior childlike partners in the project, to be raised up, and later as an enemy and adversary to be vanquished. But even this latter formulation gave some measure of recognition to the other, to contesting claims of legitimacy—even if they were only honoured in terroristic violence. Now that the shadow of the Holocaust is distant, legitimisation becomes harder won, and also more imperative to find.

Thus the extraordinary energy given over to the creation of a 'Jerusalem heritage trail', a quasi-factual version of the city's history, and one which Prime Minister Netanyahu has suggested is


more important than the military in generating 'an emotional connection' by Israelis and non-Israeli Jews to the state. The construction of such a trail would involve the demolition of a number of Palestinian homes, with rehousing in modern apartments. Netanyahu also spoke of a number of Stephen Spielberg style movies to complement the trail.

It should be obvious to anyone that something is awry when national purpose is held to depend more on kitsch theme parks and artefacts than a conscription army with a fabled history and a strong claim on public duty. The destruction of actual homes and neighbourhoods for the historical retrojection of a tradition that is to some degree invented has less in common with Sabre and Chatila than it does with Disneyland or creationist theme parks in Kansas. The idea of provoking real conflict for a campaign around imaginary matters is the exact reversal of previous strategies which, while perhaps opportunistic and propagandised, were related to some real strategic gain.

The image politics of the 'heritage trail' can serve as a model of other recent acts, which often seem to be restaged versions of earlier incidents. The Dubai assassination of a Hamas operative was widely seen as inept, given that so much of it was captured on camera. The alternative possibility is that it was played, consciously or otherwise, for the cameras—a restaging of the steely, secret post-Munich assassinations (or the Spielberg version thereof). The entirely unnecessary and counterproductive flotilla raid has more than a few echoes of the 1977 Entebbe raid. But the Entebbe raid was meticulously planned; its moral grounding was unquestionable. The ineptness of the flotilla raid appeared somehow connected with the cloudiness of the moral and tactical imperative of the raid itself.

Such repeated gestures are the leitmotif of an identity politics, which has supplanted a material politics. Its other dimension is a degree of hypersensitivity to challenge. Every 'other' becomes an agent of annihilation. Every kidnapping is a pogrom, every tinpot missile an Auschwitz. Lieberman's Beitanu party, based around Russian immigrants, appears to be interested in pushing a politics with a whiff of totalitarianism, with a compulsory loyalty oath by all citizens and banning any marking of the national day by Palestinians as a '*nabka/catastrophe*'.

In the wake of 1948, once the hopes of a co-operative Zionism had been finally dashed, there was a degree to which the injustice of Israel's establishment could be acknowledged, even if it was claimed as a necessary one to a 'higher' cause. Increasingly, any suggestion of this, either from the Left or Right, has become a subject for disdain, and an astonishing callousness to the Palestinians. One could suggest that this imaginary politics is beginning to infect strategic choices, and that Israel's actions are not that of a unified state, but the projection of a struggle between an older Likud-style Zionism, secular and realpolitik, and an identity politics rooted in newer parties and populations.

The hysteria of the neo-con Right, like Melanie Phillips, is based in part on an awareness that even Israel is ceasing to serve the purpose of a political supercharge for Western resolve. There is no reason for the Left to follow them down that path as a way of avoiding analysing a messier political situation. The Gaza flotilla was an effective operation, but its single victory was in opening the Gaza—Egypt border, and refocusing the issue on Arab solidarity. The rhetoric that attended on it—like novelist Henning Mankell suggesting that he would ban Hebrew translations of his future books—is one way not to do politics in the 21st century. 

Boat People

in the Making?

Gerhard Hoffstaedter

→→→

Boat People in the
Making?

Gerhard Hoffstaedter

Gerhard Hoffstaedter is a research fellow with La Trobe University's Institute for Human Security. His research focuses on refugee politics, Islam in Southeast Asia and identity politics. He is also part of the Melbourne Free University project <www.melbournefreeuniversity.org>.

Growing numbers of refugees in Malaysia indicate the need for a regional response

Riding the monorail high above the streets of Kuala Lumpur, Matthew (not his real name), a Myanmarese refugee, looks around him and at every stop starts biting his lip. At any stop he could be picked up by the police, immigration officers or RELA, the volunteer auxiliary police, who patrol the streets and conduct occasional raids in areas where they suspect refugees live and work. 'Sometimes they wait at the bottom of the stairs of the station. That way we cannot escape. They ask for identification and money, sometimes the mobile phone. They just take it and often let us go, less paperwork for them', he tells me.

Matthew is just one of the thousands of refugees working illegally to make a living in Malaysia. As Malaysia is not a signatory to the 1951 Refugee Convention and Protocol, it does not recognise refugees. As a result, refugees like Matthew are not allowed to work, nor do they receive any help from the government. Despite the absence of any official recognition of the refugee problem in Malaysia, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) maintains a busy office in Kuala Lumpur. Refugees are encouraged to register and have their cases evaluated. If they are deemed genuine refugees they receive a UNHCR card, which is supposed to grant them some protection from the police and detention. The track record is patchy at best.

Refugees are either reliant on the UNHCR or other refugee service handouts, or they piece together a living from the vast and often unscrupulous world of undocumented work. Police intimidation, immigration raids, and detention are common—even for those under the protection of the UNHCR. The working conditions often amount to bonded slavery, or worse, as refugees don't speak Malay or English and are dependent on their employer for their food and lodging. Things, however, are changing. In February this year both the home minister and foreign minister stated that the government had been asked by trade unions to investigate allowing refugees to work, while Home Ministry Secretary General Mahmood Adam acknowledged that refugees should be able to earn a living doing odd jobs. A more thorough review is underway. However, the government is known more for its spin than for its commitment to deliver on such matters.

Many refugees become ensnared in the politics of the cheap and exploitable labour of undocumented workers, which has helped to drive Malaysia's economy. They are tolerated when they are most needed and expelled and mistreated when the economy slows down. Unlike most undocumented labourers, however, refugees have nowhere to return to when the economy takes a dive such as that caused by the global financial crisis. They simply lose their jobs and subsequently their housing, their access to food and soon their minds.

Many refugees become ensnared in the politics of the cheap and exploitable labour of undocumented workers ... They are tolerated when they are most needed and expelled and mistreated when the economy slows down.

An increasing incidence of mental health issues have emerged as a central concern for organisations working with refugees. Only a few organisations have the specialist skills to care for such refugees and these are already overstretched. It is not only the trauma of displacement from their homeland, but increasingly the displacement and lack of connection they feel in Malaysia that worries mental health experts.

Among the worst hit is a group of Afghan refugees living in Kuala Lumpur. They desperately want to reach the West and thus secure a stable life for themselves and their children. But the Australian



"..Thoughtless refugees, you're causing us no end of suffering.."

government has declared Afghanistan safe and is seeking to stop refugees from claiming asylum here on the basis that they're endangered there. Most Afghan refugees are Hazara peoples, who have been subjected to systematic discrimination in Afghanistan, and many are embroiled in blood feuds which will affect their families for generations. Some also collaborated with the Soviets during the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan, prompting them to flee to neighbouring Iran after the fall of the Soviet regime.

The group of refugees in Malaysia had lived in exile in Iran for twenty years. Last year they were forced to flee after President Ahmadinejad began to crack down on illegal immigrants. Now they are in a similar situation in Malaysia, with neither a home to return to nor a safe place to move on to.

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Mailwagadam, a Sri Lankan refugee living in Malaysia, said he is awaiting a decision from the UNHCR about settlement in a third country, he hopes in the West. 'I have a wife and child. It is for their welfare I am doing this. I must do it the legal way', said Mailwagadam. Asked about paying people smugglers, he responded, 'It is too dangerous and too expensive. If I drown, what of my family then?' Although he admitted he had recently thought about it. Another refugee, Abdul, was more frank. He had already tried to board a container ship bound for Australia. At the last minute, though, the people smugglers had run off with the AUD\$8000 he had paid to transport him. These investments are often equivalent to life savings, in many cases of the person's entire village or family.

When you ask refugees why they want to come to Australia, they give three main reasons. Firstly, they say they want to be free: free to go to the shops, the city, the countryside, wherever, without fearing police harassment. Secondly they say they want to work and become a part of the community, which they cannot do in a country that does not legally acknowledge them at all. Thirdly, and clearly most importantly, they say they want to give their children a better future than the lives they were living. Above all, they say they want their children to attend schools so that they can learn and become all the things they themselves can no longer be, such as doctors or lawyers. For some, it is just to be able to read and write. Hearing these refugees' hopes, it is striking how similar their values are to those of average Australians.

Stories like Matthew's, Mailwagadam's and Abdul's are part of a growing refugee crisis in Southeast Asia. Numbers are continuing to rise as more and more people flee Myanmar, as well as trickle in from other conflict areas. With the Australian government in the midst of a debate about refugees, from this vantage point it seems clear that Australia can no longer go it alone when it comes to refugees. The problem is regional in scale and requires a regional response. This may include pressure on Malaysia to rethink policies that are endangering refugee lives and the security of its neighbours. ☐

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Boat People in the
Making?

Gerhard Hoffstaedter

Wild Rivers

Jon Altman

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Wild Rivers

Jon Altman

Jon Altman is an ARC Australian Professorial Fellow, Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research, Australian National University, Canberra <jon.altman@anu.edu.au>. This is an edited version of a submission to the Senate Legal and Constitutional Affairs Legislation Committee's Inquiry into the Wild Rivers (Environmental Management) Bill 2010, March 2010.

As the Senate inquires into the Queensland Wild Rivers Bill, Jon Altman argues the case for Aboriginal resources rights across Australia

The federal government and all states and territories have recently committed to closing the gap in socio-economic disadvantage between Indigenous and other Australians. Much of the focus of this policy is on remote Australia, where opportunities for economic parity are most circumscribed. Since the 1970s, first land rights and then native title laws have seen more and more of the Australian continent returned to some form of Aboriginal ownership, with considerable variation—from inalienable freehold title in the Northern Territory under the Commonwealth *Aboriginal Land Rights (Northern Territory) Act 1976* to different forms of determination under native title law, with the strongest being exclusive possession.

Today, the Indigenous estate covers more than 20 per cent of the Australian land mass (over 1.5 million sq kms), mostly in very remote Australia. However, both land rights and native title laws deprive Aboriginal titleholders of ownership of commercially valuable resources like minerals, fisheries and fresh water. While we continue to express concern about Indigenous poverty, wealth disparities between Aboriginal and other Australians will never be eliminated unless land and native title rights are accompanied by resource rights.

Paradoxically, while the current approach to Indigenous development focuses on mainstream participation, the only guarantees that Indigenous people have to resources are outside the market system. Under all forms of land rights, native title and complementary resource laws, Indigenous groups are guaranteed 'customary' non-market use rights, but not commercial market or tradeable rights. This is demonstrated by the anomaly that an Indigenous person can harvest a resource for a customary non-market purpose (like domestic consumption), while that same resource cannot be sold commercially unless the person possesses a state-provided (and generally expensive) licence.

This restrictive resource rights situation applies on Cape York, as elsewhere in remote Australia. On native title lands traditional owners do not have commercial rights to develop their lands because they lack property rights in commercially valuable resources. The need for such rights is important on Cape York; firstly, because Aboriginal people here are among the most disadvantaged in Australia; and,

secondly, because the development project proposed by Noel Pearson and the Cape York Institute, and strongly supported by the Australian state, is focused on transitioning people from welfare to engagement in the productive market economy.

The Wild Rivers Bill seeks to address this resource rights situation in two ways. It proposes to protect the rights of traditional owners of native title land within the wild rivers areas to own, use, develop and control that land and it seeks to limit any state government regulation of native title land in a wild river area under the Native Title Act unless the traditional owners agree.

In his second reading speech, Tony Abbott noted the absence of economic opportunities for Aboriginal people living in remote areas. Aboriginal rights in land were not real rights, he said, if native title did not include the right to use the land for productive purposes. By productive purposes, he meant commercial purposes. But it is difficult to see what such productive purposes might entail if they do not also include rights to resources such as fresh water, commercial fisheries or minerals, all currently vested with the Crown.

It is important to note two things. Firstly, the *Wild Rivers Act 2005 (Qld)* complies with the *Native Title Act 1993 (Cth)* so that customary rights on native title lands are maintained. Secondly, the 2005 Wild Rivers Act only limits certain forms of intensive development in what are termed High Preservation Areas, within a kilometre of a river in a declared wild river basin; and sets aside a specific reservation of water specifically for Aboriginal communities for economic development purposes.

The issue of resource rights needs to be placed in wider historical and regional contexts. Up until the 1950s, Indigenous rights were unrecognised except on Crown lands reserved for their use. Then in 1952, Minister for Territories Paul Hasluck had the idea of hypothecating all royalties raised on reserves in the Northern Territory for Aboriginal use. Surprisingly, in Hasluck's scheme these royalties were earmarked, at double the normal statutory rate, for all Aboriginal people in the Northern Territory—not just those affected, or on whose lands mining occurred, now called traditional owners. Justice Woodward was asked by the Whitlam government to provide a means of transferring



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ownership of unalienated land and associated sub-surface mineral rights to Aboriginal people in the Northern Territory in 1973. Woodward made effective recommendations for the former, but refused to countenance the latter, bowing in part to protests from the mining industry. This was a major opportunity missed for Aboriginal resource rights.

Woodward's 1974 recommendations were largely incorporated in the Aboriginal Land Rights Act in 1976. This set the high watermark in Aboriginal resource rights, but this benchmark was set too low. Instead of recommending the de jure right in minerals that Whitlam sought, Aborigines were provided by the Fraser government with a de facto right in the form of right of consent or right of veto provisions. This provided a form of leverage that Aboriginal traditional owners have since been able to use in negotiations with resource developers to achieve some negotiated mineral rents above the statutory royalties guaranteed by this law.

Woodward's rationale was politically pragmatic rather than based on legal principle alone. This is clear because subsequently, under the NSW *Aboriginal Land Rights Act 1983*, mineral rights (except for gold, silver, coal and petroleum) were provided, together with land rights, demonstrating that there is no barrier to this under Australian law. Similar issues arise with other resources like fisheries and fresh water. As already noted, in most situations Aboriginal people have customary rights to fish for domestic purposes only. Native title law seems to protect that right, which is exercised by a significant 80 to 90 per cent of adults in remote Australia.

In the aftermath of the National Water Initiative, fresh water is arguably the new frontier, and this is clearly important for Cape York. Aboriginal native title groups enjoy domestic use rights and possibly customary rights to fresh water, but the Crown asserts ownership of water, especially ground water: Aboriginal people do not have commercial rights in water beyond those that might be allocated by the state. Other new frontiers in resource rights might be carbon or biodiversity credits. But again there is a distinct possibility that the Crown may unilaterally assert ownership rights, even though Aboriginal natural resource management might lead to carbon abatement and the maintenance of environmental values.

The second issue raised in the Wild Rivers Bill is linked to free, prior, informed consent of Aboriginal communities to resource developments, although here it is proposed that traditional-owner consent be sought before wild rivers are declared, rather than when commercial development on Aboriginal-owned land is proposed. In Australia, free prior informed consent provisions only exist under the Aboriginal Land Rights Act, and even here there are national interest override provisions (although these have not been invoked in the thirty-three years since the law was passed). In other jurisdictions (except Western Australia) under state land rights laws other specific forms of consultation and negotiation are possible. The Native Title Act does not give native title groups free prior informed consent rights. Instead it gives, at best, only a right to negotiate (with a window of opportunity restricted to six months) and, at worst, a right of consultation. These rights represent a weaker form of property than the de facto property rights in the Aboriginal Land Rights Act. But they

have been used to leverage some significant benefit sharing agreements, although it is unclear if agreed financial provisions have led to equitable deals or fair compensation. In one extreme example, the future acts regime of the Native Title Act allowed the Century Mine Agreement to be leveraged up from a \$60,000 initial offer (before the Mabo High Court judgement) to a reputed figure of \$60 million over 20 years for Aboriginal native title parties. But even this latter figure seems limited when compared to the company's profits of over \$1 billion in one year, or deals subsequently struck elsewhere on the Indigenous estate.

The proposals in the Wild Rivers Bill should be strongly supported; but unless such provisions are extended to the whole of Australia this change will constitute Cape York-bioregion-specific legal exceptionalism.

Without resource rights, Aboriginal goals to either engage in market transactions or to earmark resources for local and regional benefit are limited. There is also a great deal of inequity in land rights and native title legal frameworks, jurisdiction by jurisdiction, across Australia. As shown by the emerging conflict in the Kimberley over gas and onshore facilities, the right to negotiate under the Native Title Act does not effectively give native title groups a right to stop a development. Creating commercial opportunity in locationally disadvantaged regions like Cape York will require the allocation of any existing commercial advantage to Aboriginal land owners, as well as the provision of maximum leverage in negotiations, which can be provided either by 'special law' resource rights or free, prior, informed consent rights.

In terms of Indigenous policy, the proposals in the Wild Rivers Bill should be strongly supported; but unless such provisions are extended to the whole of Australia this change will constitute Cape York-bioregion-specific legal exceptionalism. This would exacerbate the problem of regional variability—hardly appropriate given that the Closing the Gap framework applies nationwide.

Beyond Indigenous policy, there is growing uncertainty in the overlapping space between customary and



Wild Rivers

Jon Altman

commercial rights in resources, which makes property rights increasingly unclear. This lack of legal certainty has the capacity to increase transaction costs from legal contestation and will result in inefficient allocation of resources, a problem for Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians. Unless there is concerted effort to ensure greater consistency in property rights for the myriad forms of Aboriginal land tenures across Australia there will be ongoing, unproductive legal contestation over resource rights.

The Act proposed by Tony Abbott has been accompanied by a dominant media discourse promulgated by *The Australian* from late 2009. It advocates providing Aboriginal landowners with rights in commercially valuable resources on their lands, but only in Cape York. Were the Wild Rivers Bill to be passed into law we would see a fundamental change in the current workings of land rights and native title laws in Australia—the attachment of resource rights to native title lands to an extent that exceeds the current best case situation in the Northern Territory on the Aboriginal-owned terrestrial and intertidal estates established by the High Court’s finding in the 2008 Blue Mud Bay case.

While the proposal contained in the Wild Rivers Bill makes good economic sense, attention is focused on the wrong law: it is the

Commonwealth Native Title Act that needs to be amended to confer either full rights in all resources where claims have succeeded or, as a second best, to provide the free prior informed consent provisions that currently exist under the Aboriginal Land Rights Act to native title groups.

In remote locations such as Cape York, Indigenous affairs policy, currently focused on Closing the Gap, will require Aboriginal people to be in a position to use their lands in one of three ways: to use natural resources in the customary non-market economy; to use natural resources commercially, either in Aboriginal stand-alone or joint ventures; or to be in a position to trade away commercial advantage for financial benefit in the form of a compensatory benefit stream. The 2005 Wild Rivers Act clearly limits this suite of possibilities focusing instead on the protection of conservation values in this bioregion.

The Wild Rivers Bill is looking to empower regional Aboriginal native title groups to have a right to commercial development and to have real power in negotiations. It is clear that without resource rights and leverage the current power imbalance will ensure that the resource allocation status quo will be maintained. It might be time to make the playing field a little bit more level on Cape York and elsewhere if, as a nation, we are looking to close some persistent socio-economic gaps. **a**

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Green Futures?

Alison Caddick

The growing sentiment that if governments won't act on climate change other civil society groups will was evident again in a recent conference: 'From Global Crisis to Green Future'. Bobbing up in the wake of Labor's climate change backdown, it had in fact a long gestation, and was a major event for its organising body, the Sydney-based Search Foundation. An organisation with historical links to the Communist Party of Australia (which folded in the 1970s after a long-time orthodox history then brief flirtation with Eurocommunism and the new social movements), and an ongoing brief in social research, some old connections into important trade unions and the community sector were evident. But coming out green meant gathering a wider range of participants still, with the serious intention of seeing a stronger confluence of left and green agendas. At the opening session perhaps the most striking indication of this particular hope and the stakes in play was the AMWU's Tim Ayres' report that 80 per cent of Hunter Valley coal families when surveyed wanted green answers to climate change.

That's a stunning, hopeful figure but, also putting the finger on the central contradiction of any 'green Left' (a post-modern idea if ever there was one), it posed as many questions as it suggested answers. In fact as a companion lent over to say the figure meant nothing—'mere motherhood statements that the people themselves couldn't act on'—Tim made the point loud and clear that the pitch of green lefties to 'workers' couldn't be elitist or that constituency would be lost to them. A fragile allegiance at best and very little room to move.

All the same, of course a confluence of Left and green, trade unions and ecologists is a laudable quest, and the Hunter Valley figure too means quite a lot—climate change poses the question for everyone about how we might overcome the divisions we know are illogical or dangerous in the long run. Even those whose livelihoods rest on coal itself 'know' something doesn't add up. The problem is finding an adequate way to grasp what this really means and, having come to grips with that, what it might imply for future action.

More's the pity then, that some of these central confounding issues for green action within a productivist and hyper-consumption oriented economy weren't used as a real funnel and focus of discussion. At some small-group sessions and within the larger ones, related issues clearly came up. There were short presentations in small groups on steady state options and sustainable economies. There was a major session on 'strategy', with the Search Foundation's goal of a 'green socialism' something of a focus, with financial regulation and green sustainability goals key elements in this vision of a functioning (for most still capitalist) economy and fairer society.

But the focus was endlessly fragmented and any deepening sense of understanding either the problem or any potential solution remained always at bay. In fact the conference was odd, and ultimately dispiriting. It was an unhappy reminder, on the one hand, of a kind of self-sureness that people on the Left already have the answers (doubly false and worrying as the majority of the audience was over sixty) and on the other hand an insecurity or emptiness that can lead to an incredibly unproductive obeisance to sectoral and 'rainbow' concerns. When people are grasping after ideas and possible solutions to an utterly fundamental issue, why

would ten minute papers be considered an adequate presentation of the questions to hand unless all you wanted was a sample of opinions; why did every topic of left concern have to be covered (human rights, tick, democracy, tick, the struggle in the Philippines, tick); and then in simultaneous sessions which divided people into very small participant groups—participants around small-group topics, not the core issues. Part of the oddness was the mix of socialism and social work techniques for participation, and this amongst an overall group of around 150 people. With every one in small group sessions asked to make a contribution and chairpersons enforcing this, the primary intention seemed to be to affirm everyone's experience, though the effect was to say that well-intentioned people already have the answers.

