

16 June 2022

Dear IPA Members

This is my last letter to you as Executive Director of the Institute of Public Affairs.

As you know in a few weeks' time on 30 June, I finish my term as Executive Director after seventeen wonderful years in the role. My successor is Scott Hargreaves and he'll be outstanding. Scott joined the IPA as a member in 1989 and since 2015 he's been a key member of the staff of the IPA, including as editor of the *IPA Review* for the last five years. Scott will stay true to the mission of the IPA.

I'm very much looking forward to continuing working with the IPA full-time in my role as a Senior Fellow at our newly established Centre for the Australian Way of Life. It's been an incredible privilege to have led the IPA over such a time of growth and success and I would now like to devote myself to research and writing, and in particular to finishing my book on George Orwell. I don't believe the path to *Nineteen Eighty-Four* is inevitable, but it will be if we don't take heed of what is happening around us.

My End of Financial Year letter to you has two purposes. The first is to ask you to consider making a tax deductible donation.

The IPA relies entirely on the voluntary financial support of its members. We don't seek or receive any government support – and that's the way we like it and that is one of our greatest strengths. The IPA is independent. Another source of the IPA's strength is the support we receive from individuals and families. We receive almost no corporate funding from public companies. This hasn't always been the case.

When I started at the IPA in 2005 our revenue was about one-tenth of what it is now, we had cash reserves of \$160,000 and 85% of our income was from public companies. Last year our revenue was \$6.35 million and cash reserves of \$4.1 million. The total financial contribution to the IPA from public companies last year was less than \$100,000.

The IPA's growth has come about not in spite of our lack of corporate funding but because of it. Corporations don't care about freedom – people do. (In fact, increasingly corporations don't just not care about freedom they're hostile to it. 'Woke' corporations embrace every sort of 'diversity' except diversity of opinion. In this they're just like our 'woke' universities. It's hard to think of a single business leader in a public company in Australia who in the last few years has said something important or noteworthy about the future of the country.) If we're

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offered corporate funding as we are from time to time, the first thing we consider is whether to accept such funding is consistent with our mission and whether it would compromise our work. More often than not when we're offered corporate funding, we refuse it.

Usually, the second purpose of my End of Financial Year letter is to share with you my thoughts on the twelve months just gone and my ambitions for the year ahead. But as this is my final letter as Executive Director and as you've already received a note from Chetna Mahadik here at the IPA a few weeks ago about the great work of Dr Jennifer Marohasy, Daniel Wild, and Dr Bella d'Abrera, I thought I might do something a little different.

What I thought I'd do is reflect on some of the conclusions I've drawn over my time as Executive Director and explain how they've influenced the work of the IPA and how they will continue to do so. I hope that by doing this I'll be able to demonstrate to you why you should continue to support the IPA and why you should make a tax deductible donation to our 2022 IPA End of Financial Year Appeal.

There are five conclusions. There's nothing particularly special about that number. I sat down to write the list and when I finished there were five of them. One point I should make is that while these lessons are heavily influenced by my experiences at the IPA (seventeen years), I've also drawn on my years working at places other than the IPA (fifteen years) – including my time working as a political adviser for education ministers in both the Kennett government in Victoria and in the Howard government in Canberra; as a lawyer (very briefly – I found politics and policy more interesting); as a corporate affairs manager in Melbourne and London for Rio Tinto (one of those 'woke' corporations I was just complaining about!); as a lecturer in politics at the University of Melbourne (I think I was only one of two staff members out of about twenty people in the department who didn't vote Green – everyone was nice to me because someone like me was so unusual to them); and then finally as Executive Director of the Liberal Party's think tank, the Menzies Research Centre for two years.

Here are my five conclusions:

1. Principles matter

I could have used instead words like 'ideas', 'philosophy', or even 'ideology' but the word 'principles' captures the importance of working to some fundamental and unchanging beliefs. The IPA is absolutely uncompromising about our principles and they've been embedded in everything we've done since we were founded in 1943. Our objective then as it is now is 'to further the individual, social, political and economic freedom of the Australian people.'

Individuals and organisations that achieve great things operate to a set of principles. Being 'pragmatic' or 'practical' or just doing 'whatever works' is a recipe for getting by, but it doesn't lead to success. 'Pragmatic' politicians rarely achieve much of significance.

