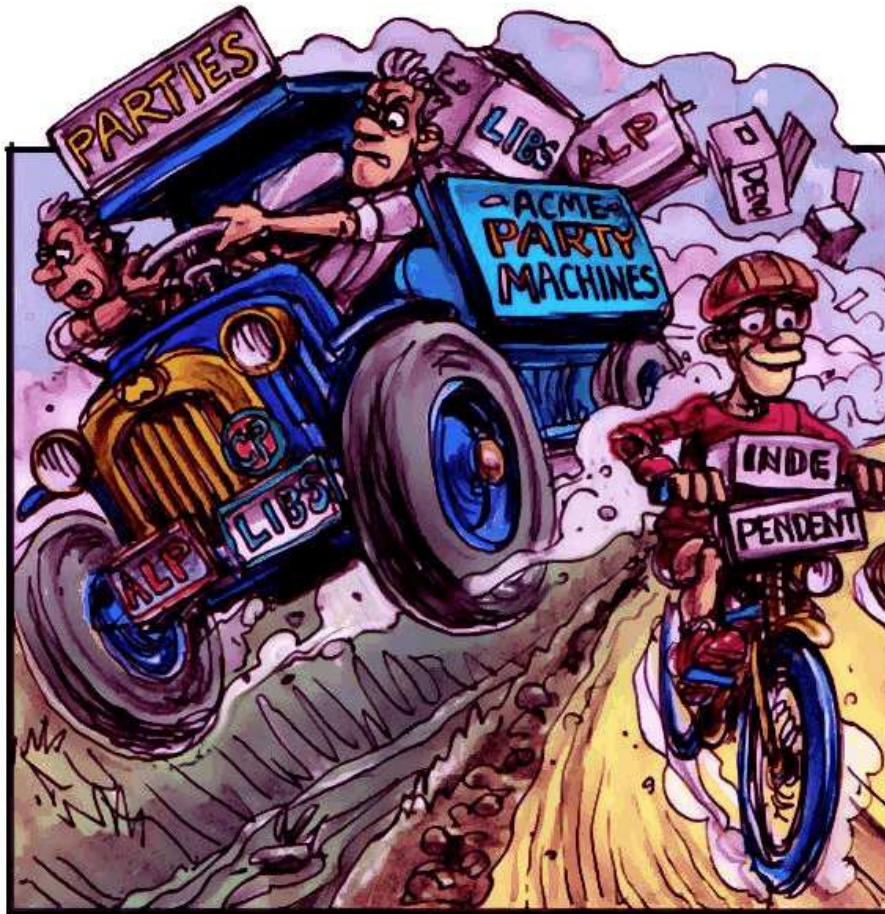


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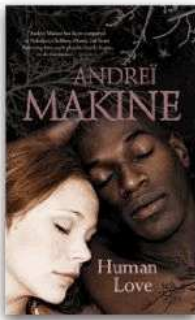
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Love bytes and pillow fights

BOOK FORUM

Andrena Jamieson

Makine, Andrei: *Human Love*. London, Sceptre, 2008. ISBN 978 0 340 97769 9



Human Love calls to mind Matthew Arnold's poem 'Dover Beach', where he describes the loss of religious faith. Towards the close of the poem, Arnold writes:

Ah, love, let us be true

To one another! for the world, which seems

To lie before us like a land of dreams,

So various, so beautiful, so new,

Hath really neither joy, nor love, nor light,

Nor certitude, nor peace, nor help for pain.

The poem is moving because you feel that in such a sweeping loss of faith, the move to find strength in a personal relationship will not really work. Faced with the demand that she supply the depth of meaning that has been lost, any woman to whom a poet joined himself in this exhortation would surely pause before what was being asked of her.

This would not be the end of argument. Pillow talk and pillow fight, a series of more recriminatory exchanges, would surely follow until more realistic expectations of the relationship were negotiated.

Andrei Makine's short novel, *Human Love*, enters Arnold's territory. Makine, who was born in Russia, writes in French. In his novels he explores the ways in which cultures and ideologies intersect. *Human Love* is particularly complex because it is set in Africa.

The novel asks whether, in the face of the brutal ways in which human beings treat one another, it is possible to believe in humanity and in human beings. Elias, the moral centre of the novel, finds reason to believe in small experiences of love and beauty.

Elias is Angolan. As a child he sees the brutality, lust, racism and greed that mark the end of the colonial regime. His mother is degraded and killed. But he also has a poet's eye for the beauty of simple things and of human relationships.

His belief in human freedom takes him on a long journey. He finds himself with Che Guevara in an African campaign, studies the making of mayhem in Cuba and Russia, and works with insurgent movements in Angola, the Congo and Somalia.

In his journey he discovers that ideological commitments mask much simpler human desires for riches, revenge, control, status and sexual gratification. The same patterns of manipulation, torture, loveless couplings, and contempt are evident in rape and pillage by colonial armies, in patronage and betrayal by Western revolutionary idealists, and in racism and manipulation by Russians who intervene in African struggles.

All speak of freedom; all express contempt for ordinary people and simple things.

In this dark world Elias is sustained by the simple human reality of love shown in everyday ritual — by the boy watching the sun rising over the river, by his mother's affection as she returns from the prostitution by which she supports him.

His instinct for simple humanity is focused in his platonic relationship with a young Siberian student whom he meets in Moscow. Anna represents for him all that is true and beautiful. A long train journey that takes them back to her home village, the site of a former gulag, remains for him a compass that sustains him in the midst of the moral darkness surrounding him.

Makine's challenge is to persuade his readers that the love between a man and a woman, and an artistic eye, can transcend the self-interest, brutality, greed and lust into which human political movements inevitably transmute themselves. Like Arnold he must represent the extent of the darkness and the lasting power of the small candle that stands within it.

The strength of the novel lies in its poetic evocation of detail: the incidents of casual brutality that evoke disgust at the human condition, and the small details that evoke love — the sight of snow on a fur hat, for example. Makine's spare description of scenes of beauty and brutality alike is telling and persuasive.

But Makine is ultimately less successful in convincing the reader that human love can trump such large disgust. As is the case with Arnold's poem the reader senses that the writer's will directs his imagination more strongly than does his observation.

The subordinate characters of the novel act the roles they are given, and rarely surprise with their individuality. Elias' judgements assess precisely their moral significance. Ordinary Russians are xenophobic, Europeans committed to revolutionary causes are wilfully and unfaithfully romantic, wealthy Africans are corrupt. Even Anna is sketched lightly as the redeeming object of Elias' love and not as the subject who loves Elias.

The novel, however, stands and falls with Elias. He captures the imagination. He remains an attractive and enigmatic character whose experience and eye for love enable him to remain committed to relieving human suffering in Africa even after he has become aware of the falsity of the ideologies under which people fight. But even Elias is burdened by having to carry the weight of the author's judgements of the world.

As with 'Dover Beach', the high art of the novel and the depth of the issues it explores are

sufficient to make the reader momentarily suspend belief. But at the end many readers may reflect back on Elias' transcendence of disillusionment and disgust through love and ask whether the author's will is sufficient to make it so.

Stuck in the immigration sieve

MULTICULTURALISM

Susan Biggar

Maybe we shouldn't have been surprised when the rejection letter arrived in the mail. After all, the Immigration Department is entrusted with separating the sheep from the goats, and our family, apparently, has some black sheep.



We are not alone. Every year thousands of immigrants line up, hoping to slip smoothly through Immigration's sieve. But for many, like us, it's not so easy.