Conferences are difficult to organise and often unpredictable. But there was an uncanny sense here of a conference following a kind of ritual format. The lack of really probing core papers was writ large in the very conference format which in more ways than one announced that the answers were known in advance. Indeed disgruntlement around a pre-prepared policy statement (circulated by email for participants to add to before the conference, to be confirmed in a very short session dedicated specifically to that task) emerged as an area of substantive difference between at least some Search Foundation stalwarts.

It broke out in a final session, strangely it may have seemed, over the inclusion of the speaker from the Philippines Communist Party whose 'Stalinist' orientation was passionately declaimed by David McKnight. David's intervention was about the communist heritage and a plea for careful ethical reflection on the Left's methods and means. But it also threw into relief the narrow, programmatic nature of the conference and its decided lack of philosophical orientation or 'big' perspective on the driving forces of contemporary upheavals. This had been clearly evident, and the source of frustration for some, in the conference's pre-prepared 'conference statement'.

I can't see much difference in the substantive positions put forward by David over a long period and the conference organisers in general as far as their overall goal of some kind of social democratic, managed, and 'green', capitalism. And this is the real question. As UK author Tim Jackson and others have pointed out, capitalism either expands or it collapses. If we are coming up against an absolute endpoint in the resources for capitalist expansion, anyone offering versions of managed capitalism as a way forward must have more to say about a transition to a different future. It would be good to hear more from both sides of the above skirmish as to the sources and means of that transition. **a**

LETTERS AND COMMENT

Green Futures?
Alison Caddick

comment

Will the greens ever get it?

Ted Trainer

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Will the greens ever get it?

Ted Trainer

Ted Trainer is the author of *The Conservator Society: Alternatives for Sustainability* (Zed, 1995) and *Renewable Energy Cannot Sustain a Consumer Society* (Springer, 2007). He is developing Pigface Point, an alternative lifestyle educational site near Sydney

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Response to Valerie Krips

Dennis Altman

Dennis Altman is Professor of Politics and Director of the Institute of Human Security, La Trobe University..



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Ariel Salleh's commentary on four recent major sustainability documents dealt well with the failure to face up to the fundamental causes of the problem. Even most people in green agencies, and indeed most on the Left, refuse to recognise that the problem is due to levels of production and consumption that are far beyond sustainable, could never be extended to all the world's people, and are now impossible for technical advance to solve. They do this in the face of facts and figures all of them must be quite familiar with, such as that the Australian footprint is 8 ha of productive land while the per capita amount that will be available to 9 billion people in 2050 will be only one-tenth of this amount. It should be transparently obvious that the problems cannot be solved without vast reductions in the amount of producing and consuming going on.

For decades a few of us have been trying to increase recognition of the fact that global sustainability is not possible unless the quest for affluence and growth is abandoned, but in my view we are further from this goal than we were in the 1960s. Just about everyone in government, media, the economics profession and within the general public refuses to even think about the issue. As Salleh shows, prestigious green agencies continue to pour out analyses which take it for granted that there are technical fixes and there is no need to question high 'living standards' or the consumer-capitalist system.

Thus it is no surprise that Worldwatch, Amory Lovins and Green parties are popular. They

constantly tell us that the technology to solve the problems exists, would not cost much (Stern said only 1 per cent of GDP), and all we need is individuals to move to green lifestyles and governments to implement the available technologies.

However, Salleh did not discuss the most important assumption built into this conviction that technology can solve the problems. This is the unquestioned faith that renewable energy sources, geo-sequestration and nuclear energy can replace fossil fuels. Green and Left people are as convinced about this as the business class. There is a substantial case that this faith is wrong.

Prestigious green agencies continue to pour out analyses which take it for granted that there are technical fixes and there is no need to question high 'living standards' or the consumer-capitalist system.

I recently calculated that to provide the quantity of energy needed through a winter month in 2050 we would need so much plant that the annual investment cost would be more than thirty times the present proportion of GDP. Many important cost factors were not included in this analysis. There would remain a much bigger problem, one of intermittency; that is, what do

you do through the many days when there is no sun or wind across a whole continent?

We are a very long way from general recognition that capitalist society cannot be fixed. Unfortunately the green movement also fails to grasp that the big problems of environmental destruction, third-world deprivation, armed conflict and social breakdown are caused by the obsession with affluence and growth and can only be solved by transition to a simpler way. **a**

For the calculation of energy needs, go to <www.dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.enpol.2010.03.037>.

For the detailed case about renewables, and for an account of the 'Simpler Way', go to <www.ssis.arts.unsw.edu.au/tsw/>.

letter

Response to Valerie Krips

Dennis Altman

Christopher Isherwood used the expression 'annihilation by blandness' to describe polite ways of discriminating against homosexuals. Unfortunately this is exactly the term that should be used to describe Valerie Krips' discussion of *A Single Man*, which was based on Isherwood's 1964 novel. One could read her entire piece and not realise that the whole point of Isherwood's story was to point to George's anomalous position as a bereaved gay man. Only at the end does she mention 'sexual preference', but if one knew neither the book nor the film that could well describe a predilection for spanking, children or indeed Catholic clergy.

I assume Krips took George's homosexuality for granted, but in so doing she totally missed the point of the story, and George's sense of isolation. **a**

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comment
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A Free University for Melbourne

Aurélien Mondon

French philosopher Jacques Rancière based the premise of his book *The Ignorant Schoolmaster* on a groundbreaking experiment led by Joseph Jacotot in the early nineteenth century. Jacotot was forced into exile by the counter revolutionary forces in 1815 and went on to teach at a Dutch university. While his Dutch-speaking students were eager to hear what the French-speaking scientist could teach them, language became simultaneously what prevented them from communicating and, more importantly, the inadvertent precursor to a great experiment in emancipation. To attempt to understand each other, Jacotot gave his students a bilingual version of a book, asking those truly interested in his science to come back a few weeks later, once they had mastered the French language. To his surprise, a few weeks later, many students came back with an impressive level of French. This left the teacher with revolutionary questions: ‘Was will more important than ability? Was every man virtually able to understand what others had done and understood?’

This experiment proved the possibility of reversing the oppressive order present in the teacher/student relationship; it disproved the common assumption of *explanation* being necessary. In fact, explanation theories were uncovered for what they mostly were: tools of domination. ‘To explain something to someone is to imply they are not able to understand it on their own.’ The explanation was the mythical cornerstone ‘of a world divided into learned and ignorant, able and disabled, intelligent and stupid minds’. Acknowledging will as the key to ability made the inherent equality of intelligence a logical conclusion. If Jacotot’s students were able to learn French, it was because they had the will to understand what Jacotot had to say, but more importantly the will to partake in a conversation, in an equal conversation.

The Melbourne Free University (MFU) was created in part under such a principle: one can learn if one wants to. The role of the teacher is therefore to facilitate this realisation, not to impose their own knowledge on a student. The MFU was the result of the belief that many elements in the contemporary education system prevent such equality from being acknowledged, which in turn limits the universal potential for emancipation.

For many, education and by a perverse extension knowledge in general, are little more than commodities, little more than tools for a simpler, more practical life. Universities have become increasingly outcome-oriented and it seems only the diploma and the possibility of a job on its completion are rewarding. The potential for personal emancipation is left unexplored and the thirst for understanding often limited to the basics necessary to pass exams. In this context, the MFU aims to offer space for personal, self-motivated engagement in areas as diverse as philosophy, politics, history, sustainable development, geography and many others. The only limitations on our future curricula will be dictated by the motivation of those who decide to participate.

The MFU does not offer diplomas. It does not offer anything but the satisfaction of knowledge for its own sake and the realisation that one can learn if one decides to. No qualifications are required to participate. The project is open to anyone and everyone who chooses to participate. Additionally, the MFU does not ask for any form of commitment. It is not necessary to register interest, nor to participate in courses in their entirety.

Another obvious consequence of the commodification of knowledge has been the price put on its acquisition. University degrees have become increasingly expensive, and other forms of education are rarely free. Central to the MFU project is the fact that it is free of charge. The MFU upholds the principle of ‘no money in, no money out’. The cost of running the project is covered by in-kind, anonymous donations. This point is directly linked to the absolute autonomy of the MFU. We remain autonomous from any political party or organisation, government, private body, university or NGO. Yet the Melbourne Free

University does not claim to be unbiased: it stands for radical equality, the a priori belief in universal equality and the possibility of emancipation.

Our first semester offered four seminars over two days. In May two seminars offered various interpretations of contemporary Australian issues, and more particularly of Australia’s role in the world and race relations in Australia. A second series of seminars took place in June and discussed ethics and morality in the 21st century and what role truth and religion play in contemporary society.

The second semester will be more like a university semester. Four six week courses will be offered over thirteen weeks: two courses, two evenings a week. The first hour will allow an expert to present on the subject and the second will be dedicated to discussion and open dialogue between all those present.

Courses for the second semester include Australian studies, international studies, philosophy and sustainability. Lectures will eventually be put online, along with further readings, offering the possibility of deeper research into the topics introduced over the semester. We hope that in time our courses will link in with external projects.

We welcome help and are looking for anyone interested in participating in any way possible. It is our hope that in the mid-term the project will become self-sustainable.

Finally, the limitations of the MFU project are clear to us. We recognise that its potential can be constrained by elements as diverse as location and time. We are aware that despite our commitment to advertising the project to as many people as possible, participation may be limited. Yet, while a practical enterprise, we believe the MFU to be first and foremost a symbol. A symbol that the acquisition of knowledge can be for its own sake and that emancipation is there for anyone to take.

Knowledge, like freedom, is not given, it is taken. **📌**

FEATURE



A Free University for Melbourne

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My University

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06-07 2010

Nº 106

My University

Rod Beecham

The *reductio ad absurdum* of Commonwealth education policy

The Commonwealth Education Minister has been reported as saying that she wants tertiary students ‘to make decisions about where they want to study on the basis of robust information about the quality of education provided at each institution rather than on hearsay, inference from entry requirements or prestige’. I think that’s a splendid idea. I am at a loss, therefore, to understand how she imagines she is furthering the cause by introducing a *My University* website.

The indicators of ‘university quality’ have not, it seems, been finalised but, in relation to teaching quality, mention has been made of completion and attrition rates, the results of satisfaction surveys, and the performance of students in standardised tests. For research quality we have heard noises about journal publications and citations.

The point has been made again and again that teaching quality and research quality cannot be measured directly because they are entirely qualitative activities. Nothing that is essential to them is capable of numerical measurement. The desire to measure them nevertheless has sent people casting about for something they can measure that will substitute for the thing itself. This is why completion rates, Likert-scale student satisfaction questionnaires, standardised testing and volume of publications feature so prominently. In social research such indicators are called ‘proxy variables’.

As every social researcher knows, proxy variables must be handled with great care. If, for example, we decided to measure the intelligence of a group of people by using the number of tertiary qualifications held within the group, we would be immediately and rightly vulnerable to attack on a variety of grounds. What is the relationship between tertiary qualifications and human intelligence? Is intellectual endeavour the only arena in which intelligence can manifest itself? What do we mean by ‘tertiary qualifications’? Is a Bachelor of Laws equivalent to a Bachelor of Medicine? Why? Why not? And so on.

The attraction of proxy variables is that they purport to represent in numbers phenomena that are in themselves unquantifiable. The danger of proxy variables is that they can rapidly replace the phenomena they purport to represent. This is because they are much simpler and easier to understand than a complex, qualitative

phenomenon and because, as numbers, they can be produced at will to provide ‘scientific’ evidence in support of a policy decision.

What students thought of their teachers, how they performed in standardised tests and whether they completed their courses of study tell us nothing beyond what they thought of their teachers, how they performed in standardised tests and whether they completed their courses of study. The number of journal publications by a given academic and the frequency with which his/her work has been cited tells us nothing beyond the number of his/her publications and the frequency with which they have been cited. To imbue such data with any further significance is immediately to make assumptions, and rather large assumptions.

Australian universities must present themselves as places where prospective young ‘professionals’ can increase their brand equity. Teaching is to be measured in terms of customer satisfaction, and research in terms of productivity—meaning publication and citation volume and, in the national context, commercial applicability.

But let us assume, for the sake of argument, that these data do provide what the minister boldly describes as ‘robust information’ about the quality of a university. What, then, are we measuring, and why? What, in other words, is the nature of a university, considered as an enterprise? This is not an irrelevant question, because the whole purpose of a quality management system is to ensure that the input to a given system is converted to the desired output as efficiently as possible every time.

Quality of Teaching

A trawl through the websites of Australia’s thirty-nine universities reveals a significant level of reticence on the part of the institutions themselves about what they do. The University of Sydney suggests that it ‘creates leaders’. The University of Melbourne purports to sell ‘academic knowledge’, ‘career outcomes’ and ‘lifelong connections’. The University of Queensland asserts that its graduates are ‘in demand’. The University of Tasmania suggests that it will ‘expand your knowledge’ and allow you to ‘discover your place in the world’. The University of Adelaide alleges that it ‘could change your life’. The University of Western Australia asserts that it has ‘the highest quality undergraduates of any university in Australia’.

These claims scarcely begin to illuminate what it is you are buying when you pay your course fees. They do imply, though, that you will be a better person for the experience, as if a university is a sort of ‘character factory’, like the Boy Scouts or the traditional English public school. The claims suggest that a university’s input is its students who, the university asserts, will undergo some kind of transforming experience that will convert them to output (by the time they graduate, we must assume).

Let us assume, further, that this output takes the form of young people trained to contribute effectively to perceived areas of national importance such as medicine, agriculture, engineering and so on. How will the *My University* website measure the quality of this output? Completion rates tell you nothing beyond what proportion of students completed their courses. Student satisfaction surveys tell you nothing beyond whether the students are enjoying their experience at the time: they can’t tell you whether the students are going to be good doctors, agronomists or structural engineers. Performance in standardised tests means little unless the tests are administered after graduation in discipline-specific areas.

I suggest that the minister needs to think a little harder about what it is she is trying to achieve with a *My University* website. A young person who wishes to become a doctor, an agronomist or an engineer is hardly going to be in a position to make an informed decision about where s/he wants to study on the basis of completion-rate statistics, student satisfaction surveys and standardised test results.

Quality of Research

Teaching, of course, is only one of the things a university is supposed to do. How do the mooted quality measures relate to the other major activity, research?

The University of Sydney states that its research ‘spans all areas of human endeavour’,

is based on ‘truth’ as a ‘core value’, and leads to ‘innovation’. The University of Melbourne presents numbers for the year 2008: ‘produced 117 articles or reviews of impact factor greater than 20 in which collaborative country addresses numbered 267 from 55 countries’. The University of Queensland wants ‘to achieve excellence in research and scholarship, and to make a significant contribution to intellectual, cultural, social, and economic life at a local, national, and international level’. The University of Tasmania mentions its ‘internationally recognised research profile in marine and Antarctic science, agriculture, forestry, food science, aquaculture, geology and geometallurgy, and medical research.’ The University of Adelaide, under the heading ‘Research Achievements’, lists its research income, its Go8 per capita income, its numbers of publications and numbers of higher degree by research completions. The University of Western Australia asserts that an emphasis on research and research training is one of its defining characteristics, indicating that it has ‘determined six strategic research areas and several emerging and seed priorities to provide appropriate focus and direction’ to its activities.

If analysis of Australia’s economic position indicates that we need more school-teachers, how will completion and attrition rates, student satisfaction surveys and standardised test results assist the Commonwealth government in assessing our universities’ response to the perceived need?

These claims suggest that the nature and meaning of ‘research’ is less important to Australian universities than creating an impression of vigorous research activity. A discernible undercurrent in these web promotions is the notion of commercially applicable research, or ‘knowledge transfer’, as the University of Melbourne calls it. The Vice-Chancellor of the University of Queensland, in an elegantly expressed introduction, uses the term ‘translational research’ as a way of collapsing the traditional distinction between ‘pure’ and ‘applied’. In other words, the ‘research’ undertaken by the universities is designed to attract conditionally released funding.

It will be recalled that journal publications and citations have been suggested as ways in which the quality of this research might be measured.

←←←

My University

Rod Beecham



Again, we see proxy variables in action. The quality of someone's research cannot be measured according to any pre-existing standard because the purpose of research, properly defined, is discovery. The whole history of human advancement was written by people who tried something new or looked in a new way at something apparently familiar. To measure research quality by numbers of peer-reviewed publications is to assume that all publications are of equal importance and that a correspondence exists between research quality and volume. Albert Einstein might have scored well on this criterion in 1905, when he published four papers in *Annalen der Physik* that were, quite literally, epoch-making—but he wasn't working in a university at the time. In any case, he would have done much less well in subsequent years, which suggests that excellence will be penalised under this rating system. If you propose energy quanta, a stochastic model of Brownian motion, a special theory of relativity, and the equivalence equation ($E = mc^2$) all in one year, it seems unlikely that you will be able to sustain such a level of output in subsequent years, meaning that the 'quality' of your research, as measured by publication volume, has declined.

The other suggested measure of research quality, citation of your work by others, seems vulnerable for similar reasons. We have every reason to be grateful for the discovery of penicillin, but Alexander Fleming's paper on the subject in the 1929 *British Journal of Experimental Pathology* was little noticed at the time. His university career may have come to an inglorious end if his 'performance' had been judged according to the number of citations by his peers.

Implications

The Commonwealth government suggests that the universities educate our future 'professional' workforce, create future 'leaders', and drive much of our economic and regional 'success'. The website of the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations says that universities play 'a key role in the growing knowledge- and innovation-based economic health of Australia'.

These statements, I think, go far towards explaining the vagueness and incoherence of our universities' own stated reasons for being. With their funding cut and their financial viability increasingly dependent on fee revenue from overseas students, Australian universities must present themselves as places where prospective young 'professionals' can increase their brand equity. Teaching, therefore, is to be measured in terms of customer satisfaction, and research is to be measured in terms of productivity—meaning publication and citation volume and, in the national context, commercial applicability.

This is wrong not so much because it has the effect of marginalising and destroying humanities disciplines such as literature, history, philosophy and classics, and pure science disciplines such as physics and chemistry—this destruction can always be justified on the grounds that such disciplines are not 'useful'—but because it has the effect of separating educational effort completely from the ostensible reasons for which it is undertaken. It is the inevitable consequence of proxy variables.

If analysis of Australia's economic position indicates that we need more school-teachers, for example, how will completion and attrition rates, student satisfaction surveys and standardised test results assist the Commonwealth

government in assessing our universities' response to this perceived need? If the number of corporate failures suggests that we need more skilled auditors and forensic accountants, how will completion and attrition rates, student satisfaction surveys and standardised test results assist the Commonwealth government in assessing our universities' response to this perceived need? The answer, of course, is that they won't assist at all. There is no correlation between what is measured and the ostensible reason for the measurement.

With their funding cut and their financial viability increasingly dependent on fee revenue from overseas students, Australian universities must present themselves as places where prospective young 'professionals' can increase their brand equity.

Will the proposed measurement of research output help? Let us suppose that Australia's economic performance is adversely affected by the outbreak of a new strain of influenza in our major trading partners, leading to trade embargoes to reduce the risk of the infection spreading. Will the Commonwealth government re-direct all research funding into virological research and immune responses? Would it make any difference? Suppose there is a revolution in Chile, causing the base metals operations of BHP Billiton in that country to be suspended, with a flow-on effect on commodity prices and the value of BHP Billiton shares. How will the number of articles contributed by Australian academics to the *Journal of Futures Markets* or the *International Journal of Advanced Manufacturing Technology* indicate the quality of our universities' response to the problem?

The utter incoherence of stated higher educational policy and the stated purpose of universities is a consequence of measurement being made into an end in itself, a transferable process indifferent to subject. The purpose of a quality management system, as any manufacturer knows, is to ensure that the input to a given system is converted to the desired output as efficiently as possible every time. The proposed measures of university quality, however, do not even begin to do this. The urge to measure has supplanted the reasons for undertaking measurement. Quality, as a consequence, has lost its meanings, which must always be contextual, and become instead a floating abstraction to be associated with whatever proxy variables are expedient. The reductive fatuities of the *My University* website are a paradigmatic example of the process, and would simply be funny if they weren't so likely to increase the sum of human misery. **a**

Evo, Climate Change and the C-word

Taegen Edwards and Pablo Brait

A report on the World People’s Conference on Climate Change and the Rights of Mother Earth

A wave of appreciative chuckles rippled through the 20,000-strong crowd packed into the open-air Tiquipaya football stadium. Bolivian President Evo Morales was on stage thrusting plastic plates and disposable ponchos into the air as he made his case for the superiority of the lifestyles and products of the Indigenous Andean peoples in comparison to imposed Western alternatives. Speaking to a sea of chequered rainbow pan-Indigenous Andean flags he was on a roll, explaining how rice has nothing on quinoa, how you’re much better off drinking *chicha*, the local corn-based alcoholic drink, than Coca Cola, and how it is clearly for dietary reasons that so many Westerners are bald.

It was April 20 and we were in the tiny town of Tiquipaya on the outskirts of Cochabamba, Bolivia, for the official inauguration of the World People’s Conference on Climate Change and the Rights of Mother Earth. Beyond the impressive colour, ceremonial burning of offerings and general Latino boisterousness, the mood was expectant. The conference had saturated Bolivian newspapers for days. Morales had caused a splash internationally when he announced the event in early January 2010, pulling no punches in declaring it the antithesis to failed global climate talks in Copenhagen. Rather than locking it out, this conference would welcome civil society with open arms. Indigenous voices, drowned out in so many other arenas, would feature strongly amongst those of citizens from around the world in Cochabamba for four days of all-in deliberations on what is needed to tackle the climate crisis globally.

Aside from the welcome emphasis on grassroots attendance and participatory processes, this ‘Peoples’ Conference’ represented another fundamental departure from climate talks convened under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). Whereas the UNFCCC has evolved into a forum for competitive and self-interested nation-states to lock horns over emission reductions targets and exemptions, financing and carbon markets,

Morales was determined to focus attention on the structural causes of climate change. On stage, and true to style, he did not beat around the bush in explaining the driving factors he had in mind: ‘We cannot have equilibrium in this world with the current inequality and destruction of Mother Earth’, he told us. ‘Capitalism is what is causing this problem and it needs to end.’