When Jordan Peterson was in Australia on his first visit here in 2018, I had the opportunity to have a private meeting with him together with four or five other people. After a general discussion about how he liked the country and how his visit was going he asked whether we had any questions and we went around the table and each of us asked him a question.

Of course, I had dozens of questions for him, but I went with one that I'd been thinking about for a few days beforehand because earlier in the week I'd spoken at an IPA Generation

Liberty event at Monash University in Melbourne. So when my turn came, I asked Peterson 'why do you think you are so popular with young people?'

His reply was, and these are not his exact words but they're pretty close because I remember them quite clearly, 'Because I take ideas seriously and I'm serious about my principles and I'm not flippant about what I believe. Life is serious – so take it seriously and take what you believe in seriously. That's my message to everyone – but it strikes a chord with young people because adults spend their time making excuses for young people rather than telling them to be serious.'

Not surrendering your principles is as important as having principles in the first place. Brendan O'Neill puts it very nicely. 'If anyone says, "I believe in freedom of speech, but..." you should disregard all the words before the 'but' – they obviously don't believe in the principle of freedom of speech.'

When scientific and education institutions gave up on the principle that evidence must be questioned and tested, they overturned half a millennium of intellectual progress. The chapter by Clive James in the IPA's book *Climate Change: The Facts 2017* makes this point.

The theory of climate change has always been manifestly unfalsifiable, but there are few science pundits in the mass media who couldn't tell Karl Popper from Mary Poppins. More startling than their ignorance, however, is their defiance of logic.

You can see how a bunch of grant-dependent climate scientists might go on saying that there was never a Medieval Warm Period even after it has been pointed out to them that any old corpse dug up from the permafrost could never have been buried in it.

But how can a bunch of supposedly enlightened writers go on saying that? Their answer, if pressed, is usually to say that the question is too elementary to be considered.

Alarmists have always profited from their insistence that climate change is such a complex issue that no 'science denier' can have an opinion about it worth hearing.

For most areas of science such an insistence would be true. But this particular area has a knack of raising questions that get more and more complicated in the absence of an answer to the elementary ones.

Any politician with principles would surely keep asking those 'elementary questions' until they receive an answer.

2. 'If you leave a white post alone it will soon be a black post.'

This is a quote you've heard me use before. It's by G.K. Chesterton from his 1908 book, *Orthodoxy*, where he discusses the need to be vigilant against the challenges to liberty.

Lesson one makes clear we must always fight and re-fight the battle for our freedoms, and this lesson explains that we must do so because things never stay the same. To come back to the freedom of speech example, the original justification for censorship was that those speaking freely threatened the established religious order. Then government used the excuse that freedom of speech threatened the political order. Now these days the government

justifies censorship so that people don't have their feelings hurt.

This is the full quotation:

If you leave a thing alone you leave it to a torrent of change. If you leave a white post alone it will soon be a black post. If you particularly want it to be white you must be always painting it again; that is, you must be always having a revolution. Briefly, if you want the old white post you must have a new white post.

To me this perfectly captures what happens if you take our freedoms and our way of life for granted. Sometimes I feel as if here in Australia when it comes to things like our education system and our public culture, we stopped painting our posts a long time ago.

We assumed that it was always going to be self-evident that Australia is a successful liberal democracy and so we eventually stopped talking about the achievements of our history and we stopped passing on that story of success to the next generation. And now we are seeing the results.

In March, the IPA commissioned a survey of 1,000 people and we asked them 'If Australia was in the same position as Ukraine is now, would you stay and fight, or leave the country?' 46% of people said they'd stay and fight, 28% said they'd leave, and 26% didn't know. That in itself is a worrying result.

Worse was what young people said. Of those aged between 18 and 24, 32% said they'd stay and fight, 40% said they'd leave the country, and 28% didn't know. You simply can't build a future if that's how young people in Australia today think. This is what decades of relentless attacks on Australia and our history and our values has produced.

That's why as part of our new Centre for the Australian Way of Life research program at the IPA we published 'One & Free - How Australia Was Made'. It's a short guide to the ten key events and people that created our democracy and that as Australians we should be proud of. We've printed 10,000 copies that we'll put into the hands of young people around the country.

The first event we've listed in 'One & Free' is the 1967 Referendum on racial equality at which 91% of Australians voted 'Yes' to remove two parts of the Constitution that discriminated against indigenous Australians.