As a family of New Zealanders and one American (me), we mistakenly assumed we would receive a warm welcome. But in 2001 the Howard Government had pulled in the reins on what once was an open and hospitable come-and-go policy between Australia and its neighbour across the Tasman.

So, by the time we hit the border in 2002 we were handed a wad of forms the size of a phonebook and pointed in the direction of the Immigration Department.

And that's where our difficulties began. Two of our young children have an inherited medical condition, a fact which doesn't win you any bonus points in the permanent residency system. In fact, it got us turned down.

After our rejection letter arrives we decide to appeal the decision to the Migration Review Tribunal (MRT), where we will join another 5000—8000 or so others, all hoping someone will listen to their story and re-think their rejection.

We read on the website that in a given year only about 50 per cent of MRT applicants succeed. Not encouraging statistics; however, for those facing the Refugee Review Tribunal only about 30 per cent get through.

Initially we are told our case should be heard by the MRT within six months. Instead, it is over a year before we are allowed to submit our defence in writing. Nearly three years will pass before our day in court and another six months before we are given an answer.

As the weeks and months pad on, we try to adapt to our uncertain status. We settle in, choosing to live like people who have a future in this country. After more than five years here our three young boys are more Australian than anything else. They play cricket and footy, sing the national anthem, recognise the nation's leaders and its history, consider themselves natives.

Watching our son sing 'I Still Call Australia Home' in his school concert feels like a family pledge of allegiance.

We struggle against being ruled by the Immigration Department, refusing to believe they alone will determine our future. I plant a vegetable garden, raise chickens. We buy a house, reassuring the kids that this is our home.

But the questions linger. Should we give up and return to New Zealand? Or stay here and battle the heartless immigration department; here, where the children adore their schools, where we have work and a community we value, where our life has come to be; here, in the Australia we love? Can we stay in a country that rejects us, our skills, our contributions, our children? A country that views us as a burden it would rather not bear?

Being a hostage to the Immigration Department affects us. There are tears of joy when the 43 asylum seekers from West Papua land on Australia's northern coast. We cheer when they receive Temporary Protection Visas. At a rally for the West Papuans, we hear them share, through testimony and song, the beauty of their culture and the deep fear for their people's future.

Reading stories of Iraqi and Afghan refugees kept waiting for years in offshore detention centres is disheartening and reminds us how much worse things could be. Clearly our circumstances are not in their league, except we have all had our future put on hold.

It's astonishing that anyone ever gets past Immigration, the Australian gate-keeper, especially those without deep pockets. The application and appeal fees run over \$3000, another \$1800 for the medical exams (repeated for three of us after they 'expired' due to the slowness of the application process), and a \$5000 no-interest bond. We are even forced to pay \$300 for the Department to determine whether my husband's PhD from Stanford University is equivalent to an Australian degree. Then, of course, there are the lawyer's fees.

Attempts to speak with the Department require extraordinary humility and a morning to kill listening to recorded messages. The staff ... well, let's just say they are generally not laying out the welcome mat for us would-be immigrants.

The illogical nature of their policies is puzzling. As New Zealanders, our children still have access to the Australian health system and have the right to remain. Granting them permanent residency won't actually cost the government anything. We try to explain the lunacy of it, but nobody's listening.

The entire process is humiliating: the interminable phone calls, the state of limbo, the failure to keep to timelines, missing them by years rather than months.

On our first trip out of Australia we are pulled out of the line at Immigration; our sons' passports triggering a warning. (Are they worried that we are leaving the country? We thought that was their aim.) This embarrassing experience is repeated every time we enter or

exit Australia. We fudge to the kids about the hold-up, not wanting our 12 and nine-year-old sons to recognise that they are the problem.

Then, finally, we are called in to hear our decision. Squashed in a small, sterile room with half-a-dozen other hopefuls, we wait as the case names are called and the decisions read aloud. The man before us loses his appeal; he looks confused, uncertain. What will he do now?

The MRT decides in our favour. Although a huge relief personally, it feels like we're escaping from a burning building, leaving others trapped inside. The irrational policies remain. So too, the piles of paperwork, high fees and unhelpful culture of the Department, through which applicants must wade for years.

The Labour government's decision to end the Pacific Solution, closing offshore detention centres, is surely a first step toward a more humane system for immigrants.

Thankfully, this is the end of our family's dealings with Immigration. Although long frustrated by unthinking immigration policies, we underestimated the impact they might have on our own life. Hopefully our years-in-waiting have taught us the importance of treating all people, Australians and wannabee-Australians alike, with respect and dignity. Until we do that, we can never stand tall.

The wage of sin is the death of the market

SPIRITUALITY

Andrew Hamilton



It is interesting that the Churches have had little to say about the financial crisis and the behaviour that caused it. After all it has put at risk the lives of people throughout the world no less than do abortion, euthanasia or gambling. And Christian faith, with its insights into sin and salvation, offers some rich material for reflection.

Sin is popularly seen simply as the breaking of God's laws. But at a deeper level sin is the pursuit of values that sell your humanity short. That pursuit typically both corrodes your humanity and undermines the conditions that permit you to pursue cheap values. This process can be seen in the financial crisis.

The root of the financial crisis was greed — seeking individual financial gain in ways that did not respect the common good. The symbols of greed were spectacular. Monstrous salaries of CEOs, for example, and takeovers that transferred fees to the engineers and debt to the companies.

But greed was not confined to the top end. Funds demanded that companies produce short-term profits, led in turn by their members who wanted spectacular superannuation growth.

The way in which greed saps the humanity of the greedy and injures the welfare of ordinary human beings and of societies is evident enough. It is less recognised that unfettered greed destroys the conditions under which the market itself can function and under which the greedy can reward themselves.

If they are to function, financial markets require confidence. They are based on credit, and we give credit only to people whom we believe to be credible, and only if we believe creditable the processes by which we give credit. If we believe that people in the market are trying to rip us off and can rely on shonky processes to do so, we shall refuse credit. Without credit financial markets collapse.

Greed alone does not destroy trust and confidence. But it breeds a fatal lack of responsibility. We accept responsibility for our own gains but refuse responsibility for others' losses. The evasion of responsibility creates bad process. We make a legal and commercial framework that diffuses responsibility. When we need to reckon our debts and our credits, we shall be unable to do so. Confidence and credit will disappear from the market.

In this financial crisis evasion of responsibility has been refined into an art form. The slicing of debt into instruments that make it impossible to determine who has responsibility is a clear

example. So is the propensity of banks to press money on those who cannot repay and the failure of board to resign after approving policies that gutted their companies and employees.

So the wage of sin is the death of the market and consequent real deaths in a world that relies on credit. That is where the parallels with Christian theology get interesting. There too the cycle of sin begets irresponsibility, and irresponsibility begets a doomed world. Salvation needs to come from outside by the intervention of a beneficent creator. He must take responsibility for debts owed in an altruistic and painful way. Thus is the working of greed and irresponsibility healed, doom averted, and credit restored. Sinners will be inspired to another and better way of life.

It all sounds familiar, doesn't it? The Reserve takes on all bad debts, and market players are freed from the consequences of their greed and irresponsibility. So salvation comes to the market whose devotees henceforth eschew greed, are responsible, and look to the common good. The market can be trusted to regulate itself.

Sound likely? Or in the market does salvation merely mean that the greed and irresponsibility are spectacularly rewarded?

In Christian faith, of course, there is the little business of original sin. People continue to sin, so that even after they come to faith life is a school for learning altruism. That experience suggests that financial markets will continue to encourage greed. So they need to be carefully structured in order that they don't foul their own nest of confidence as well as smearing those who depend on them.