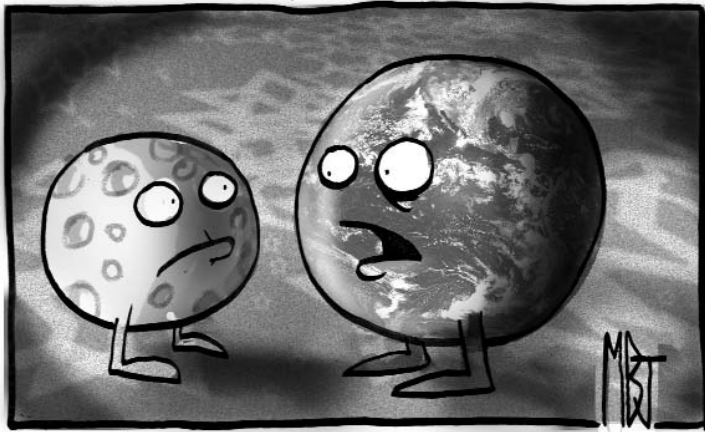
A flick through the conference program’s list of seventeen official working groups gave further insight into the way the climate crisis is viewed in Bolivia and how discussions would be framed at this event. Among those groups focused on familiar hot topics in global climate negotiations such as forests, technology transfer and the Kyoto Protocol were others convened to look at establishing an International Climate Justice Tribunal; planning a World Peoples’ Referendum on Climate Change; and drafting a Universal Declaration on the Rights of Mother Earth.

Mixed Expectations

As Australians, we were keen to extract signs of hope to inject into a weary scene of climate activism back home. Despite unprecedented activity in community-based climate campaigning, the last year had been spent trapped, fly-like, in a web cast by the Labor Party rejecting the fundamentally flawed and ineffective Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme, and dismayed by the frightening traction and spread of scientifically baseless climate denialism. After the shambolic Copenhagen talks put the icing on the cake, we figured a people’s gathering and some fiery Latino rhetoric might be just the thing to put Australian concerns into perspective, to draw on new energy and to strengthen links with the international grassroots movement for climate justice.

But as we sat listening to Evo under the hot Cochabamban sun, we had mixed feelings. On the one hand, we were more than happy to bask in the hour-long rant of a democratically elected world leader who appeared to actually grasp the extent of the climate crisis and not be delusional about the fundamental shift in thinking about human–nature relations needed to address it. On the other, it was clear that it was not just languages that would need to be translated if we were to bring the messages of this conference home to Australia. Declarations that we must choose between ‘capitalism or the Earth’,

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Evo, Climate Change and the C-word
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The opinions expressed in this article do not necessarily represent the views of the organisations the authors work for.
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06-07 2010
Nº 106



"..I want to go live in Bolivia..."

genuine acceptance of Indigenous lifestyles as a viable alternative to the Western model, and an insistence on the need to protect the rights of *Pachamama*—or 'Mother Earth'—are simply not present in mainstream climate change discourse in Australia. Morales' repeated reference to them only served to underline how different things were here in Bolivia and the shallow nature of climate policy debate in Australia. There was also a nagging question about relevance. No matter how deep their analysis or exciting their proposals, who is listening to Bolivia?

Perhaps more to the point, who is listening to Evo Morales? Those familiar with the Morales story will know it is an understatement to say that his election in 2005 represented a significant shift to the Left for Bolivia, among the poorest of Latin American nations. An Aymara himself and, famously, a former coca-leaf farmer, Morales became the first Indigenous person to be elected president in a country where approximately 60 per cent of the population are Indigenous (mostly Quechua and Aymara). In a recent affirmation of his domestic popularity, Morales was resoundingly re-elected to a new five-year term in December last year, just days before heading off to Copenhagen.

Copenhagen was as good an example as any of the fact that Bolivia is not taken seriously in global climate talks. Morales was certainly not invited into the room with the 'big boys' from the United States, Europe and the BASIC countries (Brazil, South Africa, India and China) during the farcical, eleventh-hour construction of the Copenhagen Accord. He subsequently refused to sign (which prompted the United States to cut off \$3 million in climate change related aid money to Bolivia), preferring instead to begin planning the People's Conference.

Conference Activities and a People's Agreement

While at least fifty-six world governments sent official delegations to the conference, there was a notable absence of world leaders. Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez, a close political ally of Morales, was the only other head of state to attend although he was joined by vice presidents of Cuba and Burundi and a range of other officials including UN representatives.

Official reports put the conference attendance at over 35,000 people. Since only 12,000 had been anticipated, the numbers presented some organisational challenges which manifested in long, motionless queues to register, last-minute venue changes (spread almost exclusively by word of mouth) and a rather

enigmatic 'system' for catching buses between Cochabamba and the Universidad del Valle in Tiquipaya, where most of the conference activities took place.

Two-thirds of participants were from the host country, reflecting an apparent high level of engagement with climate change amongst everyday Bolivians from both urban and rural areas. On the first day we sat down for afternoon tea with Heriberto, an Indigenous man from a small farming village in the La Paz region. He was one of about twenty that his community had sent to the conference. When we asked him whether most Bolivians were aware of climate change he nodded quickly, the dangly bits from his brightly coloured beanie dancing around his ears. 'Of course they are. They have their eyes open. You can see it.'

The conference had a jam-packed agenda with open forum panel discussions, information-sharing workshops and working group streams all running simultaneously. We roamed between all three. The panel sessions featured high profile speakers including Naomi Klein, Bill McKibben, Dr James Hansen, Vandana Shiva and a range of Latin American activists and politicians. Coming largely from the politicians, jibes at *el imperialismo yanqui* were common and popular with the audience. The Ecuadorian Environment Minister drew strong applause when she announced that Ecuador was offering to pay the Obama Administration \$2.5 million to sign the Kyoto Protocol, the same amount that the United States withdrew from Ecuador in climate aid when they refused to sign onto the Copenhagen Accord. When asked what foreign activists should do to help the Bolivian people suffering from the impacts of climate change the Bolivian Vice-President said the most important thing was to go home and take over our governments.

There were literally hundreds of workshops run by Bolivian ministries, international and local social movement groups, and NGOs. Many were purely informative—we heard, for example, about programs to emphasise the value of local traditional agricultural knowledge, the deployment of solar cookers in Bolivian villages without electricity and the ambitious initiative of the Ecuadorian Government to solicit payment from rich countries to leave the oil reserves in the Amazonian Yasuni National Park in the ground. Others had a more practical emphasis on building skills such as how to more effectively target corporations or strengthening networks and support for the 350.org and other existing international campaigns.

Though panel sessions and workshops were often lively affairs, they had nothing on the deliberations that took place through the seventeen working groups, which were open to anyone to attend. After elbowing our way into a packed university classroom we sat in on the highly-focused deliberations of the working group tasked with establishing the conditions for an International Climate Justice Tribunal. It was a decidedly grassroots affair, with facilitators trying to hold focus while juggling contributions from the floor that jumped from minor rants about how realistic the whole idea was to passionate debate over specific wording of the recommendations. While probably imperfect, the process seemed underpinned by a level of mutual respect.

The outcomes from each working group were presented publicly in a series of concurrent plenary sessions where anyone could ask questions and suggest changes. Some cognitive dissonance within the Venezuelan delegation became apparent, as one woman expressed concern at the sharp emissions reductions recommended because they threatened Venezuelan oil exports and the funding of that country’s Bolivarian Revolution. The Venezuelan man sitting next to us immediately began bitching about the hypocrisy of his fellow countrymen that wanted to have it both ways—a social revolution funded by oil money and a safe climate future. This loyal Chavista also wasn’t convinced that socialism would provide an ecologically sound alternative to capitalism. ‘In capitalism’, he told us, ‘the individual imposes himself on nature. In socialism, the collective imposes themselves on nature. It’s the same exploitative relationship.’

Morales did not beat around the bush in explaining the driving factors he had in mind: ‘We cannot have equilibrium in this world with the current inequality and destruction of Mother Earth’, he told us. ‘Capitalism is what is causing this problem and it needs to end.’

On the last morning of the conference, the working group recommendations were presented to a mass gathering of all the government officials and a few chosen representatives from social movement groups. These recommendations were then synthesised into one document, dubbed the ‘People’s Agreement’.

The People’s Agreement (see text box), which the Morales government will now take to the UN, unsurprisingly locates the climate crisis firmly within a damning critique of the capitalist model. It calls for a return to 300 parts per million of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere, demanding that wealthy nations cut emissions by 50 per cent on 1990 levels by the end of the first post-Kyoto period (2017) without the use of any carbon offsets or international carbon markets.

On paper the People’s Agreement simply adds further detail to the Morales government’s pre-existing positions on climate change, regarded as somewhat renegade in UNFCCC circles. However, the direct contributions of grassroots social movement representatives, as well as the potential for post-conference association with

these demands across broader elements of global civil society, is likely to help align, mutually reinforce and further legitimise these positions.

On Rhetoric, Action, Agency and the Moral High Ground

Morales’ posturing to a global audience and advocacy for much stronger action on climate change does, meanwhile, leave him open to criticism for his handling of environmental concerns at home. Monitoring this is also the space of civil society and many Bolivian activists have drawn attention to the need for scrutiny of Morales’ action to rhetoric ratio, particularly in the context of conventional policies relating to oil and gas exploration and exploitation, burning coal, and building environmentally-dubious dams. These concerns were reflected at the conference by the presence, both physical and in local media, of the ‘Mesa 18’ or unofficial 18th working group. The convenors of Mesa 18, importantly, pointed to the Bolivian government’s unwillingness to legitimise and give space to these neglected voices among all those others so enthusiastically invited to participate in the People’s Conference.

So, how well is *Pachamama* being looked after in Bolivia itself? The question is absolutely valid but it begins to pale in significance when you consider the global nature of climate change and the options open to the Morales government. On the one hand it is easy to say Bolivia cannot go around hyperbolically blaming ‘the system’ and calling for a maximum 1 degree temperature rise (a goal scientifically considered unachievable without an immediate combination of zero net emissions and rapid draw-down of carbon from the atmosphere) without halting emissions-intensive projects and exemplifying an alternative system at home. On the other hand, how is it possible for Bolivia to make radical changes domestically, to convert to 100 per cent renewable energy, for example, given the extreme poverty faced by much of its population and its lack of access to funds and appropriate technology? Consider this and then add the lack of power or any bargaining chips—associated with being an emerging high polluter—to influence global agreements.

It is a dilemma familiar to those versed in global climate justice issues and it is why Naomi Klein described the underlying provocation and mood of the event as ‘rage against helplessness’. While the Morales government can drive dramatic transformations in Bolivia by nationalising key industries, giving new respect and opportunities to Indigenous people and promoting the concept of *vivir bien*—‘to live well’—above the capitalist imperative to always seek ‘to live better’, they are keenly aware of the fact that their fate lies in the hands of others. This is not to let Morales off the hook, but merely to point out what a great example Bolivia is of a country facing the unfortunate combination of very high stakes, significant moral weight and a distinct lack of agency.

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Evo, Climate Change and the C-word

Taegen Edwards and Pablo Brait




At Home, Now What?

Back in the 'lucky country', we can't help but ask what our own prime minister would make of all this. After Copenhagen, while clearly not satisfied with the outcomes, Rudd was quick to sign its Accord. In April, while Evo was busy asking the deeper questions at his conference, Rudd was making a decision to put his only major climate policy (a weak and irrevocably compromised effort in itself) on the backburner, implying it was all too hard for Australia to do anything at all. The approach of his government, like Howard's before him, is an embodiment of what is wrong with stalling, deadlocked global climate negotiations, summed up neatly by the mantra that Australia, a rich, developed country with perhaps the world's highest per capita emissions, will do 'no more and no less' than the rest of the world.

We also wonder who would listen to us here if we were to start echoing Bolivian calls for the need to 'live in harmony with Mother Earth' and 'destroy capitalism'. In Australia, as appears to be the case in other turbo-capitalist Western societies where competition, greed and exploitation of resources are revered and have blurred into 'just the way things are', debate about the structural causes of climate change occurs only on the fringes. The lack of informed popular debate around systemic drivers of our high levels of pollution leaves us with an unspoken (and unproven) implication that we can deal with climate change simply by putting a price on carbon without needing to interrupt fossil fuel exports, let alone consumption and growth patterns. Anyone who bothers to look at the big picture quickly understands that the equation does not add up, but the majority of people just avert their eyes.

And finally we are struggling with what, if any, implications we can draw from the Bolivian conference for the climate movement in Australia and where it should focus its efforts. This is not an easy question to answer, not least because the movement is not particularly homogenous. From the larger NGOs to the tiny community climate action groups, there are a range of views on what needs to happen if we are to transform into the kind of society where climate change isn't a problem. It is certainly true, though, that few dare to mention the c-word. As Ariel Salleh (*Arena Magazine* no. 105) points out in her critique of a range of 'green new deals' being proposed in Australia and other Western-dominated contexts, 'today, even unionists and conservationists appear to believe that capitalism can be rendered sustainable'.

At Morales' conference in Bolivia we were surrounded by the diverse voices or implied 'others' that Salleh rightly identifies as missing from the development of policy papers presented by some Western-based NGOs as climate 'solutions'. The People's Agreement captures the demands of many who have no reason to make excuses for, let alone seek to protect, the capitalist model under which they have seen little benefit. Central to the emerging consensus from the Morales government, and elements of the global climate movement, is the understanding that solutions to the climate crisis that aim to maintain and protect the status quo in rich, consumerist societies are not real solutions. This was the overwhelming message from Cochabamba. It is a consensus we support and hope to see gain further momentum through the leadership of Morales. We will need to work harder to see this message better understood and more explicitly reflected by those advocating for strong climate action, not to mention broader society, here in Australia. 

Key elements of the People's Agreement

- **Capitalism, and its model of endless growth, is incompatible with life on a finite planet.** (There was agreement about the need to change the capitalist model of production, but not that socialism would be an appropriate alternative.) We need to choose a path that establishes harmony with nature.
- **A call for the formation of an International Climate Justice Tribunal** with the capacity to warn, judge and sanction states, businesses and people who pollute and cause climate change by action or failure to act.
- **A call for the United Nations to adopt a Universal Declaration of the Rights of Mother Earth**, outlining obligations of humans to preserve and take care of natural systems.
- **Announcement of plans for a Global Referendum to take place on 22 April 2011** to determine agreement with issues including the need to change the capitalist system and redirect current military budgets towards defence of the Earth.
- **A demand that the United States sign the Kyoto Protocol** and that commitments of developing countries under Kyoto limit global emissions sufficiently so as to return atmospheric carbon dioxide to **less than 300 parts per million**.
- **A demand that the UNFCCC's Annex 1 (developed) countries commit to emissions cuts of 50 per cent by 2017** on 1990 levels, without the use of any offsets or international carbon markets.
- **Recognition of climate refugees and demand that developed countries should take responsibility for them** and grant them refugee status in their countries under a special climate refugee category.
- **A call for the creation of a fund made up of 6 per cent of developed countries' gross domestic product (GDP) to unconditionally pay back the climate debt** to countries already facing severe climate impacts.
- **A rejection of free trade agreements** which have put the rights of profit-seeking corporations above the rights of people and nature.
- **A rejection of the definition within the UNFCCC of tree plantations as forests and a rejection of the REDD (Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Degradation) scheme** which rich countries are using to avoid emissions reductions at home and is causing the further theft of Indigenous people's lands.

Papua's Fallen Leaders

Carmel Budiardjo

Anyone who emerges as a leader of the West Papuan people is setting out on a dangerous path

Since the murder of cultural leader and activist Arnold Ap in April 1984 and the kidnap and murder of Theys Hijo Eluay, chairman of the Papuan Presidium Council, in November 2001, Papuans who have emerged as leaders have had their lives cut short by assassins from the security forces. Democracy in Indonesia has not changed Jakarta's treatment of West Papua.

The Assassination of Cultural Activist Arnold Ap

Arnold Ap was the curator of the Anthropological Museum in Jayapura and a member of a group of musicians called Mambesak, who promoted traditional Papuan music and broadcast a popular weekly program on the local radio. Ap was arrested by troops of the elite corps Kopassandha (now known as Kopassus) on 23 November 1983. After being interrogated and subjected to maltreatment, Ap, with four other detainees, was transferred to the headquarters of the regional military command. A month later, the five men were handed over to the intelligence officer of the local police.

When he heard that Ap was under arrest, the rector of Cenderawasih University in Jayapura temporarily dismissed him as curator on the grounds that he had been arrested on suspicion of subversion. When the Indonesian daily *Sinar Harapan* reported that Ap's family were being denied contact, the newspaper was publicly reprimanded.

After being held in police and military custody for three months, Ap was transferred to the public prosecution authorities, creating the impression that formal charges would be laid. On 14 April 1984, he was seen on campus being escorted by an officer. A week later it was

announced that he and four other detainees had escaped from prison, but this so-called escape had been arranged by the authorities. Military authorities regarded Ap as 'extremely dangerous' because of the activities of his Mambesak players and wanted him sentenced to death or given a life sentence, but they couldn't find the necessary evidence for him to be charged in court.

On 21 April, a Papuan police officer unlocked the cell doors of the five detainees and ordered them out. They were driven by a Kopassandha officer to a coastal base camp. One of the detainees managed to escape and later fled to Papua New Guinea where he described what had happened. The remaining detainees were told to swim out to a boat. One was struck on the head, stabbed in the neck and thrown into the sea. The others, including Arnold Ap, took shelter in a cave. Four days later, when Ap left the cave to urinate, the area was surrounded by elite troops. He was shot three times in the stomach and stabbed in the chest. He was taken to a hospital where, according to a nurse, he said that if he died his ring should be given to his wife. Other hospital staff said that he was dead on arrival.

Arnold Ap's attempts to foster the traditional arts and crafts of the Papuan people as a way of safeguarding their identity and enhancing their dignity was not acceptable to the security forces, and was even seen as a threat to their integration within the fold of the Indonesian Republic; for this he paid with his life.

The Mysterious Death of Dr Tom Wainggai

Dr Thomas Wainggai was a lecturer at Cenderawasih University who made no secret of his rejection of West Papua's annexation as a province of Indonesia. On 14 December 1988, he led a ceremony at the Mandala Stadium in Jayapura to unfurl the *Kejora*, the Morning Star flag, replacing the Indonesian red-and-white flag which had been pulled down. The event was attended by scores of people, including Protestant ministers. Dr Wainggai proclaimed the establishment of the West Melanesian Republic. While the ceremony was in progress, troops charged the crowd, beating many of those present.

Many people were rounded up and charged with rebellion (*makar*). Dr Wainggai was found guilty of rebellion and sentenced to twenty years. His wife Teruka was sentenced to eight years for sewing the flag, while others at the ceremony were sentenced, some up to six years, for handing out song sheets. When Dr Wainggai's trial began, large crowds gathered outside the courthouse, eager to follow the proceedings. In order to

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prevent further demonstrations, the trial was moved out of Jayapura.

In January 1990, Dr Wainggai and his wife were moved from Jayapura to prisons in Jakarta; he was taken to Cipinang Prison while she ended up in Tangerang Prison on the outskirts of the capital. Teruka Wainggai was released in 1993, after serving half her sentence.

In March 1996, it was reported that Dr Wainggai had died in prison. According to reports from the prison shortly before his death, he complained of severe pains in the stomach. Fearing that his food had been tampered with, he refused to eat the prison food but his condition failed to improve. On 14 March, his condition worsened; he was taken to a police prison but was found dead on arrival. His family called for an autopsy by the International Red Cross but this was refused. The prison doctor said that he had died from a heart attack but few people were prepared to believe this.

Dr Wainggai led a ceremony at the Mandala Stadium in Jayapura to unfurl the *Kejora*, the Morning Star flag, replacing the Indonesian red-and-white flag which had been pulled down. While the ceremony was in progress, troops charged the crowd, beating many of those present.

There were several days of confusion about where Dr Wainggai should be buried. The army wanted the funeral to take place in Jakarta, fearing that large crowds would gather in Jayapura to pay their last respects. However, perhaps fearing that this would create greater problems, the army returned the body to Jayapura. When the coffin arrived at Sentani airport, a large crowd of people were waiting, intending to carry the coffin the 35 km to Cenderawasih University so Dr Wainggai's former colleagues could pay their last respects. However, the coffin was transferred from the aircraft to an ambulance and driven away at high speed. This so infuriated the crowds that they vented their anger by attacking government buildings, burning vehicles and pelting shops with stones. The unrest continued for several hours and, according to *Republika*, the Jakarta daily, Abepura was 'in control of the protestors for an hour or more with protestors carrying banners bearing the words "OPM Freedom" and "West Melanesian Freedom"'.

On the day of the funeral, thousands gathered outside the Wainggai family home where the funeral service was conducted. A huge crowd followed the cortege to the Kayubatu cemetery. Commenting on the unrest, Bishop Munninghoff at the Jayapura diocese warned that the situation in the province was 'highly combustible' and could easily ignite. On 20 March, *Republika* wrote: 'We could face yet more trouble in the coming days if, like East Timor, this most easterly province turns into an international issue'.

The Assassination of Theys Hijo Eluay

In his early days, Theys Hijo Eluay was a member of Golkar, the official party during the Suharto era; in August 1969, he was a signatory of the Act of Free Choice which unanimously—under

extreme coercion from the military—voted to remain within the Indonesian republic.

Following the fall of Suharto, which ushered in a period of greater freedom, the Papuan people held a widely supported congress in early 2000. This was followed by a second Papuan Congress in May and June of that year, which was attended by many thousands of people from across the territory, who voiced strong support for the idea of Papuan independence. The congress created an executive body called the Papuan Presidium Council (PDP). Theys Eluay, a tribal chief and a highly-respected community leader, was elected head of the PDP. Although the PDP had decided to pursue the path of dialogue rather than violence, army intelligence set up a special taskforce, which targeted members of the PDP, including Theys.

On 10 November 2001, Theys received an invitation to a celebration of Indonesia's Heroes' Day at the headquarters of Kopassus in Hamadi, on the outskirts of Jayapura. On the way home, his car was ambushed; Theys' driver was forced to flee and the car was driven away. The driver, Aristoteles Masoka, rushed back to Kopassus headquarters to report what had happened. After entering the complex, he was never seen again.