The suggestion that more than half a century later we should put back into the Constitution a 'voice' that would permanently enshrine racial difference reveals how easily principles of racial equality can be abandoned.

When the 'voice' was first mentioned a few years ago I wrote this – 'Race has no place in the Constitution. Martin Luther King Jr. didn't stand on the steps at the Lincoln Memorial in Washington in August 1963 and say he wanted his children to be treated differently from white children. What he called for was 'freedom and equality'.

In 'One & Free' we talk about how the Eureka Stockade helped enshrine the right to vote for colonial parliaments in Australia – long before any such right was recognised in Europe. Mark Twain who visited Ballarat in 1895 wrote about the Eureka Stockade – 'It was a revolution – small in size, but great politically; it was a strike for liberty, a struggle for

principle, a stand against injustice and oppression...It is another instance of a victory won by a lost battle.' Australia's democracy is not an accident and it's not the product of 'luck'.

A few sentences after Chesterton talks about white and black posts he says something quite perceptive. He points out that we tend to assume the threats to liberty will be of a kind that we'll be familiar with and that we'll know how to combat. But, he says it's more often 'new tyrannies' that challenge 'public liberties' and he gives the example of the role of the press. A free press is vital in a free society, but the press can just as easily as government suppress freedom of speech with the result that 'We have censorship by the press.'

3. Support bravery

It's people that put principles into action.

IPA members tell me how proud they are that the IPA has been able to help individuals who have stood up for their principles. What happened to Andrew Bolt, Calum Thwaites, Bill Leak, Zoe Buhler, and Peter Ridd should never happen to any Australian.

Andrew Bolt and Bill Leak suffered under Section 18C of the Racial Discrimination Act because they were doing their job. But Calum Thwaites was just a university student at the Queensland University of Technology when in 2013 he walked into an empty computer laboratory on the campus that had a sign on the front door 'Indigenous-only Lab'. After he was asked to leave because he wasn't indigenous, Thwaites was investigated in secret for eighteen months by the Human Rights Commission for a series of social media posts that he didn't make and which he knew nothing about. Zoe Buhler was handcuffed and arrested in her living room in front of her children because she advertised on her Facebook page a protest against Dan Andrews' lockdown laws.

And Peter Ridd was sacked as a professor at James Cook University simply for questioning the evidence upon which were built the claims that climate change was causing catastrophic damage to the Great Barrier Reef. With the help of the IPA, Peter raised more than \$1.4 million from more than 5,600 donors to pay for the three court cases over two and a half years that he fought to get his job back.

The university's legal fees were paid by taxpayers. Ultimately Peter lost in the High Court, but there's not a single IPA member I've spoken to who donated to Peter's campaign who begrudges their donation. They're glad that we fought and we supported a brave Australian. And I am thrilled that Peter continues his commitment to integrity in science as an Adjunct Fellow leading the Project for Real Science at the IPA.

In June 2011, at the conclusion of Andrew Bolt's trial in the Federal Court but before the judgment was handed down, the IPA held a public event for IPA members to show their support for Andrew and for freedom of speech.

More than 500 IPA members attended and it was sold-out. The following day on Tuesday, 21 June *The Australian* newspaper wrote an editorial about the event:

Debate is fuel for democracy

There should be nothing remarkable in the defence mounted last night by union leader

Paul Howes of the Melbourne-based columnist and television show host Andrew Bolt. The Australian Workers Union national secretary stated the blinding obvious when he said he might not agree with Bolt's views but he would oppose any moves to shut him up.

It is a mark of how modern life has eroded the great Australian tradition of a fair go for any and every opinion that the Institute of Public Affairs felt the need to run a forum on free speech. In recent years, there has been an unhealthy move to shut down the debate that is bread of life for liberal democracy.

Sections of the Fairfax press, along with many broadcasters at the ABC, appear to think their role is to be gatekeepers, filtering out any opinions that do not coincide with their world view. Closing down debate disenfranchises voters and threatens democracy.

As the editorial noted, one of the speakers that night was Paul Howes, a member of the Labor Party. Since that editorial more than a decade ago, 'the great Australian tradition of a fair go for any and every opinion' has been eroded even further. It's been replaced by 'cancel culture'. To this day, James Cook University has not investigated a single one of the issues raised by Peter Ridd about the quality of scientific evidence upon which the Coalition government based its decision to spend \$1 billion to 'save' the Great Barrier Reef. Peter was simply cancelled (sacked) by the university.