Churches have a lot to say about markets. They ought to humour as children those who tell us to trust the markets to regulate themselves. Greed is part of the human condition. It does not offer salvation. That is something altogether different and better.

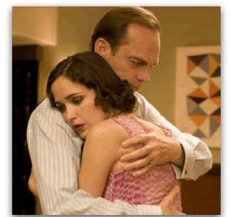
Hook turns on weighty subtext

FILM FORUM

Tim Kroenert

***The Tender Hook*: 104 minutes. Rated: PG. Director: Jonathan Ogilvie. Starring: Hugo Weaving, Rose Byrne, Matthew Le Nevez, Luke Carrol**

Tonto and the Lone Ranger are riding across the prairie when they find themselves surrounded by hostile Apache. The Lone Ranger turns to Tonto and says, 'We're done for.' Tonto cocks an eyebrow and replies, 'What do you mean "we", kemosabe?'



We've all heard the joke before. But spoken by a character during the final act of Aussie thriller *The Tender Hook*, it assumes portentous overtones. It reflects a key question for the film's characters: Where do your loyalties lie when the chips are down? Various factors apply pressure to their loyalties, and first among these is self-preservation.

The scene is 1920s Sydney — jazzy nightclubs, seedy docksides and grimy, awesome boxing arenas. Presiding over the events is McHeath (Weaving), an English rogue with his fingers in a number of illicit pies. He's accumulated a small criminal empire via gambling and bootlegging rackets, and is not averse to using violence to keep it intact.

Needless to say, McHeath is not loved. When one character speculates that McHeath is 'illiterate', his dim companion retorts: 'He *might* be a bastard; he sure acts like one.'

McHeath's young lover Iris (Byrne) enjoys the glamour of life by his side, and seems infatuated by the danger of associating with this volatile individual. During the opening credits sequence McHeath croons (anachronistically) a jazz version of 'I'm Your Man', and Iris seems to thrill to the duplicity of Leonard Cohen's deceptively sweet lyric.

But the relationship is an essentially oppressive one. So when Iris falls for big-hearted pugilist Art (Le Nevez) her sights are on emancipation as much as love or rugged thrills. Of course McHeath is not going to let her go easily. The love triangle is stretched to dangerous limits as she schemes to siphon funds from his fortune with a view to fleeing to America.

The characters can be read as a microcosm of Australia as the fledgling federation approaches the end of its adolescence. Iris, the cultural heiress, and Art, the archetypal battler, are the precocious young Aussies, fighting to leave behind the dominant and dominating colonial Brit, McHeath.

Already they have their eyes on America, destined to become the next dominator of Australian culture.

More poignant, but subtler, is the place in this microcosm of the film's sole Aboriginal character, Art's fellow (and superior) boxer Alby (Caroll). Revered for his pugilistic prowess, he's ultimately subservient to the purposes of the white characters, and is subjugated for the betterment of even the heroic characters.

Such weighty subtext helps to invigorate a film which, while stylish and slickly structured, rarely surprises. Loyalties may be tested, but the story and characters are sufficiently familiar for most viewers to guess exactly what the results will be.

Totalitarian abortion law requires conscientious disobedience

THE MEDDLING PRIEST

Frank Brennan



The abortion debate has produced a stand-off in Victoria over church-state relations and freedom of conscience. It is time to seek a resolution which respects the long-held conscientious beliefs of some health providers within the context of the proposed state regime approving abortion on demand.

The lower house of the Victorian parliament has passed a bill which treats abortion of a foetus up to 24 weeks as an elective surgical procedure. There is no legal requirement ensuring a woman has had sufficient time and opportunity to make an informed and free choice to have an abortion. Any doctor can perform the procedure.

Even a viable child can be aborted post-24 weeks at the mother's request provided only that the doctor has received endorsement from a colleague that the killing of the child is appropriate having regard to 'all relevant medical circumstances and the woman's current and future physical, psychological and social circumstances' — whatever that means.

Usually, doctors considering the performance of an elective surgical procedure are free to decline to perform the procedure. Declining doctors asked to perform an abortion will be required by law to refer the patient to another doctor known not to have any conscientious objection to abortion.

Some doctors think abortion is almost always wrong; others think it is almost never wrong. Some hold the conscientious belief that the abortion of a viable foetus is the deliberate killing of a child. They think they will be asked to refer a patient to another doctor just for the purpose of killing a child. Such doctors would regard this as being legally required to cooperate in an act that they consider immoral.

The Victorian bill also proposes that doctors and nurses, regardless of their conscientious objections, be required to perform an abortion 'in an emergency where the abortion is necessary to preserve the life of the pregnant woman'.

One third of all births presently occur in Catholic hospitals. The Catholic Archbishop of Melbourne, Denis Hart, has [said](#), 'Catholic hospitals will not perform abortions and will not provide referrals for the purpose of abortion. If this provision is passed it will be an outrageous attack on our service to the community and contrary to Catholic ethical codes. It will leave Catholic hospitals and doctors with a conscientious objection to abortion in a position where they will be acting contrary to the law if they act in accordance with their deeply held moral convictions.'

If Victoria is to legislate abortion on demand, there is a need to consider whether all health professionals ought to be conscripted into such a regime. Has the legislature got the balance right here? Presumably the legislators assume the majority of health professionals will have no ethical or moral objection. The issue is whether the minority of health professionals who do have such objections should be forced to act against their conscience.

One would have thought that the Victorian Parliament, armed with its freshly minted Charter of Rights and Freedoms, would have the appropriate machinery at hand to find that balance. After all, the Charter guarantees freedom of thought, conscience, religion and belief. The Charter does permit parliament to override prescribed freedoms in rare circumstances.

However Professor George Williams and his fellow proponents of the Charter were 'strongly of the view that it would be inappropriate to use the override clause to sanction a breach of important rights such as freedom of conscience, thought and religion'.

They did not tell us that such rights could be overridden without need for an override or even without need for parliament to consider the impact of proposed legislation when those rights could 'interfere' with the right to abortion on demand.

When introducing legislation into the Victorian parliament, a minister is required to provide a compatibility statement outlining how the proposed law is consistent with the rights and freedoms set down in the Charter. Introducing the abortion bill, Ms Maxine Morand, the Victorian Minister for Women's Affairs told Parliament:

In accordance with section 48 of the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities, a statement of compatibility for the Abortion Law Reform Bill 2008 is not required. The effect of section 48 is that none of the provisions of the charter affect the bill.

This includes the requirement under section 28 of the charter to prepare and table a compatibility statement and the obligation under section 32 of the charter to interpret statutory provisions compatibly with human rights under the charter.

Section 48 provides that 'Nothing in this Charter affects any law applicable to abortion or child destruction'. It was included in the Charter to accommodate the concerns of Professor Williams and his colleagues that the Charter not purport to resolve the question of when life begins for the purposes of defining the right to life.

The Williams committee stressed that such a provision was 'not intended to make a statement on when life begins. That question has significant moral and scientific aspects and is not a question that the Charter seeks to answer. Indeed, the key reason for including this clause is to ensure that an outcome is not imposed by the Charter, but is left to political debate and individual judgement.'

They made what must now be seen by their political masters to be a remarkably misconceived observation: 'In coming to this view, we emphasise that the Charter will

expressly preserve all other rights, including any rights that the law gives to the unborn child in other statutes and the common law.'

Unless the Victorian upper house acts to amend those provisions of the bill which presently negate the freedom of thought, conscience, religion and belief of health professionals, the matter will need to be resolved by the courts.