On the following day, Theys' body was discovered some fifty kilometres from the place of his abduction, in an upturned vehicle that had been found close to a ravine, creating the impression of an accident. The victim's face was black and his tongue was hanging out, which suggested strangulation, and an autopsy concluded that he had died of suffocation. His funeral was attended by more than ten thousand people coming from all over West Papua.

News that Theys had died under suspicious circumstances led to outrage not only in West Papua but also from the international community, which forced the Indonesian authorities to bring those held responsible to trial. Seven Kopassus officers were tried, found guilty and sentenced to derisory sentences of three or three and a half years, while a senior Indonesian army officer hailed the convicted men as 'heroes'. Nothing was ever established about who had ordered the crime.

The Murder of Kelly Kwalik

The most recent of Papua's fallen leaders is Kelly Kwalik who was fatally shot on 16 December 2009, shortly before the end of Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono's first term as president.

Kwalik died from loss of blood after being shot in the thigh by members of the infamous police anti-terror unit, Densus 88, a unit that has received training in the United States. Initially it was reported that the wound only 'pierced his skin', meaning that they were not life-threatening. The results of the autopsy have not been made public and calls for an investigation have been ignored so the chances of anyone being called to account are remote, given the impunity enjoyed by Indonesian security forces for decades.

Kwalik’s sister-in-law Yosepha Alomang and other relatives were denied access to his body. ‘Why was he shot to death?’ Yosepha asked. ‘He was not a thief. You police did not search for him in the jungle but killed him at his home.’ Rev. Herman Saud, former chairman of the General Synod of the Papuan Protestant church (GKI), said that Kwalik should have been taken into custody and asked to explain what happened. ‘Central and local governments should have the courage to enter into dialogue with those on the other side of the fence because they too (are) citizens of this country.’

Seven Kopassus officers were tried for Theys’ death, found guilty and sentenced to derisory sentences of three or three and a half years, while a senior Indonesian army officer hailed the convicted men as ‘heroes’. Nothing was ever established about who had ordered the crime.

Keletus Kelly Kulalok Kwalik was from the Tsinga people, part of the Amungme tribe. The Amungme people lived in the mountain region which has since been taken over by the US mining company PT Freeport-Indonesia, whose operations have turned their mountain into a crater. The devastation caused across Timika by Freeport was always an integral part of Kwalik’s resistance to West Papua’s annexation by Indonesia. He studied at a Catholic teachers’ college before joining the Papuan freedom organisation OPM (*Organisasi Papua Merdeka*) in 1975. He held various command positions in the movement in Timika and in 2007 became head of TPN/OPM, the OPM’s military wing.

In 1977, major Indonesian military operations were conducted in the Central Highlands, an area dominated by Freeport’s mining operations. Resistance fighters under Kwalik’s leadership took action against the company; their most successful strike caused the destruction of a section of the pipe taking the copper from the Grasberg mine to Amamapare on the coast, and huge financial losses to the company. This led to retaliatory operations by

security forces, forcing villagers to flee their homes and causing much loss of life.

Kwalik attracted international attention in 1996, when a team of anthropologists from Cambridge University on an expedition in West Papua were kidnapped by the OPM in Mapnduma and held hostage for five months. Although the International Red Cross (ICRC) was planning to handle the prisoners’ release, the organisation came under pressure from a Kopassus commander, Prabowo Subianto, son-in-law of President Suharto, to withdraw from the area and leave the military in charge. When a helicopter arrived to collect the hostages, some villagers approached, thinking that ICRC personnel were on board. Instead armed men opened fire, killing several people on the ground. Kwalik had fled, having been warned of a betrayal, and the hostages were met by Kopassus soldiers. Both before and after the hostages’ release, there were reports of the killing of villagers. One of the hostages later told a Dutch newspaper that they had ‘met entire village communities, men, women and children, on the run.’


During the crisis, TAPOL had called on Kwalik to release the hostages but Kwalik wanted to draw attention to Papua’s neglected struggle. Indeed for the first time newspapers around the world took a critical look at conditions in West Papua and its annexation by Indonesia in 1963. The fate of a small group of foreigners had aroused significant international interest while thousands of Papuans had died in numerous incidents since 1963 without the international community batting an eyelid.

Since 2002, there have been several attacks by gunmen on personnel working for Freeport, resulting in several deaths, including of foreign employees. On each occasion, the military have blamed the OPM under Kwalik’s leadership, without acknowledging the need for an investigation. Following an incident July 2009, when an Australian employee of Freeport was killed, the police chief of Papua, General F.X. Bagus Ekodanto, met Kwalik and was assured that he was not responsible for the shooting. However, a few days later the military commander of the Cenderawasih military command said that the shooting ‘looked like’ the work of Kelly Kwalik.

Finally, the police anti-terrorist unit Densus 88 attacked Kwalik in his home, shooting and fatally injuring him. Hundreds of people lined the route from the Mimika legislative building, where the body had lain in state, to the cemetery to mourn Kwalik’s passing.

Shortly before his death, Kwalik said:

In the thirty-four years I have been defending this forest and country, I have climbed many hills and mountains, I have walked many valleys and wetlands. For thirty-four years I have defended the forest, I have crossed many lakes, rivers and seas. I have endured many days that have baked my skin, I have endured the cold and freezing of my body from snow, to defend our glorious heritage and to restore justice so that truth, love and peace will reign in our glorious land.

Now I pray, and I shout with all my breath: ‘My God, take away all the copper, gold, oil and gas, fish, all the animals and other things that make this island rich. But all the things you have given us, take them away and give us only what we need today and give us tomorrow what we need then. 

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A selection from the Youth of Gaza series

Jessie Boylan

Jessie Boylan is a photomedia artist, documentary photographer, community radio producer and freelance journalist based in Melbourne. Jessie believes in photography’s capacity to create change and educate people about human rights and social and environmental injustices. She worked in Palestine and Israel documenting the aftermath of the 2008–09 Israeli war on Gaza; the experience of Gazan youth; and the plight of internally displaced Palestinian Bedouins in Israel. She also spent six months working for Inter Press Service reporting and documenting in remote regions in Mozambique, Malawi and Tanzania. Since 2005 Jessie has been continuing a body of work around the impact of uranium mining, atomic weapons testings and the nuclear industry on Indigenous and non-Indigenous people in Australia from the 1950s until today.

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Ayman Jamal
Mghames, Palestinian
Rappers, Gaza,
June 2009

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Khaled Harara,
Black Unit Band,
Hip-hop group from
Gaza City, June 2009

'I have been rapping for five years. We are the second generation of hip-hop artists in Palestine. We sing hip-hop here in Gaza because we believe it is a way to protect ourselves from the war and the occupation, because we believe the words and the lyrics are stronger than all the bullets and the guns and the shells. We can fight if we want to but we choose and we want the peaceful way. We love all the people around the world, but we hate the governments who work against the people. We also know that there are a lot of good people inside Israel who want peace with us. We don't just sing about the occupation, we sing about problems inside Palestine, like the civil war [between Hamas and Fatah], we sing about love, about ourselves, poor people, we are the sound, the voice of people here.'

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'The first thing is that we're facing a lot of problems here, we have a horrible situation here in Gaza and Palestine... I have a horrible situation from the recent war, because I lost my home and lost my dad, so now my voice is going somewhere else. Before the recent war I was thinking about going out, living my life, getting out there, but now after the recent war, everything has changed, I belong to this place more and more each day, and I don't want to go out, even if all the borders open, I'm not gonna to leave, I'm gonna stay, I'm gonna say what I think, I'm gonna say what I see, I'm gonna keep rapping ...'

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Mohammed Wafy,
Black Unit Band,
Gaza,
June 2009

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Red Tories

Roland Boer

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Criticism of Heaven and
Earth** (Brill and
Haymarket).

'All for one and one for all. 'When I go outside I want to decide how to live, how to die. I want to fly, so tell me why not, why not? A human has lost all the meaning of the human, The home is the safe side of the street It's the strength, it's the plan, This place protects us from all the suffering and shit in this world Now is the time to raise up and get your rights, To put your goals all in front of you, Time to forget the suffering, forget the past, If the door doesn't open for you, break it, and enter, If the door stops you from getting your goals, you must fight, and never forget.'

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Red Tories

Roland Boer

New idea or conservative mood music?

In the lead-up to the 2010 UK election, an apparently new idea was being floated by the conservative leader, David Cameron. We need to recover the ‘big society’, he argued, which has the truly conservative values of locality, family, moral economy, virtuous elites and common popular customs. But he did not pull these values out of thin air, for they were supplied by a man at times called Cameron’s ‘philosopher king’—Phillip Blond, leader of the think tank ResPublica, proponent of the doctrine of ‘Red Toryism’ and sometime theology lecturer. For a couple of years now, Blond has been urging the conservatives to value the local over the global, family over its discontents (gays, single parents, promiscuity), virtue over cynicism, common custom over bland commercial labels; in short, he seeks a return to the progressive, communal values of conservatism. But what, in more detail, is Red Toryism and is it really new?

Economic analysis

In a nutshell, Red Toryism seeks to decouple conservative politics from its dirty little relationship with (neo-)liberal economics, an affair most successfully consummated by Margaret Thatcher and her ilk. Always an ill match, the end of the affair was bound to happen sooner or later. But rather than make it a bitter and rancorous separation, the Red Tories wish to make a virtue out of the break-up, seeking a return to the conservatives’ old and trusted partner of many years hence—an ancient, well-nigh medieval collection of economic practices that have been lost in the rush to capitalism and industrialisation.

Red Tory economics may easily be organised in terms of a diagnosis of the current malaise and a prognosis of its cure. The relevant sources are a string of online newspaper and magazine articles, but especially an early essay authored by Phillip Blond called ‘Red Tory’ from 2008, which lay the groundwork for the much-delayed and tortured book by the same name from 2010.

Diagnosis

Blond analyses what conservatives call ‘broken Britain’—one of Blond’s empty and empirically mistaken slogans taken from the conservative think tank the Centre for Social Justice, run by the former Tory leader Ian Duncan Smith. Beneath the bluster a rather simple pattern operates in Blond’s analysis: monolith versus fragments, monopolisation versus disintegration, centralisation versus atomisation. On the one hand, we have a massive monolith—the centralised state or monopoly capital—and on the other the atomised life of individuals. While the former suck in all power and wealth, the latter lead lives of meaningless and futile consumption. There are both unoriginal and original elements to the way Blond deploys this schema; the catch is that the unoriginal dimensions undo the original ones.

Let us begin with what initially seems original. Blond argues that this opposition—both political and economic—is a result of certain developments in the 20th century United Kingdom. Apart from a brief laying of the blame at the feet of the French and American Revolutions, he identifies three key moments: the embrace (especially by the Left) of the welfare state after 1945, the slide (again by the

Left) into the self-centred libertarianism of the 1960s, and then the seduction (now of the Right) by laissez-faire economics. In short, liberalism, the Left, libertarianism and laissez-faire are among the many enemies of the Red Tory faith. If the first couple of betrayals provide the two terms of his grand opposition, the betrayal by the right is the most egregious of all, since ‘advanced capitalism’ embodies this opposition within itself: it is, according to Blond, both ‘individualist’ and ‘monopolist’, the latter using the rhetoric of the former to advance its agenda.

A rather simple pattern operates in Blond’s analysis: monolith versus fragments, monopolisation versus disintegration, centralisation versus atomisation.

The problem for Blond is that this relatively original narrative is undermined by the unoriginal parts of his analysis. I restrict myself to two points. First, the tension between monopolisation and fragmentation has been identified as a crucial feature of capitalism again and again since at least the 19th century. Capitalism generates an oppressive uniformity by rendering every individual the same; yet it simultaneously produces all manner of fragmentations (Taylorisation) through the process of commodification and reification. Hegel, Marx, Zizek, Hardt and Negri—these and more have recognised and fruitfully engaged with this fundamental contradiction at the heart of

capitalism, not least of which is the point that in the very act of each individual pursuing his or her own agenda, that individual contributes to the collective project of liberalism.

If this well-known tension within capitalism has been recognised since the 19th century, then Blond's curious 20th-century narrative is simply misdirected. The same applies to the political side of his narrative, now operating in terms of the monstrous and centralised state over against the pulverised individual. Is this too a product of 20th-century developments? Not at all, for it was first identified by Hegel and then developed by Marx: while human life under capitalism was increasingly fragmented into religious, political, economic and private spheres, the state itself became abstracted as an ideal and all-pervasive form.

So the problems Blond feels he has identified are by no means new to the 20th century, nor even to the United Kingdom. They are endemic to capitalism itself and to the bourgeois state as it has developed under capitalism. This would mean that the only means to overcome what can be only be called systemic economic and political alienation is to do away with the system in question and start anew. Is this what Blond proposes?

Prognosis

By and large, no. At times, Blond hints that the whole system in which these oppositions are endemic must be swept aside and that we need to begin again. But those moments appear as a return to something lost, to a precapitalist mode of economics that can only be called feudal. More often, however, select features of an idealised and romanticised form of feudal social and economic existence are deployed to ameliorate the sharp edges of life under capitalism.

All of which is captured in the keyword, localism. In essence, Blond proposes a postmodern return to the iconic, idealised—and medieval—English village. Here we find communities of citizens, meeting to deal with everyday concerns of the village, markets where produce from the land thereabouts is sold, guilds where tradespeople may seek work and protection, families of at least a nuclear but preferably an extended form (and definitely heterosexual with both parents present), voluntary organisations like the Lions or the cricket club, the vital

role of the church in everyday village life, and even the absent lord (of both a spiritual and physical forms) who acts in a benignly paternal and somewhat absent fashion.

As for the practical suggestions, Blond proposes that localism be fostered through the reallocation of state funds, revising both the tax structure and patterns of banking finance for housing and business. For example, state funding (without seeing the rampant contradiction here) should be earmarked for local groups and initiatives—schools, voluntary organisations, families, mutual societies, cooperatives, worker control—rather than being delivered through centralised programs. Restructuring taxation would provide assistance to traditional families, especially those wishing to set up a family business rather than work for a multinational. And revising the way banks lend money would enable people to become owners of some realisable or tradable asset, small owners of capital in a way that would generate genuine 'wealth'. On this score, he proposes a version of assets welfare, with at-cost and mixed equity loans to ensure a property-owning democracy.

What can be said about these proposals? Many of them are stunningly unoriginal, for local resistance to the global has characterised country towns and alternative movements for at least the last half century. They are also extremely parochial, not merely in terms of small-town attitudes, but also in terms of what Blond calls 'patriotic capital'. Campaigns for people to buy products of national producers have come in waves for well over a century, most of them clever marketing ploys to increase sales. Further, it is what may be called a time-lapse approach; as with so many movements of apparent resistance to (the worse effects of) capitalism, Red Toryism has simply opposed one form of capitalism with another, or one level with another—small business versus transnationals, local farmers versus agribusiness, the corner shop versus the supermarket.

In response, Blond *et al.* would agree: localism is by no means new, for it harks back to the theological doctrine of subsidiarity, in which no function should be performed at any level that could be performed by a level below it, so much so that the highest level should perform only those actions that cannot be handled below it. In its more economic form, subsidiarity becomes distributism, which has appealed and continues to appeal to diverse groups such as the Catholic anarchist Dorothy Day, the proto-fascists and Mussolini admirers G.K. Chesterton and Hillaire Belloc, the British National Party, and Mondragon in Spain. However, the theological form of subsidiarity, with its emphasis of family, local church and voluntary association, is not quite as ancient as Blond *et al.* would have us believe. It appears first in Leo XIII's *Rerum Novarum* (1891) and was subsequently elaborated in *Quadragesimo Anno* by Pius XI (1931). Four points are worth nothing about these texts: they established the tradition of Roman Catholic Social Thought *in reaction* to the rapid successes of the socialists in the 19th century, they are feverishly anti-socialist, they defend private property and they assume a hierarchical system as the basis of subsidiarity, for one must have a ladder of command in order to move down to the appropriate rung. We will see this structural hierarchy appear in other elements of Red Tory doctrine, especially in its invocation of virtue and benevolent paternalism.

More substantially, however, Blond's proposals should be seen not as a cure but as a symptom of global capitalism in its current form. Rather than seeing localism as a resistance

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to the uniformity of transnational capital, localism is actually one shape such late capitalism takes. In the dialectic of globalisation and localisation, the more globalisation becomes a reality (and we are only just beginning to see that final reality), the more localism takes off. Witness the regional claims of Scotland, Wales and Cornwall; or Quebec's consistent push for independence from Canada; or the push for regional identities in the former USSR, or indeed the Balkans (Blond's approach may be described as a 'Balkanisation of Britain'). The value of such localism is that it supplies the raw materials and research arms for capitalism's perpetual search for what is new—style, fashion, taste.

Indeed, Blond strikes me as a city-slicker who one day happens upon a village in the hills. Struck by the impossibly idyllic nature of the place, he visits the real estate office and finds that the office is full similar types and that most of the sales—now with inflated prices—are to those like himself full of Arcadian myths of 'Merrie England'. (But then, if he should buy a place and happen to move into town, he will soon find that bucolic bliss is impossible without village idiocy.)

The problems Blond feels he has identified are by no means new to the 20th century, nor even to the United Kingdom ... The only means to overcome what can be only be called systemic economic and political alienation is to do away with the system in question and start anew. Is this what he proposes?

In the midst of all this rehashing of old ideas, there is a glimmer of a truly radical proposition. In setting up the proposals for making everyone the owner of a tradable asset, Blond points out that wages are 'no longer enough to secure the fundamentals of life'. But, on the verge of a breakthrough, he does not take the next step and argue that wage labour itself is a problem, that it embodies a pattern of exploitation in its very structure and should therefore be abolished in any alternative system. Or that private property—to go a step further—is the real blockage in the system and must be abolished for any communal ownership to succeed. Instead, he offers some limp half-measures that involve some tinkering here and there but leave the system itself in place. At moments like these, the 'Tory' is typed in ever larger and bolder letters, while the 'Red' fades into minuscule type.

Moral and theological analysis

Thus far I have been following the key essay from 2008 called 'Red Tory', itself the basis of the book of the same name. Towards the end of the essay and the book, Blond turns to what he calls the revival of 'civil society', embodied in his new hero David Cameron. For Blond, 'civil' means good manners, high (as in 'quality') culture, moral values and virtue.

No matter what the topic—medicine, education, evolution, Islam, abortion, gay marriage, multinationals, banking, unemployment, immigration or the pope—Blond deliberately invokes the terminology of goodness and virtue. Needles to say, locality, family, community are

good, while multinationals, wealthy individuals and mass culture are evil. Barely concealed within such a moral terminology is a theological coding that Blond owes to the theological school of radical orthodoxy and his teacher, John Milbank. In a nutshell, radical orthodoxy seeks to turn the clock back to the medieval theologian, Thomas Aquinas, arguing that all that has followed—modernism, capitalism, liberalism, Marxism and so on—is really heresy and responsible for all our ills. Milbank has made it clear that in his opinion Red Toryism is the political wing of radical orthodox theology.

Three features of Red Toryism are due to its roots in radical orthodox theology: moralising, re-enchantment of the world and benevolent paternalism. As for moralising, I focus on a combined piece from *The Guardian* (27 January 2010) called 'No Equality in Opportunity'. In this article, Blond and Milbank argue that a proper return to virtue will recognise that people are born unequal (the target is, not unexpectedly, liberalism) in terms of talents, capabilities and opportunities: 'By virtue we mean here a combination of talent, fitness for a specific social role, and a moral exercise of that role for the benefit of wider society'. They are after a 'justifiable inequality' that seeks 'to link social and economic prestige with virtue'. A properly egalitarian society will recognise such inequalities, they argue (fully cognisant of the oxymoron), enabling people to realise their potential within those strictures. Some will find that fulfilment in sweeping the streets or cleaning toilets, while others will realise their virtues in government, the control of financial institutions and education. This is a deeply theological argument, relying on the 'analogy of being' (*analogia entis*) of Thomas Aquinas: all life may be seen as located on a descending scale from God, down through the angels to the pope and clergy to the rest of human beings and then eventually the animal and plant kingdoms. According to this divinely ordained hierarchical schema, some are simply better placed when the virtues were first handed out. Virtue, then, is not merely an abstract idea or collection of noble qualities to which we should all aspire. It has everything to do where God appoints us in terms of birth, wealth and class.

Their analysis also fails to answer the question as to who decides on the virtuous and the unvirtuous. Perhaps a hint comes from the informal title given to Blond in the lead-up to the UK elections in 2010: the 'philosopher king' of the Conservative leader, David Cameron. Such a pompous and self-aggrandising figure was, of course, proposed by Plato as the ideal ruler, the only one with wisdom and virtue enough to do so. Like Plato, the philosopher king was also elitist, aristocratic and a passionate enemy of democracy.

Apart from moralising, two other deep influences of radical orthodoxy are relevant here: re-enchantment and benevolent paternalism. Time and again, Milbank has argued that capitalism, secularism, liberalism, communism and Protestantism (this one more recently) have led to disenchantment in the world. This argument is as unoriginal and it is wayward, for it assumes a prior enchanted state and neglects that the very narrative on enchantment-disenchantment and re-enchantment is produced by the very modernist, secularising tendency it seeks to overcome. For Blond and Red Toryism, however, it translates into the politics of nostalgia that is embodied in the sense that an elusive golden age has past.

Red Toryism is far more Tory than Red. No surprise in such a verdict, but at least it highlights the very awkward marriage between conservatism and liberalism in which liberal economic policies are wedded with conservative social policies.

All of which leads to benevolent paternalism, manifested in an increasing support of the pope and assertion that only a 'Catholic' position is correct. The only path to peace, it is argued, is through a recovered Christendom that knows what is best for everyone. Blond is also rumoured to be in favour of monarchy for the same reason. Indeed, such paternalism imbues the whole project, from the development of localism to determining who is virtuous. The deep problem with advocating such a wholesale recovery of the 'catholic' ideal is that in its traditional sense 'catholic' operates through a universalism of exclusion rather than inclusion, that the very definition of 'catholic' relies on excluding heretics (mostly liberals), Jews, Turks (as Muslims used to be called), women, gays and so on. Radical orthodoxy is no different.