4. Sometimes it's enough to be Lindisfarne

One of the things many IPA members say to me about the IPA is that sometimes it seems as though the IPA is the only organisation willing to speak up. I think that's true and that was certainly the case during the two years of the Covid lockdowns. And it's true about so many other issues, perhaps most notably on climate change.

I've had friends ask me why the IPA 'keeps going on about the National Curriculum' when 'no-one else seems to have a problem with it' – and I answer 'that's because no-one else has bothered to read it.'

It can be lonely at times – especially when you realise that to bring about the positive change you're seeking might be years away. I was talking to an IPA member about this earlier this year, and specifically we were discussing the likelihood of Section 18C being abolished – and we agreed the chances of that happening under either a Morrison or Albanese government were between nought and zero – but that member said to me 'even if it doesn't happen today or tomorrow or next year the most important thing, and the reason I belong to the IPA is because I know you're never going to give up on it and you're going to keep the flame burning amid the mayhem around you.'

That got me thinking about Lindisfarne. I've never been there but I've read about it. It's an island off the northeast coast of England, roughly halfway between Edinburgh and Newcastle. It's not big – it's around 1,000 acres and it's just over a kilometre from the mainland.

At low tide you can walk to it across sand and mudflats. During the Dark Ages, Lindisfarne was the site of a famous monastery and library. As the civilisation of Roman Britain collapsed and the country descended into the anarchy of competing warlords, Lindisfarne

kept the flame of learning and literacy alight.

5. **'You may have to fight a battle more than once to win it.'**

This is one of Margaret Thatcher's most famous quotes, but as so often happens with famous quotes there's no evidence that this is the exact words, although there's many instances of her saying something very similar. A variation of this as it applies to politics – 'There are no final victories in politics' Thatcher is recorded as saying on numerous occasions.

I think about this quote from Margaret Thatcher every time I go on the media to talk about freedom of speech. For me the fight for freedom of speech is the single most important fight there is. Without freedom of speech, there is no freedom of thought and no freedom of religion. In 1644 in his classic defence of freedom of speech John Milton wrote – 'Give me the liberty to know, to utter, and to argue freely according to conscience, above all liberties', and in 1695 press censorship was abolished in Britain. But it's as if the lessons for history, and the lessons of the twentieth century haven't been learned. More than three hundred years later we are waging the same battle.

It's significant that two of the greatest leaders of the twentieth century, Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan spoke so often about the need to keep fighting for what you believe in. Thatcher said many times 'There are no final victories in politics' while Reagan's words from his inaugural address as governor of California is one of the very best statements of what must be done to secure freedom:

Freedom is a fragile thing and it's never more than one generation away from extinction. It is not ours by way of inheritance; it must be fought for and defended constantly by each generation, for it comes only once to a people. And those in world history who have known freedom and then lost it have never known it again.

In 2012 the Gillard government through its 'Finkelstein Inquiry' attempted to impose a system of government censorship of the media – a move which at least initially, was widely applauded by many journalists themselves and which was welcomed by the Malcolm Turnbull-led Coalition opposition. It was the IPA's opposition to the plan that saw the Labor Party ultimately withdraw its plan.

Then of course this year, under Scott Morrison the Coalition in the lead-up to the federal election announced it would give the Australian Communications and Media Authority the power to regulate and censor 'disinformation' and 'misinformation' on the internet. In simple terms the plan would allow the government to define 'the truth' – and anything that challenged 'the truth' would have to be taken down on threat of criminal punishment.

The sort of 'misinformation' that would be censored was specifically identified as discussion 'harmful' to 'the protection of citizens' health' or 'public safety' or 'the environment'. During the Covid lockdowns we saw how the technology companies themselves censored debate about the efficacy of the government's medical and non-medical response.

What Scott Morrison and his then communications minister, Paul Fletcher wanted to do was one step worse. Morrison and Fletcher wanted to make it unlawful for technology companies to host debate and discussion the government declared to be 'misinformation'. Such a proposal is almost literally incredible and last month, Morgan Begg the Director of the IPA's

Legal Rights Program wrote an eight-page letter to every federal MP and senator explaining just how dangerous the plan was.