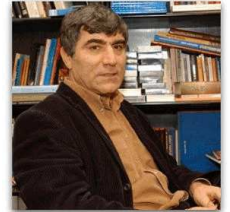
Meanwhile the Catholic hospitals and conscientious health professionals opposed to abortion on demand are well justified in taking their stand against an unjust law which carries the hallmarks of totalitarianism. Any self-respecting civil libertarian should support them, regardless of their views on the morality of abortion on demand.

PEN's three-pronged pursuit of justice

EUREKA STREET/ READER'S FEAST AWARD

Arnold Zable

In December 2006, we met, as we do every year at this time, in a café in Brunswick Street, Fitzroy. The warm nights had returned, the festive season was in the air. The annual letting-go was within reach like a tape at the end of a long distance run.



There were perhaps 20 in the group, members of the Melbourne Centre of International PEN. Each of us had a list of names and addresses of writers who had been imprisoned, persecuted, threatened and, in some cases, tortured for their work in the past year. They resided in dictatorships, left and right, in theocracies and monarchies, and in countries that claimed to be democratic.

The lists included writers from China, Burma, Ethiopia, and Iran, to name four quite different political regimes.

Our task was simple: to send a card with a message of support to the persecuted writers. To wish them well, and let them know they were in our thoughts; that they were not alone.

There was good reason for keeping the message simple. We wanted our cards to get past the censors. There is a time for advocacy, and a time for simple words of support. They work in tandem. Together they make up the 'human' and the 'rights' in human rights.

One of the writers we wrote to on that December night was Turkish-Armenian journalist Hrant Dink (pictured). A founding editor of the weekly newspaper *Agos*, Dink had been outspoken about the 1915 massacres of the Armenians, and named it genocide. For his efforts he had been prosecuted for 'denigrating Turkishness' under Article 301 of the Turkish Penal code.

He was acquitted the first time, received a six-month suspended prison sentence the second, and was facing fresh charges drawn up by the prosecutor's office in a renewed attempt to have him jailed.

Dink was a leading advocate for freedom of expression in Turkey. In his editorials and newspaper columns, he championed a pluralistic democratic system. He reached out across the cultural and historical divide, and called for dialogue between the Turks and Armenian minority. As a bilingual publication, *Agos* opened up channels of communication between the two communities.

While Dink sought to build bridges between cultures, he understood there could be no

genuine reconciliation without recognition of past and present injustices. He exposed discrimination against Armenians in Turkish society, and cases of destruction of the Armenian cultural heritage.

He argued that continued denial of the genocide would remain a festering wound for Armenians worldwide. The denial was not only a desecration of memory, but also a blight on Turkish society as a whole.

This is the third prong of human rights activism. There is the simple human contact we spoke of earlier, then the advocacy on behalf of those whose rights have been abused, and thirdly the message that persecuted writers are trying to convey. Repressive governments shoot the messenger to suppress the message.

As is so often the case, the specific cause has universal resonances. Each denied genocide paves the way for new genocides.

Adolf Hitler understood this with brutal clarity. Addressing his elite generals eight days before invading Poland, Hitler proclaimed: 'Genghis Kahn led millions of women and children to slaughter with premeditation and a happy heart. History sees him solely as the founder of a state. It's a matter of indifference to me what a weak European civilisation will say about me. Who today, after all, speaks of the annihilation of the Armenians?'

Hrant Dink spoke of the annihilation of the Armenians, and as we shall see, he paid a terrible price for doing so.

International PEN was formed in 1921 to promote literature worldwide. In 1960, PEN established a Writers in Prison Committee, in response to mounting concerns about attempts, in many countries, to silence writers. The committee documents the cases of writers who have been threatened, imprisoned, tortured, beaten, exiled, or assassinated for their contrary views.

Cases are brought to the attention of International PEN's research offices by any one of its 145 centres in 104 countries. These include centres in Sydney and Melbourne, and a branch in Adelaide.

Until recently, Australia was one of the few countries that had never had major cases of persecuted writers on PEN's lists. But in mid 2002, Melbourne PEN members were alerted to the plight of Ivory Coast journalist, Cheikh Kone. Incarcerated in Port Hedland immigration detention centre since January 2001, his story came to light due to the efforts of Melbourne schoolteacher, Peter Job.

Job first wrote to 'detainee number NBP451' in February 2002, as a participant in a letter writing campaign to detained asylum seekers. When Job discovered the name behind the number, and the details of Kone's case, he contacted Melbourne PEN. The information was

forwarded to London for investigation.

Meanwhile Melbourne and Sydney PEN members stayed in touch with Kone, in order to assure him of their support, and to buoy his spirits after his many months of indefinite detention.

International PEN soon confirmed that Kone was, as he had claimed, a journalist who had genuine fears for his safety if he were to be deported back to the Ivory Coast, the country he had fled in October 2000, after writing articles that exposed the general elections as fraudulent. Because of the new evidence and pressure applied by refugee advocates, Kone was released after 32 months in detention.

In January 2005, Melbourne PEN learnt of the plight of Iranian activist, Ardeshir Gholipour. After five years in Woomera, Port Hedland and Baxter detention centres, Gholipour faced imminent deportation when his final appeal for refugee status was turned down.

Days later he attempted suicide. The trauma of having spent 27 months in a tiny cell in Teheran's Evin prison in the late 1980s, for distributing pamphlets on behalf of the Iranian Freedom Movement, and of fleeing Iran in the late 1990s, was compounded by long-term detention in Australia.

Again it took International PEN just days to verify Gholipour's claims. In the meantime it was crucial, given his fragile state, to assure him he was not alone. Melbourne and Sydney PEN members, and other refugee advocates regularly conversed with him by phone, while his appeals dragged on.

Gholipour was finally released in April 2005. As he stepped out of Baxter, a free man at last, refugee advocates and members of PEN were waiting to greet him.

The campaigns to release Gholipour and Kone exemplify the three prongs of human rights activism, working in tandem. The two cases came to light because concerned Australians had written letters to detained asylum seekers as simple acts of humanity. The letters assured them that despite efforts to isolate them from the outside world, they were not alone.

In both cases, direct human support helped prevent a further descent into depression. When Peter Job first made contact with Kone, Kone was, in his words, going crazy. The letters and phone calls eased the pressure. Gholipour, who had been driven to the point of attempted suicide, was sustained by his regular contact with supporters.

At the same time, individuals and organisations continued to apply pressure to have the two cases reconsidered. The campaigns included newspaper stories, delegations to parliamentarians, legal representation, and pressure upon the Immigration Minister and departmental officials.

The message that Gholipour and Kone conveyed can be seen as having two components. They had the courage to expose gross human rights abuses in their respective countries. And the campaign to release them helped expose the abuses and mental anguish resulting from indefinite detention of asylum seekers in Australia.

Hrant Dink was not so fortunate. On 17 January 2007, he was gunned down outside his Istanbul office. His killer was a 17-year-old ultra-Nationalist.

On that warm December night in 2006, Melbourne PEN members sent two cards addressed to Dink. Due to reasons unknown, his reply arrived in May, months after he was murdered.

The card, designed to raise funds for a children's education foundation in Turkey, features an image of a peasant boy at menial labour, dreaming of being able to attend school.

'With this card, your contributions are helping to make a difference in a person's life,' the caption reads. Having spent years in an orphanage as a child, Dink was committed to universal schooling.

In his reply Dink wrote: 'I thank you for your support and your message of goodwill. I send you all my best wishes for a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year.'

These words were written weeks before his death. The card remains a poignant reminder of the risks human rights advocates face in courageously pursuing their goals; and the power of a few simple words of understanding.