However, the last word on the matter of benevolent paternalism falls to John Milbank, who, in his essay *Liberty Versus Liberalism*, invokes nothing less than *The Lord of the Rings* in his politics of nostalgia:

And in this way Christ is now King upon the earth and so it follows that there should be always also a secular fusion of democratic dispersal with monarchic liberality and objectivity. Indeed this should run almost in the direction of monarchic anarchy, as clearly recommended by Tolkien in the *Lord of the Rings* (no law in the Shire; but the orderly echo of remote kingship). Or (to use the local example), perhaps in the spirit of Robin Hood ...

Conclusion

Much more remains to be written in analysis, not least of which is the British exceptionalism of Red Toryism. It is closely tied in with the idiosyncratic cycles of British politics in which 'New Labour' had by 2008 and 2009, after thirteen years in office, worn out its welcome and in which the Conservatives were sprucing themselves for power. In this context Blond became one of a number of peddlers of opinion, deft manipulators of think tanks (Blond runs ResPublica), and the buzz that seems to accompany those who flock to a shift in the power base. This is also the context for the false apocalyptic sense of *fin de siecle* and a new dawn that seeps through much Red Tory rhetoric. The problem is that it assumes the particular concerns of the United Kingdom are also those of the rest of the globe—a problem that bedevils many former imperial centres.

In the end Red Toryism is far more Tory than Red. No surprise in such a verdict, but at least it highlights the very awkward marriage between conservatism and liberalism in which liberal economic policies are wedded with conservative social policies. Red Toryism seeks a hasty divorce so that the conservatives can go it alone. But as they do so, they may find themselves in bed with other partners, for the great heroes of Blond are G.K. Chesterton and Hilaire Belloc, or 'Chesterbelloc' as George Bernard Shaw first called them. Both sought to apply Roman Catholic theological doctrine of subsidiarity into the economic practice of distribution, both constructing a mythical idyllic medieval England with its wholesome villages and lush countryside. But Chesterbelloc was also anti-democratic, or rather, against any form of parliamentary government, favouring a hierarchy of virtue and the return of the aristocracy, and thereby finding in Mussolini a great champion.

Indeed, in *The Cruise of the Nona*, Belloc writes of Mussolini: 'Meeting this man after talking to the parliamentarians in other countries was like meeting with some athletic friend of one's boyhood after an afternoon with racing touts; or it was like coming upon good wine in a Pyrenean village after compulsory draughts of marsh water in the mosses of the moors above, during some long day's travel over the range'. He goes on to say, 'Society in Italy had to reach the point of acute peril before that reaction took place which saved the country; but what a fine reaction it was, not only in its virtues, but, what is more important, in its spirit! What a strong critical sense Italy had shown!' Change Italy for England and the last quotation may well have come from Blond. 



Red Tories
Roland Boer



Great Britain to Little England?

Tom Nairn

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Tom Nairn
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Who knows how far Alice will fall in Britain's topsy-turvy state?

And what the dead had no speech for, when living,
They can tell you, being dead, the communication
Of the dead is tongued with fire beyond the language of
the living.

Here, the intersection of the timeless moment
Is England and nowhere. Never and always.

T.S. Eliot, 'Little Gidding,' *Four Quartets*, 1944

The G-B Election

So the Great-British General Election took place, on the 6th of May, 2010. And on the 7th of May the voters woke up in Alice's Wonderland: 'Down, down, down. Would the fall never come to an end! "I wonder how many miles I've fallen by this time?" she said aloud. "I must be getting somewhere near the centre of the earth." She worries about arriving among the 'Antipathies' on the other side, but the White Rabbit keeps reappearing and, in between nervous glances at his watch, reassures her things will soon be sorted out.

Today the White Rabbit is Nick Clegg, leader of Britain's Liberal-Democrats, summoned by 'the Duchess' (the Conservative Party's David Cameron) for grotesquely unlikely talks about common policy over staging the Mad Tea Party: dealing with Britain's gigantic deficit without turning the Pound Sterling into funny-money, being simultaneously for and against the European Union, and so on. Though uncomfortably like an accord between Albert Schweitzer and Genghis Khan, the deal does appear inevitable for the time being. The Conservative Party won most votes, and the Lib-Dems have advanced sufficiently to claim a place at the power-table—or at least, for as long as Labourism continues to sink in the choppy wake of the departing Gordon Brown. Most recent reports indicate water-level rising near deck-level and threatening the Bridge. However, what choice have the living but to seek an exit from zombiedom, however difficult?

In most countries another election would be the answer. But this is Wonderland. A second contest might push everything still closer to the centre of the earth. Isn't the ancestor of democracy succumbing to advanced Alzheimers, and capable of results even worse than May the 7th? Hence, the urgent task ('national interest' etcetera) boils down to getting rid of a millenary tradition in a few days: time to at least to consider disposing of the Mother of Parliaments and 'first-past-the-post'. Reared to worship such timeless icons, today's Royal Subjects find themselves placed under brisk orders to bin the lot and re-equip themselves for boring modernity. Two-partyism has joined the Dodo and the 'caucus race', in Dodgson's famous portrait of Englishness. As Iain Macwhirter concludes his 'State of the

Nation' survey in Scotland's *Sunday Herald*: 'This election was a kind of punishment for the UK political leadership, for the expenses scandal and the banking crisis. The people wanted a change—well, now they have it. The political system is broken, but we don't yet know if anyone has the tools to fix it'. That's the job of the incoming coalition government, and we're still finding out day by day just what the tools are, and how likely or unlikely will be the restoration of the historic United Kingdom.

The Missing Link

So far one thing has to be taken for granted: the absence of an *English* polity capable of asserting itself democratically, on behalf of its 85 per cent UK majority. No non-democratic or dictatorial alternative is yet presenting itself. Yet what is happening is an odd sort of dictatorial solution: a power system imposed by absence. Scottish, Welsh, Northern Irish and other peripheral opinion (for example the Isle of Man) are bound to react, but with no real option except one or other version of actual nationalism. In that sense, the latter turns out to be founded less on swelling separatist tides than on the hopeless breakdown of the centre, Westminster Britishness. Straightforward political reform, like proportional representation and federalism, has been put off too long. And today no time is left. That is, no time for anything but panic and hasty makeshifts, manifested in the notion of a gambling-table deal between Deep-South Toryism and 'civic' Liberal Democracy to keep catastrophe at bay. This is break-up, nor are we out of it. New Labour, 1997–2010, was the last chance saloon, and towards the end of it six-gun Brown couldn't even draw his shooter. Today we find him retired, but still leaning on the old bar without so much as a decent wisecrack to amuse the remaining soaks and newshounds.

Couldn't Labourism vote in another less party-bound leader, and set up a different bar-room deal with the Lib-Dems and the Scottish and Welsh Nationalists on all-round constitutional change—in effect, move towards some kind of confederal replacement for the United Kingdom? Possibly, but how many years would it take? The Britannic *ancien regime* is founded on the unthinkability of things like that. So it will have to emerge in fits and starts like those we are going through—over the wreckage of Gordon Brown's Britishness and David Cameron's smart new ways to keep the old Union going. Open Democracy and like-minded organs have been arguing in that general direction for decades already, preaching to the largely unconverted. Now suddenly everybody has experienced a five-minute conversion—forced on them by the simple failure and incapacity of the traditional regime. The

question has turned from whether or not to be ‘radical’, into just which version of radicalism will best fit the new times. Against the grain of Britishness and most of the secular odds it imposed, a stalled evolutionism has ended by setting the stage for political revolution.

Conscious of approaching doom, Cameron’s first move as premier was to Scotland, where he commiserated with that country’s Conservatives on their single constituency victory, and held awkward talks with Liberal Democrats and Nationalists. It was as if Kevin Rudd had rushed to Perth immediately on assuming office in Canberra and warned West Australians against relapse into 1930s separatism. Everyone is aware that the ruling Scottish Nationalists want a referendum on independence and an end to the United Kingdom. He has repeatedly stated that he doesn’t want to go down in history as the last Prime Minister of Great Britain. But he also insists on a regime of ‘respect’ for the devolved governments. To mean anything, ‘respect’ entails equality, or the pretence thereof. But there can of course be no such equality between Britain and its ‘component’ parts. Unequalness is written into any union between an 85 per cent majority and assorted minorities with varying ethnic, linguistic and societal natures and ambitions. Standard-issue international relations are founded upon *formal* respect among such unequal entities—which of course entails the common ground of independence, recognition and statehood.

In the British case such mutuality is inconceivable in the absence of an *English* ‘component’. Regrettably, the Conservative–Lib–Dem regime is based mainly upon street-walker conservatism—the new vendor on the block, wearing a new-new brand to reassure everyone the essence of the ancient statehood is safe, with a bit of good will. Some minor reforms are suggested, an Australian-style preferential voting system, an elected Second Chamber, and enhanced ‘local government’ to divert popular energies and attention. The ship was badly holed, admittedly, after thirteen years of New Labour mediocrity. However, sales staff can still argue that it’s not yet doomed—provided that the new Cameron–Clegg administration shows itself to be one of adequate travelling repairs and replacement, guaranteed to restore seaworthiness *without English nationalism*.

The question is complicated by the odd location of English identity in the wider story of world nationalism. In her *Nationalism: Five Roads to Modernity* (1992) Liah Greenfeld insisted that England had been the prime mover in the formation of nationalist modernity. The original ‘-ism’ arose as a series of responses to English expansion and overseas threats, from both France and (later) trans-oceanic colonialism and empire. However, the originator of the process could never itself become simply another episode in its history. It was destined to remain the ‘first-born’ or model, a first ‘road’ unable to exemplify all the characteristics of the routes that came to compose modernity over the 18th to the 20th centuries. Primordially in that sense was a fate that would last into successive

presents, and could probably only have been effaced by military defeat and occupation—followed by more ‘typical’ rebirth and identification.

Liberation from Pomland

I returned quite recently from some years in Melbourne and, oddly enough, the Cameron–Clegg program may be more comprehensible from the Antipodean angle: what the ‘Antipathies’ have got round to perceiving is, approximately but rightly, the dying complex of attitudes identified in Australia as ‘Pom’ or ‘Pommy’: that is, ‘English’, not in the typically modern sense of ethnicity, language or genetic origins but in that of *superiority*, the inheritable (and probably eternal) distance of improved customs, outlook and exportability. This was an ideology naturally borne and transmitted by United Kingdom empire and population transfer over more than two centuries. Though comparable to other exports by competing powers like Spain, France, the Netherlands and Portugal, one need only list these to see an important difference. The English version has lasted much longer, without the defeats and other setbacks that were to affect its North-Atlantic neighbours. ‘Anglo-Britishness’ (as it might be more accurately titled) has survived remarkably intact, and since World War II even been reinforced by a curious ‘special relationship’ with the ascendant power of the United States. The Cold War refrigerator preserved it until the 1990s, and finally New Labour carried it forward into another century.

Australians are familiar from recent experience with dubious right-of-centre Coalitions. John Howard and the Liberal Party accomplished the trick over eleven years, via their alliance with the National Party. Yet that endured so long only because of a crucial factor that no longer applies, even in Great Britain. Wonderland characters like Cameron and Clegg may want it to be there at the end of Alice’s fall; but actually it has become another bit of Dodo nonsense. I refer to the mystique of capitalist growth-fetish known as neo-liberalism, the supposedly permanent exorcism from history of left-wing philosophies like socialism and equality. Howardite Liberalism flourished near the crest of the neo-liberal wave, in the nineties of last century. But Cameron–Cleggism has arrived far too late, and can only scabble along in the ebbing tide. The only reason they aren’t already washed into oblivion lies in the miserable oppositions they face: exhausted forms of post-Labour that spend decades over-ingratiating themselves into a supposed realism of (pre-crisis) capitalist expansion. This is how the present battle of zombies was generated, claiming life-in-death in the name of one or other has-been creed.

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A measure of nausea is surely in order here. England is failing to get its act together; but the resultant after-life of Britishness means all archipelago inhabitants are being sucked back into the graveyard. The peripheral populations mentioned above need the ‘autonomy’ (I would prefer to say ‘independence’) to think differently, come to diverse conclusions, and invent a future going beyond the corsets of ‘devolution’. Devolution was a recipe for forestalling and taming emergent political expression, by simultaneously conserving and re-imagining British-state traditions and culture. What it brought in the end was the present stalemate and incapacity. We’re supposed to stay ‘British’, and thus go on sparing the English majority from undue self-appraisal and renewal. The basic instinct is that under Westminster ‘democracy’ could itself accomplish rebirth without the painful parturition of reformed national identity and self-discovery. ‘Britain’ has by self-definition stood above ‘that sort of thing’: it inherits ‘bigger-than’ by transmitted ectoplasmic continuity, the underlying spirit of imperial outreach, and its successor, North-Atlantic Special Relationism. We simply cannot break down into ‘little’ England, Scotland (and so forth) because the Great-societal DNA rules it out.

Labourism began by colluding with Royal-British state-nationalism, and ended as another subject—even as its most enduring prop ... Will this never end? But of course the question in another sense suggests its own answer: it is only because the regime is ending that such spectacles are possible.

The customs of Pom-land are deeply entrenched, and the Cameron–Clegg regime will try to revive them with the famous strategy from Count Lampedusa’s *Il Gattopardo* (*The Leopard*, 1958): ‘If we want things to stay as they are, things will have to change’. The true Sicily will never change—although its leopards and lions may have gone, to be replaced by jackals and hyenas, who think of themselves nonetheless as the salt of the earth. An earlier Labour Premier, Harold Wilson, once declared that Britain had to remain great or else be ‘nothing’. Cautious electoral reforms will probably be undertaken to make the system seem ‘fairer’—I would have thought, more likely an Australian Preferential Vote than outright, all-round proportional representation. As for a leader, the Labour Party will be hard at work for some time trying to find one.

Bizarrely enough, two of the announced contenders are the brothers David and Edward Miliband, sons of the late Ralph Miliband, the author of *Parliamentary Socialism: A Study of the Politics of Labour* (1961). This was a corrosive and

unsparing analysis of the British Labour Party, arguing that it had turned into a vehicle for the dilution or even outright betrayal of socialism. Miliband was a premature revolutionary; he saw *Parliamentarism* as the formula that had changed the means into practically an end in itself: the corporate body of the Royal British state or ‘Establishment’, accepting both monarchy and the House of Lords as obligatory compromises along the road to power. Labourism had begun by colluding with Royal-British state-nationalism, and ended as another subject—even as its most enduring prop. This is why I can’t avoid a pressure of the heart today, imagining how he might feel on seeing his sons competing in still another exhumation of the corpse. Will this never end? But of course the question in another sense suggests its own answer: it is only because the regime is ending that such spectacles are possible.

The problem of post-British readjustment is not in fact too daunting. One of its odd features is *relative* modernity: it rests in practice upon a political accord of the early 18th century, not a prehistoric popular fusion or conquest. Great Britain’s occupation of Ireland was certainly a specimen of the latter; but that was of course largely resolved in the 1920s, to leave behind only the somewhat distinct question of a partitioned, mainly Protestant Northern Ireland. The English conquest of Wales was also a ‘typical’ metropolitan takeover or subjugation. Nonetheless, the backbone of the United Kingdom has become the accord with the largest British Isles minority, the Scots. And there was nothing typical about that. It was an early-modern political treaty between parliaments, confirming a joint monarchy and the prospective common endeavour of overseas expansion: the empire of the 18th to the 20th century. Revocation of such an agreement had been impossible within the former Westminster system, based on 1707’s fusion of representative bodies; but of course this was replaced by the New Labour government’s devolution of parliaments after 1998.

These reforms didn’t shift the foundation of ‘sovereignty’. They were designed to forestall any such change after the rise of peripheral nationalisms in the last third of the 20th century. But such a reaffirmation of centrality could work only by acknowledging the emergent ground-plan. This was for a different kind of union, or association, among the various nations of ‘those islands’, naturally including England. *Scale* is secondary for such designs; but it was not allowed to appear so for a second by the unbending protagonists of ‘Britishness’. To the latter, scale remains all: the standing of the United Kingdom first and foremost, as a world player rather than a ‘nothing’; and after that (by implication) stress upon sufficient internal cohesion and assent, the social support structure sustained by post-1707 over the mainland and as much as possible in post-1922 Ireland.

What such bombast both manifests and conceals is essentially the quandary of English national identity: compensation for occlusion by over-emphasis upon the most available ‘imagined community’ of the past and dread of ‘little England’. Though exhibited in extreme ideological forms by the British National Party (BNP) and the anti-European United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP), the emotional attitudes are widespread

and comprehensible. Britishness was a strong drug, unavoidably fostered by many aspects of both the educational system and popular media culture, and also by today's weird combination of pro- and anti-Americanism. Resentment of the Afghanistan involvement (for example) has become very widespread; but what Gordon Brown (and now his successors) counted on is equally common acknowledgement of the special relationship, supposed to entail support of whatever *they* deem deeply significant.

What we find now is that servitude is still preferred by the political ruling class to contraction: the dwindling echo of Greatness appeals more than any sobering admission of ordinary nationhood, and redefinition of the accompanying collective identity. Iraq didn't finish off the post-Great neurosis—will Afghanistan be more effective? Elections are due in Scotland and Wales in 2011, and for Alex Salmond's SNP government this is an opportunity to attempt a referendum on independence. Recent poll surveys indicate a majority still clinging to the Union, but the British parties will do all in their power to stop it happening: they know that a principle is at stake—the *right* of the smaller nations to decide on their future ... and of course, behind that, the spectre of 'little England' coming, at last, to claim *its* separate (shrunken) future as well.

Confederation?

Cameron's London coalition of 'Con-Dems' has given rise to a whole discourse of confidence trickery and condemnation, the instinctive speech of zombieland. Aggravated by the analogy with 'condoms', it already makes it difficult to spell out the formula for post-2010 development in the post-United Kingdom. This can only be in the direction of confederation, and has been neatly expressed by Scottish commentator Gerry Hassan in a recent instalment on the *OpenDemocracy* website:

The familiar templates and landscape of the British political system is cracking and falling apart; the world of ... a two party adversarial system is no longer how our politics are shaped. In the last decade alone, the Conservative/Labour hold on our political system has vastly weakened and retreated, to a degree as yet not understood by the Westminster village. The 2010 election is further evidence of this, even if it is true the Lib Dems did not quite live up to the hype! Then there is also the evidence of the 'four nations' of the disunited kingdom, a state in the process of losing its overarching United Kingdom politics, as we witness the emergence of four very different party systems across the UK.

This is why some confederal solution is becoming inevitable. Cameron's attempt to restore British unity is possible only via abandonment of two-party adversarial politics; but two-partyism was essential to the way the system worked—periods of consensus or 'National' government had always been temporary expedients intended to bring back normality. But the 2010 crisis now looks like becoming permanent. The end of New Labour and the limits of Cameronian

New Conservatism may at last usher in electoral and constitutional reform. Unable to choose constitutional reform, the United Kingdom has fallen backwards into it. An Australian-style federal answer is unlikely: the units are too unequal, and too socially distinct—as Labour's survival in Scotland, alongside nationalism, has vividly demonstrated.

The new regime 'Queen's Speech' was broadcast while these last paragraphs were composed. This is the ritual whereby Her Majesty reads out the list of policy proposals given her by the prime minister she has just confirmed. The new forecast is for possible reforms of the voting system, most likely in two years time (once 'thoroughly debated' etcetera). Given the sloth of Commons procedures, plus the opposition of many Conservatives to any change whatever, all one can say is that an 'Australian' order *might* then arise in the homeland. A preferential voting system could be chosen as a safer alternative to proportional representation, conserving two-partyism in a more presentable fashion and allowing a fairer system for any Second Chamber replacing the House of Lords. But one may reasonably doubt whether it will be in time. In a world where, as the authors of a recent study of Indian nationalism point out, 'There are at least 2500 potential nationalities in the world waiting to stake their claim to full nationhood', it appears unlikely that the populations of Wales and Scotland will wait patiently for future reassignment. At this moment, 2011 looks the most likely date for serious commencement of the Scottish independence initiative, very likely to be followed by that of Wales. If the existing Westminster coalition government endures, and whether or not its half-hearted constitutional reforms reach the statute book, the breaking-up (or reconstitution) process will then take its course. **a**

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Thoughts of an Antipodean in Hellas

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06-07 2010

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Thoughts of an **Antipodean in Hellas**

Matthew Sharpe

To Marion Tapper, en philia

Part 1: An Embarrassment of Riches

Today's weary pilgrim can take shade for as long as s/he wishes on the leafy Stoa of Zeus Eleutherios at the north-west corner of the sprawling ancient Agora (market place) at Athens. Its long-fallen columns were erected by the Athenians to celebrate the Greeks' unlikely victory over the Persian Empire in 480 BCE. Soon afterwards, they echoed with the talk of the philosopher Socrates and his students. Socrates is known to have frequented this place. It was at this very spot that the world's first free inquiry into the rational bases of moral and political life took place.

Today, in midsummer, all you will hear is the noise of the cicadas, thick as syrup, and the gentle rustling of the wind through the trees. At 7.45 in the evening, it is true, the sworn guardian will appear, whistle in hand, to move you gruffly on your way.

But when this happens, you need only pass through the north gate of the Agora. Then turn left and walk down the paved, café-lined street which runs parallel the Agora's north side. About one hundred metres down the way, take a seat to your left, looking towards the Acropolis. For you will then be sitting overlooking the foundations of the ancient Royal Stoa (Stoa Basileos) which once stood there. And although you wouldn't know it, it was on this very spot in 399 BCE that the same Socrates was brought to trial and condemned to death by the Athenians for pursuing his free inquiry into the bases of their ways of life.

You can take your time as you take all this in. For this secular Golgotha is wholly free of pilgrims. The floods of tourists which daily choke the gates of the Acropolis will file past in dribs and drabs. But they will not stop. The modern Athenians, having run an electronic train line over the Royal Stoa's Southern foundations in 1891, today do not even mark the site with a legible sign.

If you set out from the same Stoa of Zeus Eleutherios the other way (south), you pass first the remains of the Assembly (Bouleterion) where the Laws founding the world's first democracy were passed in 508 BCE. But no need to get too misty-eyed. For just next door, barely twenty strides closer to the hulking shadow of the Acropolis, stands the 'State Prison', or Demestherion, of the 5th century BCE. In this building, little more than a hundred years after the Kleisthenic reforms of 508 BCE, the restored democracy asked its patron philosopher to kindly take the hemlock, and his free inquiries, to Hades.