What was particularly disappointing was the lack of opposition to the plan from Coalition MPs themselves and from the media. A few months ago when the Biden Administration attempted to do something similar by announcing the establishment of a 'Disinformation Governance Board' in the Department of Homeland Security the backlash from the Republican Party was so ferocious the plan was dropped within weeks. Republican Senator Tom Cotton said 'The Federal Government has no business creating a Ministry of Truth' while Senator John Kennedy wrote 'Biden's Disinformation Governance Board wants the government to tell Americans what's true. What could possibly go wrong?'

In 2017 Scott Morrison when he was treasurer opposed the repeal of Section 18C of the Racial Discrimination Act and he famously said, 'I know there are a lot of people who are interested in this issue... As a senior figure in this government... I know this issue doesn't create one job, doesn't open one business, doesn't give anyone one extra hour. It doesn't make housing more affordable or energy more affordable.' Morrison's defeat at the federal election gives the Coalition a much overdue opportunity to re-establish its commitment to the fundamental values of our liberal democracy.

The new opposition leader, Peter Dutton hasn't as yet announced whether Morrison and Fletcher's plan remains Coalition policy. What the new Labor government plans to do is also unknown. Not surprisingly the ALP had welcomed the Coalition's plans. Michelle Rowland, who is now the federal communications minister, said in 2020 that the government should 'take action' against the spread of misinformation about climate change.

I've focused on freedom because it's close to my heart and also because the fight for freedom of speech provides such a clear demonstration not only that you may have to fight a battle more than once to win it, but that in truth no victory is ever permanently won.

I used to keep a scrapbook of interesting articles and comments about the IPA, but I gave it away a few years ago as it's easier now just to press 'Cut and Paste' on your keyboard and store everything electronically. But one article I did print out and keep a hard copy of was from *The Guardian* back in June 2014. It was by Jason Wilson who back then was a staff member at the Institute for Social Research at Swinburne University of Technology in Melbourne. Wilson might have been your typical left-wing academic writing about the evils of 'neo-liberalism', but he wasn't always wrong.

The title of his article was certainly eye-catching – 'No, the IPA is not secretly running Australia'. Wilson wrote that he'd been prompted to write the piece following an 'analysis' of the work of the IPA in another left-wing publication *The Saturday Paper*.

The summary of Wilson's piece under the headline was as follows – To obsess over the influence of thinktanks is to misunderstand the role they play in contemporary politics: compensating for the hollowness of political parties. (When I read this, I asked myself 'surely the only people who 'obsess' about the IPA are *Guardian* readers.') This is the key part of what Wilson wrote – and I'm quoting it because I think it's right.

...in *The Saturday Paper's* story, and much else that is written about the IPA, it is insinuated not only that they have untold power, but that there is something improper

in their tactics. Yet the IPA make their arguments very publicly, work hard to mobilise supporters around heavily-promoted campaigns, and are, after all, a membership organisation.

Secombe himself [the author of *The Saturday Paper* piece] discusses how, they have come to rely more on the support of members as corporate sponsors have backed away from their more hardline positions [ie, as companies have gone 'woke'.]

To obsess over the 'covert' activities and corporate sponsorship of thinktanks is to misunderstand the role they play in contemporary politics. On both the left and the right, they exist largely because of the hollowness at the heart of the major parties.

Long since dead as mass organisations, and focused through the political cycle on electoral competition, big parties lack much capacity for meaningful internal debate or the generation of new ideas. In the age of permanent campaigning, politicians are more focused on perfecting risk-averse, targeted messages on values or vision.

Perhaps the IPA stand out in this context because they are unapologetically ideological...

Its impact has been in making its stand on its values, and also by combining campaigning and policy work. They are not afraid of confronting ideological antagonists and they understand no political fight is ever over. [I've underlined that last sentence for emphasis.]

'...they understand no political fight is ever over.' Exactly. That's exactly what I believe and that's exactly why IPA members support the work we do.

If you've already made a donation to our 2022 IPA End of Financial Year Appeal – thank you! If you haven't as yet, please consider making a tax deductible donation to support our work. You can donate over the phone by ringing Claire Peter-Budge here at the IPA office on 03 9600 4744 or you can donate online at www.ipa.org.au or you can return the enclosed donation slip.

Thank you for your support.

kind regards