It's time to ditch GDP

ECONOMICS

John Wicks



From any ethical perspective, the prime objective of economic theory, policy and practice needs to be the wellbeing of all individuals and households. That demands pursuance of 'the common good' whereby each and every person has the opportunity to achieve their potential.

Recent decades have witnessed the ascendancy of the neo-liberal or neo-conservative economic philosophy. It emphasises paramount principles of unfettered free markets, supremacy of the individual, self interest and the profit motive to maximise the common good.

It is claimed this approach will maximise production of goods and services and maximise national wealth for the benefit of all, so that and even the most disadvantaged will enjoy the benefits that will 'trickle down'.

This approach has been a major factor in spawning the current global financial crisis through the sub-prime debacle in the USA. A pure and unregulated profit motive driven by self-interest caused trillions of dollars to be loaned to often disadvantaged people who could not afford repayment.

Meanwhile, billion dollar corporations made huge profits, and their executives reaped multi-million dollar salaries and other rewards. Sensible and just regulation and oversight could have prevented this financial fiasco which should never have been permitted to develop.

While the 'trickle down' of wealth proclaimed by neo-liberalism is highly debatable, the hardships and problems of sub-prime activities descend on the disadvantaged with the speed and finesse of a freight train. Hence hundreds of thousands of low income Americans have lost their homes, many more are on the way to losing them, and millions of lower income Americans have seen their most important single asset decimated.

Millions of would be retirees have seen their forthcoming pensions wiped out or reduced to future welfare dependent levels. Credit has been severely restricted, affecting the production and sale of a wide range of goods and services. This in turn will have a wide and serious impact on employment levels.

Even in Australia there have been adverse impacts. Due to eagerness for short term profit and inadequately researched investment activities by some investment funds, hundreds of thousands of Australians face sharp declines in future superannuation benefits, particularly those on low incomes.

Some local councils in Australia have suffered losses from funds indirectly invested in the sub-prime debacle. In addition billions of dollars have been wiped off Australian share market values. This will cause financial institutions to demand the scaling down of existing company loans and strong restrictions on new loans, which will impact company activities such as training and education, workplace benefits, and donations to charities.

Governments in the developed world have poured billions of dollars into support of the financial sector in efforts to stem the crisis. This must in due course have an adverse impact on essential government expenditure and on levels of taxation. What will be the impact on transport, public housing, education, health and aged care?

Australia has one of the highest levels of consumer debt in the western world. It is far from the sub-prime debacle but may pose a serious problem depending on how many households can repay their debts. Yet TV advertising continuously promotes the purchase of goods for 'no deposit and no interest' for two to five years, with no mention that any glitch in repayments will result in a 30 per cent or more annual interest charge.

We need to ensure that Australia does not duplicate even on a much reduced scale the sorts of outcomes emanating from the sub-prime fiasco. The following are some suggestions worthy of consideration.

Disregard neo-liberal policy prescriptions: The self interested, profit seeking approach to almost all forms of economic activity is unlikely to promote national wellbeing. In the USA, the most conservative of world economies where neo-liberalism has prevailed, we have the spectre of the largest of government interventions and biggest nationalisation of private assets in western history in the name of 'the common good'.

Achieve a better balance between the free market and regulation: We need to bear in mind that unfettered free markets have severe drawbacks. They lack ethics, focus only on the short term, emphasise profitability whether it serves the community or not, and fail to address externalities whether they be dire health or environmental consequences of economic activity.

Restrict profit seeking: Undertake a comprehensive review of government policies as they relate to the finance sector to restrict or deter unproductive speculation. Already action is being taken to ban 'short selling'. There are numerous aspects of derivatives trading that should be banned or restricted and the taxation system could be used to greater advantage in restricting profit seeking activities that add little or nothing to national wellbeing.

Dump the all invasive but misleading GDP concept: In any macroeconomic analysis these days one can hardly miss the constant referral to GDP, its use to demonstrate gains, progress, benefits successful national governance and the like. In fact the GDP has so many fallacious aspects in the way it is used.

GDP is not, as so many proclaim, a clear indication of national advancement and wellbeing.

Road deaths and injuries promote the GDP because of funerals, health services, motor repairs and the like, tobacco production increases the GDP but so does the costs of treating cancer patients. Damaging environmental outcomes which need to be rectified add to GDP. The faults in the concept and the way it is used go on and on.

For many years now, thinking economists have demanded a focus on concepts related to GDP but directed to data on the the production of goods and services that promote the common good, such as a 'general progress indicator', or GPI. It is not so much more difficult to calculate, but would remove negative aspects of the GDP to give a more realistic measure of real and beneficial economic progress.

It would have a major impact on forcing economic activity and government policies to focus on wellbeing.

In praise of Cricketmas

POETRY

Tom Clark

Baxter — a boys' own tale in five voices

I. Satan

I've been asked, and I'm building
up to it slowly. The fall. When I'd
been cast down, I wondered just
where on earth or in the heavens
this weird place, made to keep me, was.
Beside me stood such strange companions,
each too quick to anger — too quick, too,
to tears. I asked, what bonds are these?
Is this an adventurer's reward? To stoop
as one in the huddle of the homeless,
shivering with rage, beyond even hope
of revenge? I guess it always was.
God's people have only ever known
the way of hard power. Against art,
against play, against the song
of a siren dollar and a dollar siren.
Anyway: have faith, my friend!

II. Aeneas

Multas dat mare lacrimas[1], ancestors
said in their day, breaking free of
the humdrum waves that brought
only ageless cares to those nearer

shores. Now we are so much
further afield. Our olives, too,
would weep their oily tears if they
could see this land. *Dat mare.*
The sorrows of sea-travelling
have made so many a landfall here.
Positively queer. An ocean of cares
and a wealth of hurts, all from that
first look of disdain: you're welcome
anywhere but here, for this is
The Unwelcome House. And, yes,
multas lacrimas. The wise see
the sorrow everywhere among us,
even in Philip Ruddock's sneer.

III. Siddhartha

This permits the chop and change:
each chapter is a new life; each
life is thus many lives; in each
moment, therefore, I stand for each
moment of each moment of each
life, and of each life. In this, we know,
a certain wisdom lies. (Do not be, ever,
every; be always and forever each.)
We wake to each, not every, sorrow.

Waking's what we teach through our
endless exemplary emptied days, while
nights are but each effort to escape

from every dream. You know, like the
river, everything returns, but each is as
the wave, the wave on which we came.

IV. In the cricket

Peter Taylor, selected straight from
Petersham firsts to bowl his offies
for the baggy green, taught us how
the 'Strayan dream can fizz and spit
through Sydney's fond atmosphere.
It's so old school: the delivery of danger
is shrouded in languor. Those days
at the beach, watching surfers riding in,
were a prelude to his mission, a certain
Taylorisation of swooping and swaying
in praise of the sun-gods: Cricketmas!
Did you wonder how we came, though?
How our boats made their ways through
rushing waves and seagulls to this,
these peaceful grounds of whited play?
Well, we had to face each one
on its merits, take things one day at
a time. It was very much a case of playing
the percentages, but you know,
I guess, in the end, a champion's always
a champ. We crumbled under their
pressure a bit, let their sledging
get to us — what can I say? Still,

that's why we're in this situation.

We've just got to work our way
forward from here. I think we'll start
with our approach to appealing,
look like we're really hungry for that
decision. Let them know we want
the win, that we've come to play!