'Eleutherios' in 'Zeus Eleutherios' means 'freedom' or 'liberty', as you discover when you travel to Greece today. For the country is obsessed with this most enticing and most

contradictory of political words at the heart of our divided Western inheritance.

Every city or town you visit in Hellas will have its 'Plaka Eleutherios' (Freedom Place) and its Odos Eletheurios (Freedom Way), together with its 'Odos Demokratia'. It goes without saying that the name of the national airport (Eleutherios Vassilidis) includes the word. Even the beautiful Orthodox Chapel you stumble upon when you inevitably get lost in the heart of Athens' modern agoras north of Syntagma Square is called the 'Agia Eleutherios'—although what its theology could be I am not qualified to say.

What is it, then, that the traveller can learn today from this land of self-proclaiming freedom, ancient and modern, whose classical wonders draw tourists from the four corners of the known world, now as in the days of the Caesars? In a way, as Antipodeans, we are perfectly placed to appreciate what the two Greeces, ancient and modern, have to offer. From a place, as we are, nearly free of European history, we have an innocence about these things which the locals find difficult to understand.

'You like Athens?' our tourist guide queried, amazed. '... Really?' Then, when there was a delay with a booking, thinking on her feet: 'Have you visited the Acropolis?' (The thought had not crossed our minds!) 'What should I do with my last day in Athens?' I asked a Greek colleague as my stay drew towards its close. 'Leave Athens', was his wry response.

The modern Greeks, if truth be told, seem somewhat at a loss concerning the truly incredible cultural heritage bequeathed to them. These ancient ruins dot their modern metropolises and countryside as incongruously as some proverbial neurotic's symptoms, and—were it not for the tourist's dollar—they would have as little to do with the life of the modern nation.

It is not that today's Greeks, or their government, are embarrassed about their extraordinary cultural inheritance. Far from it. The opening of the New Acropolis museum received a national telecast. This was then followed by a telecast of how other countries around the world had covered the event. Nor are the modern Greeks at an economic loss about their cultural riches. If they can't always savour its cultural or aesthetic values, they are at least acutely aware of the monetary price it fetches on the global tourism market. Nearly every street corner shop in Athens sells miniature busts of

ancient greats at bargain prices, together with postcards and posters of the classical wonders. The traveller can still meet all manner of Aristophanic scoundrels waiting to generously fleece them below the slopes of the Acropolis. Strepsiades and Peithestratos today speak fluent English and trade in busts, bookmarks, and painted pottery of Aristophanes, his contemporaries and the Olympian pantheon.

Once you leave the flea markets and the Plaka, though, you can be surprised at how indifferent today's Greeks seem to be to the ancient wonders that gird their streets. But how, after all, could they not be? They commute, work, eat, drink, fight and love in their shadows every day, as insouciant as the Sydneysiders about their Harbour Bridge and Opera House.

In Athens, you can park your car at the front of the Roman Agora any day of the week, astride the remains of the Emperor Hadrian's Library, or in the shadow of the Imperial Tower of the Winds. In the baking summer heat, the attendants of these and other sites sit down to their vigil with all the enthusiasm most Anglo-Australians evince sitting down to dinner with their extended families. Many sites, like that of Socrates' failed defence the Stoa Basileos, are left to stand as they will, unremarked.

Take, for instance, the site of the ancient Assembly on the Pnyx hill overlooking the Acropolis, scarcely five hundred strides away. This remarkable natural platform, due west of the Parthenon, played host to some of the most renowned figures in Western political history—Thermistikles, Kimon, Perikles, Alkibiades, Kleon, Demosthenes. Today, it is frequented by Athenians taking their evening constitutionals, walking their dogs or jogging, and young couples canoodling on the marble remains.

Just outside the city of Argos, which boasts that it is 'the oldest city in Greece', if you climb the hill towards the Frankish Fort there, you stumble upon the remains of a Roman Sanctuary spanning several hundred metres of the slopes. Amidst the overgrown dry grass, you can trace out the seats and stage of a magnificent theatre looking down over the valley to the sea, a Temple and Stoa, a large (now-graffiti-covered) stair, and the bathhouse where Marc Antony bathed, still strewn with the seashells brought there by Romans two thousand years ago.

Or again, in Gortyn, on Crete, you can find an even larger Roman complex, completely unattended. Gortyn was once one of the largest Roman centres in Greece. To this day it houses the Gortyn Law code etched in stone, the oldest remaining in the Hellenic world. Today, however, its magnificent Temple of Apollo, Praetorium, and Fountain complex presides in silent majesty over a captive audience of olive trees, amidst acres of red soil, strewn with broken stones. As you piece your way back towards modern civilisation along the dirt path on the north side, the only noises you hear are the heavy bells of the local goat herds and the whistles of their keepers.

Part 2: Of Freedoms, Ancient and Modern

Whatever the complacency of today's Greeks about their antiquities, the Athenians have done a generally terrific job of preserving the Agora, the Acropolis, Areopagus,

Keramaikos (ancient cemetery), the Theatre of Dionysus, Pnyx hill (the ancient assembly) and the Sanctuary of Zeus of Olympus to the Acropolis' south. Nearly the entire area of the ancient walled city surrounding the Acropolis is cordoned off from any through-traffic. The Plaka and Monasteriki, the two suburbs on the Acropolis' north side, have kept their shuttered houses and paved medieval streets, not made with a view to the modern automobile.

The traveller can still meet all manner of Aristophanic scoundrels waiting to generously fleece them below the slopes of the Acropolis. Strepsiades and Peithestratos today speak fluent English and trade in busts, bookmarks, and painted pottery of Aristophanes, his contemporaries and the Olympian pantheon.

Perhaps the first thing that will strike you about the ancient Athens is its size. All of the ancient sites are concentrated, with the Acropolis at their geographical and symbolic heart. The ruins of the ancient walls that are still extant at the Keramaikos, Zeus Olympian, and near the parliament are nowhere much more than a modern kilometre from the Acropolis. Well might Pericles have said that Athens was an education to all Greece. In modern terms, it was not much bigger than one of our 'big 8' universities. At 30,000 male citizens, its population was also scarcely larger. Yet this remarkable place, scarcely more than five kilometres square, was by 450 BCE the centre of an international empire. Furthermore, as we can hope will continue to be taught in schools and academies in future even down under, it

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was also the birthplace and cradle of the theatre, of history, of political democracy, and of philosophy.

Everywhere you go in this small space, if you look up, you will see one thing. The Acropolis and the Parthenon at old Athens' heart preside over the places below like a crown or shining marble conscience. The Acropolis itself is a great thrust of rock, whose prow at either end drives forward into the blue of the sky like some great ocean liner. On a midsummer's day, the heat and light on that platform of living marble are almost overwhelming. From the Acropolis' top, you can see perhaps sixty kilometres in all directions, save those where Attica's framing mountains block the view. Out past the port of the Pireaus, down the Saronic Gulf, you can see the straits of Salamis sheathed in white haze, where the Attic fleet faced down and defeated the invading Persians in 480 BCE. The city below glows and reflects in white; the Attic countryside around it is a sea of ochre and dry red soil.

The Acropolis itself is today largely a work site—today as in the 440s when the Parthenon and smaller Erechthion on the north side were built, after the older temples were razed by the Persians in 480 BCE. A worker there asked how old I was, and when I answered I was in my early thirties, he told me there would still be cranes here when I died. The truth is that the mathematics of the Parthenon in particular are so precise that to rebuild it even to the limited extent the Greek government hopes is no easy thing. Remarkably, for one thing, there are no exactly straight lines to the Parthenon. To beguile the viewer's eye, the eight by seventeen Doric columns each taper slightly, to a maximum girth at exactly two-fifths of their height (a visual ruse called *entasis*). The lengths of metopes, triptychs, and steles above the columns also curve minutely, to take into account the angles below from which the temple is seen. There are certain angles upon the longer western and eastern sides where the lines of seventeen columns seem to merge dizzily into each other, creating that uncanny effect which modern philosophers call the mathematical sublime.

But the aesthetic wonder of the Parthenon is only part of the story. This superb edifice remains today an immense embodiment in stone of Periklean Athens' civic pride and 'confidence in freedom', despite the ravages of the centuries, the Christians, the British and the Turks. On the pediments and in the metopes, the odd piece of sculpture (here a rearing horse, there a processional figure) still peeks out, a reminder of the building's original devotional calling. Before it became a tourist trap, it is well to remember that the Parthenon was a grand temple to the city's patron virgin goddess, Athena. The democratic general Pericles had the Parthenon erected from the spoils of Athens' naval empire in the 440s BCE, in the interregnum before the Peloponnesian war, the plague, and her long defeat at the hands of Sparta.

Even now, as the object of a million tourists' idle stares, Iktanos' masterpiece still speaks eloquently to the magnificent vision Thucydides records in Pericles' famous funeral speech in 430 BCE, to honour Athens' first dead in the war with Sparta:

Our form of government ... does not copy our neighbours', but is an example to them. It is true that we are called a democracy, for the administration is in the hands of the many and not of the few. But while there exists equal justice to all and alike in their private disputes, the claim of excellence is also recognized; and when a citizen is in any way distinguished, he is preferred to the public service, not as a matter of privilege, but as the reward of merit ... There is no exclusiveness in our public life, and in our private business we are not suspicious of one another, nor angry with our neighbour if he does what he likes ... While we are thus unconstrained in our private business, a spirit of reverence pervades our public acts; we are prevented from doing wrong by respect for the authorities and for the laws, having a particular regard to those laws which are ordained for the protection of the injured as well as those unwritten laws which bring upon the transgressor of them the reprobation of the general sentiment ... To sum up: I say that Athens is the school of Hellas.

It is little wonder that such magnificent words and works, backed as they are by a concentrated century of cultural achievement probably unmatched in history since, have meant that the legacy of Athens—or even of 'the Greeks'—has remained a political prize for which many have wanted to claim ownership.

In our own time, for instance, the father of the New Right, Friedrich von Hayek, has claimed to see in Athens' 'liberty' and, in her rebellion against the tyrants of the 6th century BCE, the forefathers of economic liberals' vocal rebellion against the 'big state' today. Athens, a port city, was also a centre of trade, whose cultural dynamism was a sure reflection of its peoples' wily economic enterprise. In this first 'market society' public bureaucracy was considered beneath the dignity of free men, unlike in the age of our 'nanny state'. The many public duties we regulate from Canberra were regulated in classical Athens by slaves.

But there is surely something silly in trying to find in the ancient world an exact prescriptive model or apology for our liberal democracy today, or any other system of government. For one thing, for every virtue we should want to celebrate in Athens' culture there are as many features of her life which we would hesitate about: the fact that to be a citizen you needed to be able to own and bear arms; the fact that the leisure for public participation of the citizens was based in the slavery of many others, and the indispensable economic role of migrants without access to the franchise; the complete political and cultural marginalisation of women, whose glory lay in their silence, as Pericles agreed with Homer, and Aristotle a century later.

Those who, with an eye to today's debates, would see in Athens a vindication of their own one-dimensional vision that political autonomy is grounded in the economic liberty to buy and produce goods, though, need particularly beware. The great liberal thinkers whose ideas founded our modern market societies were more historically aware, and more careful. Like the New Right today in action, they saw and feared in direct democracy a recipe for economic inefficiencies and a sure-fire recipe for the mob to trample upon the hard-won private liberty of the prosperous to peaceably enjoy the fruits of their economic transactions. How indeed could we have maximised our national wealth and economic 'freedom' when the heads of each household were expected to spend nearly half the day at the public assembly, with an eye to the 'public good'? And how could we have concentrated

on private business and maximising returns if, on a rotating basis, each of us had to spend a month out of every ten as the modern equivalent of a senator, and one day as the ancient equivalent of the prime minister or speaker of the house?

In the light of these demands, most of us would be more like the characters in Aristophanes' plays who take every chance they get to complain about their public duties and long for the good old days, when they didn't always have to go to the assemblies. In truth, and for what it is worth, we are much closer today to the Athens of the 4th century, a prosperous city of specialisation and declining public spirit, whose stages had been emptied of tragedies, and whose 'new comedies' are even the distant predecessors of today's 'romcoms'.

But the greatness of 5th century Athens reflects the way ancient Greek culture was obsessed with competition, our modern defenders of 'freedom' would rejoin. The great stadiums at Olympia and Delphi held around 30,000 spectators. The Greeks competed in almost anything, from Homeric times to the days of Pericles: naked wrestling and charioteering, drinking bouts and the composition and production of tragedies, comedies and satyr plays. But it is the height of philistinism to say that this patented agonism was primarily rooted in free trade—every bit as ridiculous as to say that a people who would adjudge all things in terms of exchange value should ever produce buildings as beautiful as the Parthenon, the Erechthion, or the contemporary Temple to Poseidon over the waters of Cape Sounion.

To measure our distance from this place, and its sense of *eleutherios*, it is enough to compare Pericles' words concerning political freedom with the extraordinary poverty of the words of the recent leader of the free world, who when asked to define the freedom he sought to export militarily around the globe answered like a bashful schoolboy, reciting lines learnt by rote: 'If I have something to sell and you also have something, no one else should be allowed to interfere in our trading', or words to that effect. To cite the funeral oration again: 'We do not say that someone who keeps to himself minds his own business here. We say that he has no business here'.

So, despite the ideologues, is there no political lesson that we can learn today from a visit to the homeland of political democracy, as we are drawn to 'fix our eyes upon the greatness of Athens, until we become filled with the love of her and ... the spectacle of her glory'? If anything, this place speaks against the hubris of our attempting any such thing. One day spent looking at the stately ruins of this place, and the extraordinary beauty of their surrounds, is enough to intimate powerfully the truth of what Albert Camus once said: that if modern Anglo-European culture is the son of Greece, we are her renegade child.

Part 3: Hubris and Limit

The philosophies that today overwhelmingly govern our public life, despite the temporary rock of financial recession, are philosophies of limitlessness. The philosophy of free trade was conceived in the world of the 17th century, at the very time that Europe's discoveries in the new world opened up seemingly

boundless fields for her expansion and exploitation. The possibility that is now emerging, that the limitless economic growth that has resulted is undermining the natural preconditions of our collective lives, was then scarcely imaginable. Whether it be climate change, rising sea levels, peak oil or peak water, it is these unprecedented challenges that will define the next era of our collective history.

One day spent looking at the stately ruins of this place, and the extraordinary beauty of their surrounds, is enough to intimate powerfully the truth of what Albert Camus once said: that if modern Anglo-European culture is the son of Greece, we are her renegade child.

By contrast with our leading ideas, Greek thought from the start took its stand upon the notion of limit. In the pre-Socratic philosophers like Anaximander or Heraclitus, justice (*dikaisyne*), for instance, was held to set bounds on the natural world itself. Socrates, when asked to defend his life, would similarly only identify his highest wisdom with a proud acknowledgement of ignorance and self-limitation.

The idea of tethering our culture's ships to the idea of economies (and hence societies and populations) that would grow indefinitely, without any external limit in nature, would have been madness to the Greeks. They would have identified it as a barbarian notion, most akin in their experience to the expansionary intentions of the Persians who they fought to the death at Thermopylae, Marathon, Salamis, and Plateia—and who incidentally bought the allegiance of many Greek cities with the promise of unmatched economic plenty. Nothing in the *kosmos* can grow infinitely, they would have warned us.

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Our Western culture is of course today not unaware of the transitional point that we are collectively approaching. We live in a period of widespread scepticism, and the absence of any wider, positive vision—some, more dramatic than this author, call this nihilism. This is why we have been so totally delivered over to philosophies that can conceive of no higher goals than ‘efficiency’ or ‘growth’ to orient our public life—in truth, the most callow and aimless of gods yet invented by human beings.

Even the postmodern relativism lamented today by the political Right can only be understood as a shocked response to the excesses of a modern world, and the wider sense that the West has lost its direction. Yet postmodernism misdiagnoses the problem. It is not ‘Western rationality’ or ‘Western civilisation’—very many-faceted things—that are hocus bolus to blame for the horrors of the world wars, the gulags, the camps, and now the increasing exhaustion of the earth. Nor will we find our salvation in the vaguaries of ‘difference’, ‘becoming’, ‘the Other’, ‘the infinite’, and so on held up by the postmodern prophets—all so many names for further freedom from all rational constraints, when what is needed is a new basis for these constraints.


All this, I grant you, sounds terribly like edification. And edification is a million miles away from the dusty remains of the ancient Attic Agora, or the splendour of Sounion in the fierce sunlight of a mid-summer afternoon. My point is only that all the redoubtable mathematical perfection and technological virtuosity of the old Greeks’ temples are not there to set these edifices apart from or above the natural world, or to speak to the surpassing wonder of man alone. The Greeks’ myths populated the natural world’s mountains and groves with gods and daemons, and it is to honour these that their temples were first erected. It was the Christian world which first turned its back on the natural world. So the modern ambition to master and subdue nature—turning it into so many natural resources, which we are now exhausting—is much more Christian than it is classical, however proudly ‘secular’ we take our culture to be. The culture that

produced the sanctuaries at Delphi or Olympia knew nothing of any such need, and would have scorned it.

If there is indeed a fault with the Parthenon, it is that its very size bespeaks a sense of grandiosity that borders on becoming deeply un-Greek. Pericles’ political opponents called him ‘Olympian’, and it was not a term of love. The nigh-Egyptian proportions of this monument scoffs at the Delphic wisdom of ‘nothing too much’, every bit as much as Pericles’ proud boasts that no poet could ever sing Athens’ praises, so surpassing was her greatness.

And lest we forget, little more than a decade after the Funeral Oration, Pericles’ own adoptive son Alkibiades was to lead the city on a pointless, near-Persian exercise in imperialist excess: the Sicilian expedition. Her inevitable failure in Italy would ensure Athens’ defeat by the Spartans, and in this way, that the city’s justly celebrated golden age lasted little more than one hundred years. A century more, and the entire Greek peninsula has lost her autonomy under the heels of Philip and Alexander of Macedon, and Greek culture began its Hellenistic decline.

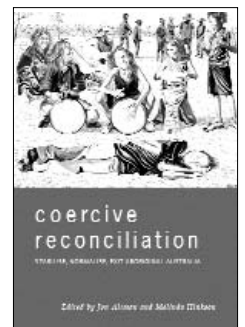
Perhaps in this story of overweening hubris, then, we can take something like a lesson today. The Greeks never denied that mortals could, and would, press against and violate the limits of their condition, fondly imagining that their god-like powers proved them already to be gods. They only insisted that, when we do this, Nemesis—God of moderation, not of vengeance—will demand the price. Today, ironically, it is our scientists—those former paymasters of progress—who deliver us this Greek message, their graphs and reports prophesying changes in our biosphere whose political consequences can only be profoundly destructive. Whether we like it or not, our culture now needs to reconsider its relation to the natural world, and forego the ages-long conviction that somehow we are in, but not of, this biosphere. Courageous and wise political leadership will be needed, and continual struggle with those who will continue to profit from ‘business as usual’, including their vocal apologists in the now unprecedentedly concentrated global media industry.

But we will also need to produce new ideas. As we seek for these new ideas, and specifically a new conception of our limited, if potentially destructive, place in the natural world, the recollection of the Greek world whose ruins you can still visit today—a culture which ‘carried nothing to extremes, neither religion nor reason, because it denied nothing, neither reason nor religion ... balancing light with shade’—can speak to us perhaps with more clarity and urgency than ever. 

Coercive Reconciliation: Stabilise, Normalise, Exit Aboriginal Australia

Edited by Jon Altman and Melinda Hinkson

On 21 June 2007 a national emergency was declared to combat child sexual abuse in the Northern Territory. In an unprecedented action the Commonwealth Government would take direct control of communities, overriding the authority of both the NT government and local community organisations. In this book, prominent Aboriginal leaders, academics and social commentators provide a devastating critique of the Howard government’s draconian intervention from the perspective of human rights, alcohol and health policy, welfare and land rights reforms, Indigenous representation and reconciliation, and the recognition of cultural diversity.



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The Future of **Community Radio**

David Melzer

For all the successes of community broadcasting, the sector is at a crossroads

Australia leads the world in many areas—some good and some ... well, some may be best not to jump up and down about. Which ones stand out for you? For me: Longest Surviving Culture stands out, something to be check-this-out proud of. Unfortunately, the sustainability of that boast is threatened by our mistreatment of Indigenous people. We are really very good at digging iron ore, lead and zinc out of the ground and shipping it out—but I'm not sure how sustainable that is either or whether it's really something worth boasting about. Australia can also claim to be a recent world leader in house-price growth as well as time spent per capita on social networking sites (it IS a big country after all).

But the development of which we can all be extremely proud is community broadcasting. We lead the world in terms of number, diversity and quality of licensed community-controlled broadcasting stations. Australia is in the healthy situation of having more licensed community radio stations (358) than the number of commercial (274), ABC (65) and SBS (4) stations put together. Melbourne is the heartland for Australian community radio with nine (the most of any Australian city) well developed and supported stations. On the smell of the proverbial, community radio gives access to the airwaves to people who are otherwise denied it—young people, old people, Indigenous people, ethnic people and those interested in alternative views and non-mainstream music.

Community radio (and television) stations are licensed by the federal government when communities express a need for them. They can be geographic (70 per cent of community stations are in regional areas) or communities of interest. Some fine examples are: SYN-FM in Melbourne, constitutionally restricted to young people under twenty-six, which in one corkscrew of a year trained 4000 young people in how to broadcast; JOY-FM, the only radio station in the world operated by and for the local gay and lesbian community; and Goolarri Media in Broome, active in media and music production and in providing training and employment opportunities for Aboriginal people in their community. In Melbourne, also think RRR, MBS, PBS and CR; think KND, ZZZ and RPH—all treasures.

Community stations are generally operated by volunteers; 23,000 people are currently actively involved in operating the 300 plus stations across the country. There are stations on Christmas Island (growing audience) in the west, Palm Island in the east, Thursday Island up north and Kangaroo Island down south—just about the four corners of the country—and everywhere in between. Most importantly, community broadcasting allows all those people to be part of decision making and ownership of stations—but maybe not for much longer. Community broadcasting is hot national infrastructure with a racy past but a doubtful future.