V. Prospero

It is nobler in the mind
to speak than to be spoken
of, to mend than to be
mended, to call the scene
than to be two dopey young
lovers over sea, for such is
the nature of nobility: we hold
some are born to lead. It's in
this spirit, then, we've decided
to separate you two awhile
for your own goods, Australia
and asylum. Otherwise, I fear
the play might end too soon, too
simply, lacking good dramatic
pain. Therefore, oh lovers, oh,
the things that you'll endure!
Of course, in the end we'll need
to be kind, let you unwind, bring
ease after the many days of screaming

mind. I'm even inclined, after
you've done your time, to throw
wide open the doors to the party,
to call you (each and every) mine,
to escort you down the great line,
guide you from the ridiculous
to the sublime. But don't stop!
Detention's never over till the
mage completes his rhyme.

[1] *'The sea sheds many tears.'* (Lit. *'many gives the sea tears'.*)

Euthanasia drug bill's dignified demise

POLITICS

John Chesterman

The Victorian Upper House voted this month to reject legislation that would have enabled terminally ill patients to ingest a drug to end their lives. The Legislative Council chose wisely.



There is no doubt that those supporting the bill did so with the best of intentions. Many of them have seen loved ones die painful deaths, and have felt immense frustration at their inability to do anything but watch.

Colleen Hartland, the Greens Legislative Councillor and bill's sponsor, spoke in parliament about the 'intolerable pain and suffering' that confronts some terminally ill patients whose only choice at present is to refuse further medical intervention. It is human nature to wish not to see someone in pain, and moreover to seek to alleviate that pain wherever possible.

Yet few would argue that pain alone justifies euthanasia. And if we remove pain from the equation, the arguments in favour of euthanasia become much weaker. Instead of encouraging humane responses to suffering, these arguments become assertions about free will and the unpalatable burdens endured by the very sick and those who care for them.

More than anything, the debates are couched in the language of the desire for a 'death with dignity', the catchphrase of euthanasia supporters.

But if it is death with dignity that is sought, where is the indignity? Is it the indignity of a person trying clumsily to end their own life, where a less messy option might be available? Or is it the indignity simply of being terribly sick, of being incontinent, of having one's family see a person as a shadow of their former selves?

Is it undignified simply to be sick? Hard as it is, I can for a minute imagine myself, or indeed my parents or spouse, being terminally ill, filled with tubes, incontinent, unable to speak. That would be extremely sad, I might well feel undignified, but would I lose my dignity?

Of greatest concern was the broader message the passage of the Medical Treatment (Physician Assisted Dying) Bill would have signalled. The bill embarked on a pronounced shift. The 'sanctity of life versus quality of life' choice can be rephrased: do we protect life, or protect only those lives deemed worthy of protection?

The problem with shifting from the former to the latter is that once that step is taken, it cannot logically stop with terminally ill patients. Why should it? Why not make euthanasia available to those suffering extraordinary and unrelievable pain?

If one privileges free will in these matters, then such a choice should be available. At present few people value free will this highly. Enactment of the bill would necessarily have made such a choice more palatable.

This is not to advocate the artificial support of life at all costs. The decision to cease taking medicine is made daily in hospitals around the country. And the Victorian Supreme Court ruled wisely in 2003 that the decision to stop tube-feeding an unconscious and terminally ill woman amounted to a lawful decision to cease medical treatment.

It is true that there are serious ethical dilemmas involved when the prescription of pain relief has the effect of hastening a person's death. Again, such decisions are made daily, and legally, where pain relief (and not the end of life) is the main goal. But the decision to permit consumption of a drug whose sole purpose is to end life clearly goes a step further.

I recently convened a discussion on the topic of euthanasia in a fourth and fifth year university class. An international student later pointed to the irony that with all the developments in medical science and all the modernisation that was taking place, 'we are becoming like animals'.

He meant that we have lost the basic human instinct to value the time spent, and compassion involved, in caring for others. The pain, anguish and heartbreak involved are part of what makes us human. Already there is a creeping societal tendency to view caring for others as a duty with no intrinsic value.

This is largely, I suspect, because this role has little material value. We have lost sight of the intrinsic nobility involved in it. No-one is surprised to learn that a disproportionate number of care agencies, and presumably the carers working in them, are religious. They know they cannot look to secular society for rewards.

Still, as we have watched the Paralympics, even the most secular among us have been able to value life in all its forms, and to marvel at the indomitability of the human spirit.

Turnbull's opportunity to back battlers

EDITORIAL

Michael Mullins



Malcolm Turnbull laughed off the Government's half-baked attack on his wealth last week.

Infrastructure Minister Anthony Albanese mocked the new opposition leader as the 'reborn friend of the battler' from 'struggle street in Point Piper'.

However some of his colleagues were more illuminating. Small Business Minister Craig Emerson wished him well and said he hoped 'class envy belongs to the 20th century and not the 21st century'.

Finance Minister Lindsay Tanner said Australians are 'less interested in whether you come from privilege than whether you represent privilege'.

Malcolm Turnbull is a wealthy man. But, as the Australian Catholic Bishops assert in the annual [Social Justice Statement](#) launched last week, wealth is 'not in itself a bad thing'.

'Affluence can bring great benefits, depending on how we use it.'

Instead what destroys society is greed, and rich and poor alike can be afflicted by this condition, which is the product of an affluent society. The Statement argues:

'The worker and the family can be trapped in a cycle of overwork, over-consumption and debt in the effort to achieve material success. Indeed, affluence can give rise to the mentality that one has an inalienable "right to things". People can lose a basic sense of gratitude for what they have and instead be grasping for more and more.'

With the current meltdown of the global economic system, we are seeing the catastrophic impact of the actions of the wealthy who are greedy.

Some might be tempted to cheer on the sidelines as scores of greedy investors are punished for their sins. Certainly they lost sight of many of the principles of responsible stewardship as they played hard and fast during the era of loose credit, complex deals, and blind hope in rising home prices. But they will recover more quickly than those at the bottom of the economic pyramid.

Historically, the poor suffer most whenever there is a major financial crisis, with many losing their jobs. Retired senior public servant, and St Vincent de Paul Society economist, John Wicks is preparing an article on the crisis for *Eureka Street*. He says the poor will pay the cost of government decisions to put many billions of dollars into rescuing failed financial institutions.

‘They won’t have the money to put into health and education. Local councils are also caught up in it, with their investments. They are going to have to reduce expenditure on services, and increase rates, to cope with their losses.’

Wicks says the crisis proves that, while the free market is a brilliant mechanism, it will need to be offset by more regulation and government intervention, to ensure a fairer economic outcome for all members of society. In this, Malcolm Turnbull will have a good opportunity to demonstrate that he truly represents those who ‘live in rented flats’.

Unlikely (big) brothers in arms

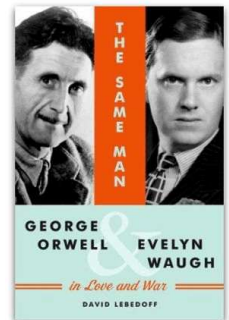
BOOK FORUM

Alexandra Coghlan

Lebedoff, David. *The Same Man: George Orwell and Evelyn Waugh in Love and War*. Scribe, August 2008. RRP \$29.95

A devout Roman Catholic and an atheist; a relentless social climber and a perpetual outsider; a sparkling social satirist and a literary polemicist. Outwardly, no two individuals could have less in common than George Orwell and Evelyn Waugh.

Yet the legendarily callous Waugh not only requested but was permitted to visit the reclusive and dying Orwell in hospital — his expression of a lengthy mutual admiration that, for Orwell, culminated in an (unfinished) essay in praise of Waugh's writings.



In *The Same Man* David Lebedoff attempts a conceptual high-wire act, arguing that these two men actually had far more in common than they had in conflict. Occupying the aesthetic, philosophical and political poles of their generation, the two authors gave very distinct voice to the dreams and dreads of a nation in flux — a nation whose present was in the process of becoming past, without any notion of where its future lay.

Inextricably linked to the concerns of a material age that both frightened and digusted them, Orwell turned to parable and Waugh to satire. It is in the brutal honesty of their cautionary visions, and their shared disgust for moral relativism that Lebedoff sees Orwell and Waugh united, arriving at a point of moral — if not spiritual — agreement from fundamentally opposing directions.

If Lebedoff's book is not a standard biography, it is no mere gimmick either. The provocative — some might say counter-intuitive — thesis that he puts forward serves to focus the bulky social and personal histories that fall within his remit, and yields an original angle of approach to two such canonical figures and a particularly ubiquitous period of world history.

If the result is occasionally guilty of an over-exuberant slanting of the evidence, it nevertheless makes for a compelling and provocative introduction to its subject matter.

At a mere 200 pages, *The Same Man* bucks the prevailing trend for comprehensive and exhaustive biography, opting instead for a more elegantly selective approach.

Structured around a series of touchstones — education, war, family life — the book allows its central figures to emerge gradually in parallel: Waugh's beloved country home at Piers Court set against Orwell's retreat in Jura, and his military service in Croatia juxtaposed with

Orwell's experiences in the Spanish Civil War, with direct comparisons largely reserved for the extended concluding chapter.

Lebedoff proves himself master of his material, employing apt anecdote, detail and quotation to particularly evocative ends, crafting a fluid and readable narrative out of the convoluted history of this period. Waugh's Oxford and Orwell's Spain emerge in colourful detail alongside less familiar episodes such as Orwell's time as a policeman in Burma, and Waugh's abortive suicide attempt.

Least satisfying is the chapter detailing the single meeting of the two men in 1949 shortly before Orwell's death. Despite, or perhaps precisely because of, Lebedoff's skilled build-up, the fleeting and frustratingly undocumented episode can scarcely be other than an anticlimax.

Lebedoff's account as to why Waugh — compulsive social diarist that he was — failed to relate the meeting does not ring true: 'The visit appears to have been purely personal. For Waugh saw Orwell not as another point on the scoreboard but as his equal.' It also raises more questions than it answers as to the true nature of the regard between the two men.

Evocative and conceptually agile, *The Same Man* makes up in elegance for what it lacks in sheer weight. Lebedoff pulls off what might so easily have degenerated into a bravura exercise in academic self-indulgence with understated ease, supported by his evident passion for his subject matter.

While his thesis is not entirely convincing, it could be suggested — in keeping with the provocative arguments of Lebedoff himself — that it is not intended to be. The book plays an extended game of devil's advocate with its characters and ideas, using its unconventional approach as a means of jolting his reader into viewing these fossilised and figures afresh.

If we put down the book unable to resolve the philosophical differences between Orwell and Waugh, we nevertheless cannot help but put it down with renewed interest and engagement with its figures.

When sharemarkets and the real world collide

ECONOMICS

Robin Bowerman



The relationship between the real world and the stockmarket can sometimes seem tenuous. The rout on financial markets is inescapable yet people are still going to work earning money, going to the supermarket or the pub to spend it, buying fridges, TVs and even luxury cars. Spring is in the air and football finals fever is building. In short life goes on.

So reconciling what is happening with sharemarkets around the globe, and trying to comprehend the mind-bending numbers that are tossed up regularly in the media about the size of losses or asset writedowns, is far from a straightforward exercise.

For the person on the street the problems besetting Wall Street investment banks seem a long way from life in downtown Australia. With the obvious exception of the bank employees who have lost their jobs, the gyrations of the sharemarket can appear strangely disconnected from everyday business.

With words like crisis, panic and financial contagion bombarding us via newspapers, websites and nightly news broadcasts it is no surprise that consumer and investor confidence has taken a battering. For the first time in 20 years bank term deposits top the rankings in consumer surveys as the wisest place to invest.

So the need for context — and a clear head — has never been more important. We know from previous market corrections/crashes that making emotional decisions in the heat of short-term events can simply turn bad to worse.

So a critical issue is whether you believe the financial market gyrations are a portent of bad things to come in the real world economy or that over time as confidence returns in company earnings that the sharemarket will return to realistic valuations based on the long-term growth in both our economy and the global economy.

There is no doubt those in the financial sector — notably US investment banks — have done a spectacularly good job at distancing themselves from the real world. Amazing profit growth within what has been dubbed the 'shadow banking system' in recent years has been exposed for what it is: increasing amounts of poor grade debt bundled up in a way that obscures the true level of risk.

Now that the default risk is there for all to see, suddenly we are faced with a system that is seizing up on itself. It's akin to driving a car with a fine engine but a gearbox that is struggling to engage the right gear. Repairs — be it via regulation or markets forcing mergers and takeovers — will clearly be required.

Yet there is plenty of good news around. Oil and food prices are down from their mid-year highs. The US economy seems surprisingly strong (the US economy had the strongest growth of the G7 countries for the June quarter) while unemployment rates — a critical economic indicator — both here and in the US are at low levels.

In the Australian economy the Reserve Bank governor Glenn Stevens reported to Parliament this week that domestic demand in Australia rose 4 per cent in the first six months of this year — down from about 5.5 per cent last year. That in itself is good news because, from the Reserve Bank's perspective, it takes the pressure off inflation, and gives them the flexibility to lower interest rates.

So the economic scorecard paints a much more positive picture than the daily gyrations of sharemarkets. But for investors who are receiving super fund statements or checking account balances online, that will be cold comfort. And there are lessons — albeit painful ones — to be learned from extraordinary periods like these.

With all the market activity swirling around us it can be hard to sit still and do nothing. If you are young, and invested in a diversified portfolio in your super fund, it should be easy to file the statement and write yourself a note to check back around the same time next year. If you are older, perhaps approaching or in retirement, the challenge may seem several orders of difficulty higher.

But at times like these diversification — spreading your money across a range of investments, a number of asset classes and over time — is the best way to handle the risk.

Australian shares — as measured by Vanguard's Australian shares index fund — is down 14.7 per cent for the 12 months to the end of August. In contrast the diversified balanced index fund is down a much more modest -4.7 per cent for the same period. No-one likes negative numbers but that really shows the power of having a portfolio that has a good level of exposure to fixed interest and bonds as your defensive asset mix.

The other perspective is to remind yourself that when you are investing in the sharemarket — and particularly with super — you are investing for the long-term. Looking over five years the Australian share market index fund has grown 14.3 per cent a year to the end of August. If someone had told you five years ago that was the return you would get, most people would have signed up happily.

When it comes to what happens next in the short-term, your guess is as good as the next person's. What a review of financial crises and crashes back to the 1929 Wall St crash does tell us is that they are typically caused by some speculative build-up which is where markets and the real world economy tend to part company.

After the bubble — and the seemingly inevitable hangover — the real world economic value can again be seen more clearly, and normal cyclical service is resumed.

Lipstick on America's political (dog) collar

POLITICS

Moira Rayner

The American presidential campaign gives us much to reflect on. The faces of three very different women show us a lot about modern political discourse.



Hillary Clinton stands out. Once she became a qualified presidential candidate, rather than the humiliated wife of a president, she was cut off at the knees. Even a black man was preferable to a middle-aged woman wearing a beige pant-suit who reminded too many men of their mothers.