A Short History

A look at the history of community broadcasting in Australia highlights its purpose and value. Community broadcasting, catering to expressed needs of sections of the Australian population, has developed as a complement to the other two significant broadcasting sectors in the country. What is unique about Australian broadcasting is that all three major sectors—commercial, government-funded (ABC, SBS) and community—are large, well-developed and well-supported. The United Kingdom has only recently started licensing community stations, so has only two mature broadcasting sectors.

Broadcasting in Australia developed rapidly from 1923, when the first four radio stations were licensed. It developed into a hybrid of models in the United Kingdom, where all broadcasting was government-owned (commercial radio did not start in there until the 1970s) and the United States, where there are no government-funded radio stations.

Government funded radio started in Australia when it became apparent that the private sector would not service regional areas as there was no 'business case' for doing so. In 1927, a Royal Commission into broadcasting directed the Post Master General (PMG) to take control of a number of radio stations, with a brief from government to extend radio into country areas. The PMG contracted the Australian Broadcasting Company to make programs for the service. In 1932 the Australian Broadcasting Commission (ABC) was established, funded by licence fees. Forty years later another development in Australian electronic media occurred when established services again failed to meet the needs of a section—or rather, many sections of the Australian community.

The origins of community broadcasting—or 'public' broadcasting as it was known until the ABC appropriated that term in the 1990s—is not traceable to any one single movement. During the 1960s and 1970s four distinct and unrelated threads of political, cultural and social movement, and then two more, came together to weave the fabric of community broadcasting in Australia. Educators, protestors, migrants and, oddly, classical music enthusiasts made strange bedfellows, stranger studio mates. Not long after the start of community broadcasting, Indigenous communities and people who could not use print media also wanted access to the airwaves.

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The Future of
Community Radio

David Melzer

David Melzer was living in the Otways in western Victoria when he became enthusiastic about what was then called public broadcasting. He first volunteered at 3YYR in Geelong in 1988; later he was employed as part-time manager. He went on to manage 3ZZZ in Melbourne—surviving the politics of a station that broadcasts in sixty-five languages. He and his family then schlepped to Fitzroy Crossing in Western Australia's Kimberley region, where the ABC employed him to work with the local Aboriginal board to establish an independent station. He spent ten years back in Melbourne managing 3MBS, with a stint once again in the Kimberley, managing the ABC station in Broome. He has spent many satisfying hours volunteering at community stations, including 3CR, 3RRR, 3PBS and 3YYR. He is presently Acting CBOOnline Manager, Community Broadcasting Association of Australia.



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The first identifiable group seeking access to broadcasting was classical music enthusiasts. Peaceful, relaxed and pensive, you might think—hardly the types to storm the barricades of the broadcasting regulators. But not so. In 1961, when the government closed down experimental FM stations, allocating the spectrum to television, disappointed classical music fans formed the Listener's Society of NSW and the Music Broadcasting Society of Victoria. Their objective was to establish FM radio stations to play fine music.

Educators made up the second group, with some universities lobbying for licences to broadcast educational material on air. They had witnessed the Open Universities in the United Kingdom and the educational stations in the United States. In 1961, the University of NSW was given a licence to broadcast lectures over a non-broadcast frequency.

The third prong of the movement came from ethnic communities. In the wake of post-war migration, the media lagged far behind in meeting the needs of Australians whose first language was not English. As a result of migration, the country's population had almost doubled in twenty years.

Al Grassby, later a minister in the Whitlam government, worked in agriculture in southern NSW in the 1950s. Up to 60 per cent of local people had a first language other than English. Grassby started broadcasting European music on 2RG in Griffith, interspersed with segments in Italian for local farmers on topics like 'How to spray your earth mites'. By the 1970s, Grassby was Minister for Immigration and started a fledgling SBS through small stations in Sydney and Melbourne. The burgeoning political power of migrants ensured that ethnic broadcasting burst out around the country. Brisbane hosted the first full-time ethnic community radio station, 4EB, in the late 1970s. There are now hundreds of languages spoken on community stations around the country, many catering to recent arrivals such as those from the Horn of Africa and the Middle East.

The fourth group seeking access to the media was the politically active 'Vietnam generation'. The desire for a more open media was exemplified by the draft resisters and their supporters in Melbourne and Sydney who ran pirate broadcasts. In Brisbane Springbok rugby tour demonstrations in 1971 and their coverage by the mainstream media led students to form their own radio station (ultimately 4ZZZ). As the wave of anti-Vietnam War moratorium marches spread throughout the country, in 1971 students at two Melbourne universities were considering their response to the government's crackdown on civil liberties and the right to protest. The answer was two pirate radio stations. But these were a token gesture with limited

transmission range. Monash University hosted 3PR People's Radio and Melbourne University had 3DR, Draft Resistor's radio. Several people involved with the Melbourne stations, particularly those with technical expertise, joined forces to start the Community Radio Federation (CRF) in 1974.

Each of these four groups had one thing in common. They challenged how broadcasting operated in Australia. They wanted control of the airwaves and they lobbied for it, leading to the establishment of the third tier of broadcasting in Australia.

The history of community broadcasting in Australia parallels the changing face of the country's social, political and cultural environment, changes which began in the sixties and achieved a critical momentum over the next two decades.

Historically, Indigenous communities were badly served by and portrayed in the media. Indigenous aspirations were not part of the agenda of mainstream media. The importance of maintaining Indigenous languages and cultures only emerged as a policy objective in the 1980s.

In 1980, Australia's first Aboriginal owned and controlled radio station, the Central Australian Aboriginal Media Association's (CAAMA's) 8KIN, started broadcasting, producing videos and making music clips. Not long after, some Indigenous communities in remote Australia started to adapt low-cost video, videoconferencing and radio services to suit their needs, and some, such as those at Yuendumu and Ernabella, started pirate community television stations.

With a Labor Government, elected in 1983, talking self-determination in Aboriginal policy making, and with bureaucrats like Charles Perkins and Eric Willmot driving the process, Indigenous communities were to officially gain control of media at a local level through the Broadcasting for Remote Aboriginal Communities Scheme (BRACS). With the launch of Australia's first domestic satellite in 1985, remote Indigenous communities had access to telecommunications, broadcast television and radio for the first time. The launch was seen as both a potential advance for Indigenous communications and a threat to the maintenance of an already diminished language and culture.

When the BRACS project was first funded in 1987, as a Bicentennial gift to Indigenous communities, these communities had the potential to use media to sustain their culture for the first time. BRACS gave communities the ability to produce their own video and radio programs and re-broadcast or 'embed' this material in mainstream programming by turning off main signals and transmitting their own programs locally.

Then came the blindfellas. Radio that meets the information needs of people with a print disability dates back almost as far as community radio itself. From 1975 a community group in Melbourne presented a regular weekly news and information program on 3CR.

Members were aware of the radio reading services then developing in the United States. In 1978, at Bathurst's community radio 2MCE, station manager John Martin felt that reading the local newspaper on the radio would

provide a service to people who could not access print media—not just vision impaired people, but others with literacy problems and those who could not physically handle books and newspapers. One of a young Andrew Denton’s first media experiences was reading out local newspapers on-air at 2MCE. ‘Andrew’s description of the frocks (from the social pages) was magnificent’, Martin has said.

Overtures were made to the minister for post and telecommunications for access to the broadcasting spectrum for the provision of reading services—to become known as Radio for the Print Handicapped. In July 1978 the minister permitted ‘The establishment of a special radio communications service for the blind and other people with reading difficulties’.

During the 1960s and 1970s changes in political, social and cultural horizons led to changes in the media landscape. The six very different groups who pressured government for access to and control over the airwaves were joined by others and twelve initial stations multiplied as a response to communities expressing a need for and a capability to operate their own radio and television stations.

The ABC

When community needs have become apparent, as they did in the early 1970s, Labor governments have tended to expand government services. 2JJ started when young people demanded a different approach to music than the American Top 40. When classical music enthusiasts became strident about hearing Mozart, Beethoven and Schubert on radio, the government responded with ABC Classic FM. When ethnic communities demanded more than English language programs, the government initiated what has become SBS.

Despite the degree to which our national broadcasters are cherished by people who value independent media, they are not enough. Despite the degree to which they are resourced, they cannot cover the diverse interests that have developed in this old and new country. And despite the high quality of service, they are undeniably national broadcasters; government broadcasters: no matter how much they try to dress themselves up as ‘local’ or ‘community’ radio, they are not of the community.

Recently, the ABC received a massive injection of funding to provide what they described as ‘town square’ services—community hubs where people can contribute content. But Australians generally won’t fall for that. Despite the ABC calling itself ‘local radio’, people in Cairns know when the overnight program on ‘their’ local radio is coming from Melbourne. Without ten times the funding, the ABC just cannot be local enough.

The ABC is a wonderful service, but despite its intentions, it cannot cover all media bases in this country. It should stop acting like it can and stop trying to shut out other media from public events. National broadcasters and commercial radio can’t serve the needs of remote Aboriginal communities. It can’t serve specialist music lovers. Will the ABC provide a service as basic as reading newspapers? How many people interested in working in the media do the ABC or commercial radio train each year? The number is a lot closer to zero than the hundreds trained by community broadcasting.

The Achievements

Today a significant proportion of the Australia population listen to community radio. McNair Ingenuity Research figures found in 2008 that 57 per cent of Australians over fifteen—9.5 million people—listen to community radio every month, an increase of 10 per cent since 2006. Qualitative research showed that people like community broadcasting for local news, for offering the ability to

connect or create communities and for more accurately representing our social and cultural diversity than other media.

The achievements of community broadcasting are many. Community broadcasters pioneered FM technology when no one else wanted to touch it. They have pioneered new programming formats supporting local musicians, alternative news, current affairs and information, programs in languages other than English and positive stories about Indigenous culture. Community radio, more than the ABC, provides strong support for Australian music. Musicians like Paul Kelly, John Butler, The Saints, Boys Next Door, to name a few, received their first airplay on stations like RTR in Perth, DDD in Adelaide, Edge FM in Hobart, ZZZ in Brisbane, PBS in Melbourne and SER in Sydney. Almost 100 Remote Indigenous Broadcasting Stations (the old BRACS) are operating in small communities in outback Australia. These are communities where Aboriginal people want to sustain their culture, language and sense of community.

The Challenges

For all the young people trained by SYN-FM, for all the Indigenous issues covered by the twenty-six full-time Aboriginal radio stations across the country, for all the thousands of hours of non-English programming broadcast every week in over one hundred stations across Australia and for the hundreds of local musicians supported by their local community radio stations, the sector is at a crossroads.

The immediate challenge for community broadcasting is the proliferation of platforms on which people can express themselves. The days are gone when licences issued to community stations were beacons around which people rallied in a heavily regulated media landscape. The internet can deliver New York and New Delhi for your listening pleasure. How do community broadcasters sustain engagement with their communities in the face of this deluge? If massive media empires like Fairfax and News Limited can’t work out how to maintain readership of their daily newspapers, what hope have community radio stations?

Community broadcasting has developed strategies to address these challenges. By returning to its origins, the days when a microphone, turntable and transmitter and a bit of training could turn enthusiasts into media players, community broadcasting can offer people who believe in independent media, social justice and serving their own communities, pathways to digital literacy and digital economies. The community sector has developed a vision that re-invigorates the community broadcasting role in local communities by enabling them to leverage the rollout of digital technology. Community stations can provide the facilities, training and infrastructure for people who support their ideals to connect with digital media. A level of initial funding support is needed to establish this vision.



The Future of
Community Radio

David Melzer

All politicians in the upcoming election campaign will be asked to support infrastructure development at community stations around the country to enable local communities to better develop new and engaging local programming. This will be achieved through the provision of digital production facilities and digital media training for thousands of volunteers. The outcome will be a 25 per cent increase in volunteer participation, a doubling to 2000 of the number of jobs in the sector, and a huge increase in local program making.

This federal government and its predecessor have taken active measures to diminish and erode more than forty years of development of Australian community broadcasting by over 100,000 volunteers.

This technology-based community connecting will echo the innovation and energy that characterised the early days of community broadcasting. As the sector has matured, so has its aspirations and there's little doubt community broadcasters are at their best when being creative, innovative and providing real alternatives to mainstream media.

The other challenge is the digital platform—costly beyond any community station's budget and with too few listeners to generate any income. The government legislated for community stations to be hosted by commercial radio on the new digital transmissions infrastructure in 2007. The federal government also hamstrung community radio's future on the new digital radio platform by reducing its relative broadcast power.

Community broadcasting has lost parity of spectrum—for the first time in its history. That is, community stations are no longer being offered the same licence conditions as commercial or government-funded stations. Whereas on the analogue spectrum (AM and FM) community stations have the same conditions as commercials and government-funded stations—the same allowable transmission power and the same transmission areas—the government is only allowing community stations a quarter of the spectrum

offered the other sectors on the new digital transmission platform.

Digital radio transmission has enough challenges for all players—commercial stations are yet to establish a business case and the internet is flooding listeners with stations from across the planet—without the government putting community broadcasters a mile behind the starting line by reducing its access to spectrum. Community broadcasters are least equipped to handle the steep rise in costs associated with generating new program streams on new technology.

Just as community radio stations in the capital cities of the mainland states take the giant and unknown leap into digital transmission, they are effectively being chopped off at the knees. This federal government and its predecessor have taken active measures to diminish and erode more than forty years of development of Australian community broadcasting by over 100,000 volunteers.

Why would governments want to destroy community broadcasting? Is it by simple neglect and lack of knowledge of the many benefits brought by the sector to the millions of Australians who listen to it? Or is it by design, and what could that be? Either case is unfathomable. For community broadcasting, the next couple of years will determine whether or not the decades of development will be squandered. **a**

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a small treatise on captivity

the cage hen crouched on flimsy
legs with stubby beak
she sang inside her cardboard
box and fell over when she
saw the sky.

the cage hen looked sideways
with golden eyes scratched
up mountains and rollicked
her feathers in pools of mud.

the cage hen stirred her wings
and surprised herself over the fence.
silent, with open fangs, the dog:
she ran as if she had already
lost her head.

the cage hen looks sideways
with one golden eye beats her
ragged wings inside her pen
and waits for me to let her out.

*Cage hens never see the sky. Up to 20,000 hens reside in large sheds, under artificial light: each tiny wire cage contains two to five 'debeaked' hens. Leg muscles atrophy.

Translation

Yet why not say what happened? Robert Lowell

Two days into Spring and the Wajeha video arrives.
A slim woman in a head scarf, black binds her eyes,
a black stripe covers her mouth. She paints on an easel

in a pleasant, well-lit room—and something slowly grows.
She is painting a portrait of herself: a sky blue veil,
a youthful face, blinded by black, a black stripe replaces

her mouth. She cannot sing; her brush strokes cannot release
her mind. All she sees is that she cannot speak. And then
the words: *there is no life without freedom of expression.*

*Wajeha al Huwaidar is a Saudi Arabian journalist banned from writing by her government.

Susan Fealy

STORY

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a small treatise on
captivity

Translation

Susan Fealy

Susan Fealy is a Melbourne-based clinical psychologist and poet. She won the Henry Kendall Poetry Award 2010, and her poetry has recently been published in *Etchings, Meanjin, Eureka Street* and *The Best Australian Poems 2009*.

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Memory Flags

Roger Rees

Roger Rees is Emeritus Professor in Disability Research at Flinders University's School of Medicine. 'Memory Flags' is an excerpt from *Out of Calamity*, an as yet unpublished book of true accounts about people who experience trauma, adjust and reinvent themselves.

Memory Flags

Roger Rees

A story about memories lost and recaptured, the knowledge of a lifetime held by paper and string

Seeking change in his fortune and the renewing of hope, a young man wanders among homemade flags in his ground floor suburban flat. Paper flags, some neatly cut, some torn, some white, some green, haphazardly carry names of places (*Adelaide Central Market, Rundle Mall, Glenelg, Tram Stop, Melbourne, Sydney, Tathra, Bangkok*), people (*Angela, Michael, Courtney, Phillip*), objects (*door, window, shower, chess set, drafts, sculpture, garage*), phrases (*on table, under roof, Angela's smile, forget words*) and the occasional sentence (*I am tired, I can't remember, he is happy, it's a long time, I want to leave*).

These 'memory' flags are strung randomly on thin string at head height across his dining room, lounge and part of his kitchen. They flutter below a creaking, slowly rotating fan in the spacious flat. He says that since his accident he cannot recall even the smallest words. Simple words such as *work, rest, drive, ride*. Sometimes even basic words such as *man* and *woman* are on the tip of his tongue. But his ability to speak these words, whenever appropriate, rarely occurs.

He hopes that his flags, just like the prayer flags he had seen in Nepal and Tibet, will bless and nurture his memory. Nepalese flags, printed on thin and fading muslin, flutter in Himalayan winds, seeking long life, transformation of bad to good fortune for their people and renewal of hope for the world.

The words are hidden, distorting the actions and manner of his life. He starts to forget who he is. Now he hopes that his flags, just like the prayer flags he had seen in Nepal and Tibet, will bless and nurture his memory. Nepalese flags, printed on thin and fading muslin, flutter in Himalayan winds, seeking long life, transformation of bad to good fortune for their people and renewal of hope for the world.

The man's flags renew his hope for a change in fortune.

His accident was a late night ambush by unknown assailants as he left the city casino after successful backgammon play. Robbed and left bleeding and unconscious, with a serious head injury, he has now lost his memory.

'I look the same as before, but now I just forget; sometimes I don't know where I am and words won't come,' he says. 'I'm sure I know your name because we've met before but...'

He stares at me. 'Okay,' he says. 'Tell me your name and I'll write it down, make another flag ... hang it on the line ... there's a space over there.' He points to a small gap in his line of flags.

The young man exhorts his damaged brain to 'work as well as you can'. His mind is sick with longing for the return of his memory. He suffers an endless desire for the restoration of his mental life. As despair grows he can wake in the night at the slightest sound. Then he says he gets up and switches on lights in order to look at his flags. But the beautiful fulfillment of a fluent memory is lacking; that fulfillment lies with the flags fluttering under the creaking fan.

His passion for reading his flags is exhausting. He's in a maddening situation. Every day he reads the flags, his eyes on a name, a new word, a phrase he remembered yesterday but cannot remember today. He has never read before with this degree of passion, but the hope for a return of his memory fails despite his intensity. And so he is wearing himself out. To make things worse he is out of work and his partner has left. He manages somehow to live on his disability allowance. He borrows here and there and just gets by. He is degraded, has lost his friends and his social standing. He is alone so he talks to his adored flags, exciting himself when a word, read the day before, returns with just a glance towards a flag. Then he smiles, acquiesces and takes himself to a suburban café to drink alone for an hour or two, consumed then by the temporary effectiveness of the fluttering flags.

His memory is lost almost completely, as though it never existed. How does a man survive? But he still hopes.

'Thank you, flags,' he mutters. 'Brain, work now as well as you can!' **a**

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film Tearing the Family Apart

review by Kate Harper

Animal Kingdom, David Michôd (dir.), 2010

A garish embossed-bronze wall hanging comes into view. On it a powerful lion is depicted standing atop a large stone, flanked on either side by two crouching lionesses. The film's title—*Animal Kingdom*—appears boldly through the middle. From here a slow-motion black and white montage shows CCTV-style images of people robbing banks in crudely made balaclavas. All this is done in tableaux to an ominous score by Sam Petty—a strange but affective mix of 80s synthesisers and sonorous piano organ. This is the opening title sequence to writer and director David Michôd's first feature film, and the ensuing thematic drive of *Animal Kingdom* is all there in the symbolism of the Franco Cozzo-inspired wall hanging: the King of the jungle survives by dominating the weaker members of his pride.

Animal Kingdom is a fictional tale of Darwinian survival of the fittest—not surprisingly, given its title—set amidst one Melburnian crime family in particular, the Codys. Make no mistake though: the Cody family of this story are a far cry from the economic and political power of Corleone dynasty in Coppola's *The Godfather* trilogy, the film most celebrated for marrying the term 'crime' with 'family'. We enter *Animal Kingdom*'s distinctly Melburnian criminal landscape through 17-year-old Joshua 'J' Cody, played by James Frecheville. When his mother dies of a heroin overdose, J is taken in by her estranged family and quickly embroiled in the escalating dysfunctions of this violently defensive clan. In many ways the film is a rite-of-passage narrative for J as he is forced to confront familial hierarchies and to assert his position in this 'animal kingdom'. Alongside Frecheville, Michôd has assembled a formidable ensemble cast, including Ben Mendelsohn, Guy Pearce, Joel Edgerton and Jackie Weaver.

Genre films set within the criminal milieu have been popular since cinema's infancy. From the 'gang films' of the 1930s, American genre films have explored the psychology of the criminal and the social world they inhabit, necessarily evolving in style, form and thematic emphasis to both accommodate and suggest shifting socio-historical circumstances. Our own national mythology has been especially interested in outlaw figures while our films have consistently taken place within the realm of the family—often dismembering the ideological sanctity of the

institution in the process. Thus, as an urban crime drama with the family at its centre, *Animal Kingdom* works especially well as a genre film in the Australian context as well as clearly having antecedents in American film traditions.

Following from these generic strains of influence, *Animal Kingdom* zeroes in on audiences' fascination with the intimate familial sphere that serves as a breeding ground for crime. This voyeuristic allure may be due to a paradox that arises when watching these films: the families we witness are both strange and yet familiar. That is, the values that form the foundation of every action and reaction of the crime family are the same principles aspired to by the 'ordinary family'—loyalty and love. In fact, the crime family just takes to its logical and violent extreme the traditional principles that define the family unit—closeness and dependability serving as defences against potential harm or calamity. In essence, the criminal family takes ideological idealism at its word and says, *because I love my family absolutely I will protect it by whatever means necessary*. Thus the family's number one function here is to protect the continuation of the institution itself while fearfully observing (shifting) power relations between its members.

Synonymous with the crime family in film and literature is a rigid hierarchy—everybody has a well-defined role to play within the domestic organisation. *Animal Kingdom* is no different, with Weaver playing the Cody family matriarch, affectionately known as Smurf. A 'whited sepulchre', she is no more a Smurf than Chopper Reid is a Care Bear. In fact, she is the real venom of this family and its most powerful member. In a retrospective voice-over narration early in the film J says that Smurf 'just seemed to wanna be wherever the boys were'. Protective and ruthless, we soon realise that she will do whatever it takes to protect her 'boys'. Weaver says Smurf 'bred these three psychopath sons', and indeed the film quite clearly suggests that she is responsible for the Cody boys' criminal behaviour. Her role here at the epicentre of a violent horde of men brings to mind another Australian film about a dangerous familial tribe—Rowan Woods' terrifying *The Boys*, of 1998.

Animal Kingdom thematically evokes this earlier film. Both dramatise the snowball effects of a masculine pack-mentality within families that are marked by absent fathers and burdened mothers. In fact, while watching *Animal Kingdom* it feels as if the ineffectual mother of Woods' film (played by Lynette Curran) has finally said, 'I'm tired of being the punching bag. I'm doing the punching from now on'. Unlike the powerless mother of the Sprague men in *The Boys*, Smurf guides the violent direction of her family and implicitly encourages her sons' excess of masculine energy, while never allowing them to dominate her. All this is done in such a sickly-sweet, predatory sort of way that she is basically a less histrionic version of the controlling Oedipal mother, so adored in horror films as a figure of masculine reproach since Norman Bates uttered, 'mother ... isn't quite herself today'.

Positioned above Smurf—in name only—is eldest son and patriarch of this family, Andrew, appropriately nicknamed 'Pope' and astonishingly realised by Mendelsohn. Physically Mendelsohn has undergone a rather wonderful transformation in the last five years: his face and body have come to express what we might call an aesthetic of hard-knocks. Gone is the approachable boyishness that made him so adorable as Lewis in *Cosi*; his face now appears as though he dedicated years to drowning that former cub in bottles of scotch. All this is to say that Mendelsohn's physicality is a perfect match for the hardened and ageing character of Pope. Indeed, Michôd says he wrote 'the character of Pope with Ben Mendelsohn in mind because I knew that Pope needed to be the

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Tearing the Family Apart

Kate Harper


Kate Harper completed a BA with Honours in Cinema Studies at the University of Melbourne and is now working as a freelance writer.

charismatic alpha male of this particular family'. In one scene notable for its affective silence and inaction, Pope stares out through heroin-soaked eyes, bands of wrinkles laddering his neck, appearing at once entirely depleted and utterly resolved, like one of Darwin's ancient turtles. Pope's embodiment of a fatigued masculine dominance, which refuses to give up on an increasingly fatal brand of 'family values', is written all over his face.

Amidst the seething danger, *Animal Kingdom* is punctuated by genuinely funny moments that expose the everyday banalities, worries and foibles of this violent horde. For instance, when J goes to leave a public toilet without first washing his hands, Pope's best-friend and crime buddy, 'Baz' (played by Edgerton), proceeds to dish-out a lesson on thorough bathroom hygiene—'get some soap ... work it into a lather ...'—as he monitors J's every move. The irony that Baz expects rigorous personal hygiene to be maintained while they are all morally covered in shit, so to speak, is laugh-out-loud hilarious. Moments like this in *Animal Kingdom* not only provide tonal light and shade but also assist in creating more dynamic characters. In fact, *Animal Kingdom* makes a point of individuating its many characters so that, even though we may never like them, we take a keen interest in what happens to them.

Michôd has said that he used a large cast to signify 'the way in which the criminal world filters through regular society and brushes against us constantly, even though we don't realise it'. In practice, however, this sense of criminal activity occurring within the everyday, rather than in exotic locales discrete from the world we live in, is achieved mainly through interactions between characters in space. Michôd's characters inhabit a wide variety of locales across Melbourne—Footscray, Richmond, Ivanhoe, the corner of Little Collins and Exhibition streets, to name only a few. This mobility makes them appear ordinary in one sense,

while at the same time suggesting that threat of violent crime they embody is dispersed out of the purely domestic sphere and into the streets. Unlike *The Boys*, in which the violence was claustrophobically contained to one house before devastatingly spilling out, *Animal Kingdom* constantly suggests that the Codys are 'among us'.

Ultimately, *Animal Kingdom* is a genre film in which every element of the production has been carefully thought through and is forcefully delivered. To be sure, Michôd has taken his time considering and crafting the project, spending seven years in creative utero while he worked for industry magazine *Inside Film* (IF). All this peripheral toil by Michôd has effected a compelling film, obviously made by someone with an intimate knowledge of the workings of the Australian film industry and the difficulties in enticing local audiences to see local productions. *Animal Kingdom*, however, will presumably have few problems finding a local audience—it is already an international success, having won the Grand Jury Prize at the Sundance Film Festival amid rave reviews. And although the television series *Underbelly*, set amidst Melbourne's 'gangland wars', is far more fetishistic in style and character, its popularity in Australia will no doubt have a positive impact on *Animal Kingdom*'s spectatorial success. Fingers crossed. 

book Inspired Criticism

review by Sean Cubitt

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Inspired Criticism

Sean Cubitt

Sean Cubitt is Director of the Media and Communications Program at the University of Melbourne.



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Jodi Dean, *Democracy and Other Neo-liberal Fantasies: Communicative Capitalism and Left Politics* (Duke University Press, Durham, 2009)

Unlike so many books of political theory, Jodi Dean's is 90 per cent inspiration and 10 per cent perspiration, and the perspiration is a result of frustration rather than plodding prose (never a problem in the book). But let's start with the inspiration. *Democracy and Other Neo-liberal Fantasies* is inspiring because it calls for action on a new terrain. The critique of democracy was historically a prerogative of the Right, the Matthew Arnolds and T. S. Eliots terrified of the vulgar mob and the great unwashed, shoring up their decaying regimes with promises of elite delights of literature

and civilisation. But in Dean's account, the claim to democracy has become a hallmark of neo-liberal imperialism, at home and abroad, especially in the United States where she lives, works and pursues her politics.

Though perpetually blind in one eye (the House of Saud never seems to appear among the undemocratic regimes), the House of Bush has made a calling card of the idea of democracy. It has brought the benefits of democracy to Iraq which, in March 2010, President Obama could proudly boast of as being the only Middle-Eastern Islamic country with free and fair elections (you can only wonder what has been achieved in Afghanistan, and whether Pakistan is excluded on purely geographical principles). The fact that Obama is the boaster points to the central thesis of Dean's book: that democracy, though entirely a construct of the Right, has become the cry of the Left as well. As a result, she argues, the Left are perpetually weakened by a 'me too' political line which leaves them perpetually running behind the hegemonic principles of neo-liberalism.

The argument is subtle. Contemporary capital presents itself as a market where everything is on offer, and where the governing principle is choice. Democratic politics has followed suit, presenting us with limitless opportunities to choose between competing products. The popularity of what we have come to know as the Centre is proof that the parties only offer what we want: the little parties of the Extreme are unpopular because only insignificant numbers of punters choose them. But Dean is concerned with another thesis: that the political is 'the terrain upon which claims to universality are raised and defended'. The problem of what she designates 'communicative capitalism' is that what has become universal is communication, accompanied by a rhetoric of universal access which, however, far from securing radical democracy, supports and constantly builds the infrastructure of an economic regime which, she contends, consistently steers money and power into the hands of a tiny minority while blasting the global poor and the planet itself into misery.

So, she asks, what happens if instead of a world of universal debate and discussion, we have a world where we always already doubt the words of governments and advertisers? In a brilliant analysis of 9/11 conspiracy theories, Dean makes the case that we are in such a position. We know what we know *already*—but our certainty (that the US government destroyed the Twin Towers, for example) is itself unstable, not to say unhinged. We thought that the triumph of the 18th-century republics was a triumph of transparency: openness today is instead the driver of ever more pervasive instruments of communicative capitalism. Characterised by the imperative, now deep-seated in every unconscious, to enjoy—to consume, to have fun, to have great sex and great holidays and wonderful kids and loving friends—communicative capitalism veers between a language of facts that speak for themselves (and cannot be disputed) and a language of doubt so profound it veers towards the psychotic. 'Networked communication technologies', Dean concludes, 'materialize democracy as a political form that formats political energies as communicative engagements'. We sign and forward instant online petitions when we could be actively engaged in the hard world of political struggle.

The world turns upside down. Where the doctrine of Friedmanite economics was to expand the market and shrink the state, today we have the contradictory phenomenon of the strong neo-liberal state. The two-way flow of networks implies not only a right to speak but an obligation to be heard—by anyone, especially the automated surveillance systems of paranoid security apparatuses and commercial databases: the state defended against its citizens, corporations against their customers.

There is only room to sketch some of Dean's themes; the abbreviated chapter titles running as crossheads on the pages give a sense of what she is about in this analysis: Technology, Free Trade, Democracy, Resolve, Ethics, and Certainty. A finely wrought argument challenges the Left's belief (associated with political philosopher Judith Butler) that certainty is a characteristic of tyranny. Dean argues that condemning and denouncing don't need to come from religious conviction: they are methods we might (but fail to) use to start off ethical and political debate, debate that also involves our own racisms, bigotries and complicities, and which concerns in the last analysis the object of politics. What constitutes the good life? What future do we want? The breadth, originality and incisive passion of her arguments are a joy to read, and an inspiration to take up progressive politics again.

The 10 per cent frustration arises, for an Australian reader, from the understandably US-centred theme of the book. Dean gives short shrift to the reconceptualisation of democracy as conflict in recent European thought (Rancière, Mouffe); avoids the radical ethics emerging in the wake of Hannah Arendt (Baudrillard's late work *The Transparency of Evil*, Badiou's *Ethics: An Essay on the Understanding of Evil*); and attributes near-universality to neo-liberal capitalism against the evidence of, among other things, the anti-globalisation and ecological movements and their articulations with the hacker underground. Instead she hitches her wagon to the admittedly fascinating but nonetheless unworldly and over-generalised psychoanalytic politics of Žižek. But even so, this is a rattling good yarn, one that shivers the timbers and inspires this reader at least to cut loose the anchor and set sail for new horizons. **a**

book **A Nation in Freefall**

review by Gillian Terzis

Joseph E. Stiglitz, *Freefall: America, Free Markets, and the Sinking of the World Economy* (W. W. Norton & Company, New York, 2010)

In the midst of the crisis no one (apparently) saw coming, Chicago school disciple Robert Lucas made a stunning declaration: that perhaps we are all 'Keynesians in a foxhole'. Stunning, of course, because it was a sentiment that was anathema to the neoclassical nostrums of efficient and self-

correcting markets—the very assumptions that have seemingly led us to the economic foxhole we're in. Conservative economists hold an inexplicable degree of faith in markets to yield desirable economic outcomes, dismissing government intervention as inept and inefficient. But when the markets were broken—with the once-mighty United States staring into an economic abyss—the clarion call to arms was clear. Urgent reform was needed.

The time was ripe for Joseph Stiglitz—Nobel Prize-winning economist and former chief economist at the World Bank—to showcase his impeccable neo-Keynesian credentials in his latest tome, *Freefall: America, Free Markets, and the Sinking of the World Economy*. One of the leaders of the vanguard against market fundamentalism and its uncritical deference to mathematical

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Inspired Criticism

Sean Cubitt

modelling and rationality, it is unsurprising that he lobs a heavy-handed (but extremely articulate) *J'accuse* at the usual suspects: Wall Street, The Fed and the flawed responses enacted by both Republican and Democrat administrations. Stiglitz doesn't pull any punches with his grim assessment of America's path to recovery: it will be slow, marred by a 'larger legacy of debt ... and more vulnerable to another crisis'. Predictably, an attempt to undertake significant financial-sector reform will inevitably be thwarted by the corporate elephant in the Congress room. Thus far, his predictions have proved correct.

The global financial crisis, described by Stiglitz as the Great American Robbery, certainly makes for a compelling narrative. Bankers were cast as the primary villain, with collateralised debt obligations as their weapon of choice. Poorly informed consumers didn't stand a chance. But predatory lending practices didn't just happen overnight. The problems were part of the flawed incentives that induce bankers to engage in these practices. Indeed, one of Stiglitz's catchphrases in *Freefall* is 'incentives matter'. Of particular pertinence is the presence of those institutions deemed 'too big to fail'; the ones whose failures would wreak utter catastrophe on the economy. Stiglitz makes a convincing argument that because these firms are guaranteed survival by taxpayers, there is a greater incentive for these firms to engage in high-risk, high-reward activities. And therein lies the problem: capital gains are privatised but the losses are socialised. These examples of moral hazard stem from information asymmetries in financial markets, which is precisely why Stiglitz argues for 're-regulation' and a greater emphasis on the transparency of financial information. The reason why such high-risk behaviour had escaped the attention of regulators was because of a peculiar conflict of interest: federal banking regulators in the United States were paid by the very banks they are supposed to regulate. Faced with declining revenue, some regulators began to market themselves as more lax than others. Without those checks and balances, Stiglitz figured it was only a matter of time before the US brand of unbridled capitalism devoured itself. The United States' economic dynamism was reduced to no more than a myth, propagated by an unsustainable housing bubble and a debt-inducing consumption binge.

Stiglitz is quick to point out that no economy is ever beyond repair, but economic recovery is contingent upon the actions of the Obama administration. A lengthy chapter entitled 'A Flawed Response' details Stiglitz's thoughts on the \$800b stimulus package, in which he criticises the size and design of the package. Not only does he believe it was too small (he suggests \$1 trillion over two years), but he believes there is too much money directed at tax cuts and corporate welfare masquerading as 'investment', when there should have been greater compensation packages for working and middle-class families and struggling state governments. Stiglitz is equally dismissive of Obama's appointment of Larry Summers (chief economic advisor) and Timothy Geithner (treasury secretary), as illustrated in this pointed quip: 'President Obama, who had campaigned on the promise of "Change You Can Believe In"', only slightly rearranged the deck chairs on the Titanic.'

The fact that Summers has strong ties to Wall Street and was one of the architects of the deregulation of derivative markets under the Clinton administration could be something of a sore point for Stiglitz. But these

appointments, as Stiglitz points out, are not consistent with the objective of achieving radical reform. With these two economists at the helm—in addition to Obama's moderate sensibilities—a return to corporatism is imminent. This, however, is not the reform Stiglitz is after.

Stiglitz offers a range of policy suggestions for economic reform; some more feasible than others. His suggestion to break up big banks, regulate derivatives and discourage the securitisation of mortgages would be met with an enthusiastic public response, particularly given the antipathy directed toward Wall Street and the big banks. However, Stiglitz begins to drift away from solid economic argument to improbable wishful thinking. This is encapsulated in his call for a new, global reserve system with a neutral currency—an idea that seems a logistical impossibility. His plea for a more progressive taxation system is well-intentioned, but unlikely to win broad public or even party support. At one point, Stiglitz strays into dangerously self-righteous territory when comparing Bhutan's notion of gross national happiness with the United States' focus on gross domestic product, and the residual 'moral deficit' that stems from acting in self-interest. However, it is a small blemish that, thankfully, doesn't detract too much from the rest of *Freefall's* nuanced arguments.

There is no doubt Stiglitz has a gift for demystifying the dismal science, providing trenchant analysis that is fuelled by a strong sense of conviction. His arguments are consistently backed up by rigorous research, and the tone is spirited rather than snarky. Indeed, one feels that Stiglitz's arguments are somewhat constrained by his doctrinaire approach to Keynesianism, as *Freefall* could have provided the opportunity for Stiglitz to formulate new ideas in economic thought. Nevertheless, *Freefall* is an intelligent cautionary tale against unfettered markets and provides a considered evaluation of the challenges facing developed economies in the post-GFC era. **a**

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A Nation in Freefall

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06-07 2010

No 106

Culture, Nihilism and the Market

Simon Cooper

Peter Carey's recent comments about the fate of books and reading on Q&A and at the Sydney Writers' festival provoked an enormous amount of vitriol on the part of right-wing pundits across the country. This in itself marked a shift. Not so long ago one would have expected claims about the importance of 'high culture' to have been mocked by elements of the postmodernist Left. Instead Carey's suggestions that people read less than they used to, that the novel was in crisis, and that reading habits were dumbed-down, were dismissed as elitist and arrogant by the Right. Andrew Bolt and Miranda Devine had a go at Carey but Gerard Henderson went furthest arguing that as well as being a snob Carey was simply wrong. More people were reading than ever. His evidence? Literacy rates were rising.

The argument that as long as people *can* read it doesn't matter *what* they read, or indeed how much they read, marks a shift in how we understand knowledge. The intrinsic value of knowledge is increasingly questioned; instead the value of knowledge is framed in market terms: as a set of skills that allow greater varieties of consumption. An oft-repeated claim by the Right in the culture wars has been how the perceived relativism of cultural studies and postmodernism undermines the values that underpin our civilisation. Yet once we shed the link between knowledge and a sense of value outside of the market we inevitably move towards nihilism.

However it's not merely the right-wing commentariat that is hampered by questions of cultural value. One only has to look at the culture of book reviewing, typically a domain of the liberal-Left, to see the collapse of culture into the commodity. Book reviews in newspapers have disappeared or shrunk to text boxes that replicate the book-jacket blurb. Programs like the *First Tuesday Book Club* are framed by the dictates of the market, the choice of books governed by publishers' lists of latest releases, or touring writers promoting their latest work. The discussion of the book's importance is confined to whether the reviewer enjoyed it; the decision to exclude academics as potential reviewers, replacing them with media celebrities, largely prohibits any extended examination of what might distinguish a good book from a mediocre one. While different in tone to the right-wing punditry attacking Carey, much of what passes for book culture confirms that reading is now little more than a question of managed consumption.

Henderson's implication that the *content* of knowledge is irrelevant, and that what counts is the capacity to consume knowledge, goes beyond debates about the novel, extending to the university. Universities are expected to produce knowledge of primarily commercial value, while teaching is directed at the student-consumer whose knowledge 'outcomes' include an identifiable 'skill set' at the end of their degree. Measurement schemes have been developed to rank

knowledge, to create an artificial regime where scholars compete with each other. That this has distorted the notion of what makes worthwhile knowledge has been much commented upon, and is elsewhere in this issue of *Arena Magazine*. Yet while destructive, such auditing schemes at least allowed scholars to find some way to legitimise what they were doing in an increasingly hostile environment. Now there are signs that even these auditing schemes may be unable to defend knowledge against the nihilism of the market.

The case of the philosophy department at Middlesex University in the United Kingdom seems on the face of it nothing out of the ordinary. In April it was announced that the department would be closed. Why? Because the philosophy department at Middlesex was *doing everything right*, according to all of the measurement schemes put in place by government. Student numbers were healthy; the department's Masters Program was the largest of its kind. More importantly the department had consistently scored highly in all the research ranking exercises over the last two decades—in 2008 Middlesex philosophy was the highest-rated subject of its kind in the country. Home of the influential journal *Radical Philosophy*, the department had become an important conduit for the public discussion of difficult and challenging ideas, staging events at places like the Tate Gallery.

For Middlesex's Dean of Arts and Sciences, the measurement criteria amounted to nothing; the department would close because it made 'no measurable contribution' to the university. What makes this case so significant is that it reveals the inevitable result of tying knowledge to the market. Despite meeting all of the criteria for scholarly value, impact, value to the community or institutional reputation, the only real 'contribution' is financial. Knowledge is only valuable if it can make money.

This final stage, starkly revealed through the Middlesex case, has come about rapidly. Not so long ago it was inconceivable to imagine the university without a philosophy department. And while knowledge has long had a potential commercial value, this existed alongside the understanding that knowledge fostered other values—self-understanding, cultural interpretation, social critique. The humanities are cheap to run, their importance, if often marginalised, was always acknowledged. We are now facing a situation where their necessity is openly questioned. Like novels, which are deemed redundant in an age of mega-literacy, the significance of the humanities recedes, replaced by a general commitment to intellectual training.

This warped understanding of knowledge clearly endangers figures at one end of the spectrum—novelists and academics—but it's worth noting how the students have been similarly transformed. The student as consumer—once a contestable notion—has become so normalised that universities issue student identity cards that also function as credit cards. The culture of risk-avoidance now dominates teaching—classes have to be narrowly tied to assessment criteria, knowledge has to be imparted as transparently as possible. The 'student experience' is subject to constant monitoring, with students

encouraged to rate subjects and teachers, fill in exit surveys and so on. The results of all this may perhaps make teaching practices more accountable, but it has created an oddly sterile environment for learning. The corporate university's emphasis on student sovereignty dictates that knowledge must be transferred as transparently and efficiently as possible. Yet the philosophical tradition now under threat has always held that genuine knowledge—from Socrates to Nietzsche to Badiou—is what challenges, unsettles, even hurts; it is what confronts us that allows us to develop. Surely part of the cultural importance of the university is the transformative possibilities open to the student—where knowledge allows assumptions to be questioned and the self to be overcome and provides a different place from which to reflect—and much of this is checked in an effort to maximise the 'student experience'.

Any attempt to make knowledge safe and easily consumed is fraught with difficulty. The reproduction of culture has always been a highly charged and unruly process. Mentor—student relations always involve more than the transfer of mere intellectual content, as a whole series of investments, projections and challenges develop between student and teacher. Power imbalances have always occurred and laws appropriately drafted to prevent their excesses. However, even here there are signs of a shift in understanding. The university I work for recently issued a set of draft guidelines concerning appropriate staff—student relations. Alongside the entirely appropriate remarks about possible abuses of power was a radically expanded list of what constitutes 'inappropriate behaviour'. Staff should avoid socialising with students, meeting with students outside of the university, disclosing any personal details to students, contacting students on social networking sites, giving students personal contact details and so on. No distinction is made between undergraduate and postgraduate students. Having talked to people about these proposed guidelines, the general consensus is that it would actually rule out what many remember about their 'student experience', especially at graduate level. The whole document is framed by a need to avoid all situations that could lead to risk, rather than regulate against abusive conduct.

Policies like this evoke a pre-emptive morality, where under the guise of protecting staff and students from possible abuse, a whole series of previously acceptable forms of activity are ruled illegitimate. Reminiscent of Australia's forthcoming net-filter, policies such as this reveal a paternalist distrust of its citizens. This move towards policies that shield us in advance from potentially problematic encounters reveals a new phase in our culture where the 'freedoms' of the market are only available alongside the management of populations towards a risk-free environment. One can only hope that the universities—traditional defenders of knowledge, of freedom and autonomy, of culture *and* of risk—might be able to resist these assaults now that the final mask of the knowledge economy has been removed to reveal the barbarism underneath. **a**



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ISSN 1039-1010 indexed and abstracted in the Bibliography of the Social Sciences.