She must have expected sexism: it had happened before. When first-term President Clinton appointed 'my wife' to do a serious job, reforming the health care system, neither the media nor the self-appointed elites were willing to make the best use, or any use, of the proffered 'two for the price of one'.

By the end of 1994, Hillary Clinton had been sidelined by her husband's own administration. She wrote in her memoirs, 'I underestimated the resistance I would meet as a First Lady with a policy mission'.

Too punchy, too confident, too ambitious, too female — because being seen to have real power and authority, as a woman, invokes the Furies. Her failure 14 years ago led to her becoming a 'lightning rod for political and ideological battles ... and a magnet for feelings ... about women's choices and roles'.

Once wronged by her man, sympathy kicked in, and turned off again when she sought to lead in her own right.

Michelle Obama, on the other hand, enjoyed a short honeymoon as a beautiful, sassy, smart and loyal presidential aspirant's 'first wife'. But once Hillary was scuttled, and once the Democrats rallied behind her husband's campaign, the same media that lauded Obama's poise and style confected 'offence' at her comment that she was "for the first time in my life proud of my country".

As a future great man's intimate and domestic support at the Democratic Convention, Michelle was safely bookmarked.

Then John McCain anointed a former beauty queen and 'hockey mom' with negligible political experience, fundamentalist religious and right-wing political opinions (pro-Iraq, killing moose with machine guns, drilling tundra parklands for a few years more oil, but anti-choice — did her pregnant 17-year-old really have one?) as his vice-presidential nominee.

This small-town 'beauty queen' in her 40s, with big hair, great legs, short skirts and killer heels, delivered a strikingly well-written speech to the Republican Convention in which she ad-libbed only once: that the difference between a hockey mom and a pit bull terrier is — boom-boom — 'lipstick'.

I support all women who aspire to politicking as women, rather than honorary blokes, and say no more about Sarah Palin, but have much more to say about her leader, McCain. He is no feminist. He said teenager Chelsea Clinton was 'so ugly' because 'Janet Reno is her father'.

According to *The Real McCain*, by Cliff Schechter, this crude bully went further in front of three reporters in Arizona: '[I]n his 1992 Senate bid, McCain was joined on the campaign trail by his wife, Cindy, as well as campaign aide Doug Cole and consultant Wes Gullett. At one point, Cindy playfully twirled McCain's hair and said, "You're getting a little thin up there." McCain's face reddened, and he responded, "At least I don't plaster on the makeup like a trollop, you c***." McCain's excuse was that it had been a long day. If elected president of the United States, McCain would have many long days.'

Hillary, Sarah, Michelle and Cindy (note, women are immediately recognisable by their given names, men by the patronymic) and 'Condi', too — all fill political roles. In modern western politics, such women are acceptable if they look 'youthful', wear plenty of makeup, never look tired, occupy subsidiary political roles (political 'wife', trophy 'vice president', presidential gofer) and are firmly attached to powerful men to whose authority they defer.

An 'old' political woman (50 plus — political men still apparently 'get heat' in their 70s), experienced in formal executive authority, in her own right, is acceptable only in a subordinate role, 'attached', and therefore safely feminine.

The big Western representative democracies seem unready for a Golda Meir. For a time, women like Imelda Marcos, Corazín Aquino, Eva Perón and Benazir Bhutto — women within powerful men's hierarchies — may rise, but can never be even honorary men.

And as to the honourable man who uses his women as props, perhaps paraphrasing both the man himself as well as Barack Obama, you can wipe the lipstick off a pig, but he's still a pig.

Q. 'In a world without women, what would men become?'

A (Mark Twain) 'Scarce, sir. Mighty scarce.'

Vote 1 Michael Palin

POLITICS

Brian Doyle



Like millions of other cube monkeys, the first I heard of John McCain's choice of running mate was the headline 'McCain picks Palin!' flashing across the bottom of my electric connection. I instantly thought, wow, bold move, Mac, wow, Michael Palin! ... and then inevitably remembered, dang, Palin is a Limey, born and raised on the moist island that used to run the world and now gazes enviously at Ireland, he can't be vice president, can he?

he?

Well, no, he can't, but just for a minute let us daydream of a Michael Palin candidacy. It wouldn't be so bad. Engineering background — father worked in steel. Shakespeare buff — once played all the parts at once, an epic feat indicating brilliance or insanity or both. Able writer in various forms, excellent public speaker, comfortable in front of camera.

Understands women — has certainly worn his fair share of dresses over the years. Big animal rights man, especially with deceased parrots. Understands commerce, especially cheese industry. Comfortable with various religious traditions; has played a minister and a Catholic cardinal. Astute student of urban transportation issues. Very well travelled, alert and attentive to cultural differences and humour.

He's fascinated by art and artists — he's even written a play, the one serious flaw in his resume. Reportedly currently working on a documentary about the First World War, the careful study of which should send any sensible soul sprinting toward other ways to solve geopolitical conflicts than dismembering the enemy by the millions. Interested in science — has an asteroid named after him, which is a sentence you hardly ever see.

Attentive to troubled children — founded a centre to help kids who stammer. Seems to be addicted to trains, which is a good sign in a world where more public transportation for less energy cost is rocketing to the top of the project pile.

Best of all, perhaps, about Vice President Michael Palin, if we could get past those pesky citizenship requirements (which are certainly being reviewed by a team of lawyers in the office of the Governor of California) is that he has a sense of humour, of the absurd, of the constant goofiness of life.

Seems to me that a true sense of humour is a real sign of maturity both in individuals and in societies; real humour, after all (I don't mean snarky irony, or the cruel laughing at the travails of others) is essentially democratic and merciful.

Real humour acknowledges that we are all battered by fate and luck, subject at any moment

to loss of dignity and balance, our expectations utterly dashed, or sent careening in new directions. Humour, finally, is a gentle admission that most of the time what we expect and prepare is not what happens, and we must accept this with grace and grin, or go mad trying to control the uncontrollable.

No one, as Michael Palin once said, expects the Spanish Inquisition, and perhaps he meant not the Catholic secret police of old Spain, but the much larger empire of chance.

With real respect for Governor Sarah Palin of Alaska — I mean, the woman led her high school basketball team to a state title, how cool is that? — didn't you, too, think the headline meant Michael Palin? Didn't you too think, just for an instant, that having a wild sense of humour in the White House would be an improvement on arrogance, hubris, incoherence, and men lying so thoroughly we are surprised their lips don't fall off?

Maybe that instant should be a lesson for us — not that we should elect more comedians, for we seem to have elected a veritable parade of those in recent years, but that we should elect someone who understands that deep, real, genuine laughter is a gift, a grace, maybe a prayer.

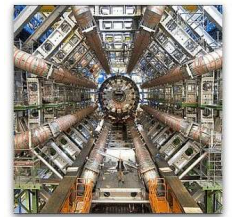
Woomf! Plunggg! Protons collide with doomsday fanaticism

BY THE WAY

Brian Matthews

In the week following the switching on of the Large Hadron Collider it seems mandatory to give it a mention.

Hands up those who don't know what the Large Hadron Collider is. Well, it's a Swiss machine immured in an alpine tunnel and it's 27 kilometres long, placing beyond all dispute its claim to being called 'large'.



Hereinafter to be referred to as the Hadron — a word susceptible of truly catastrophic misprinting of a kind that totally destroys the seriousness of any discussion — this interesting monster arranges for protons to smash into each other at blinding speed thereby duplicating the conditions which immediately succeeded the Big Bang.

It's doing that right now, as we speak: crash thump go the protons with sounds of *Woomf* or possibly *Plungggg*... I'm not sure what acoustical phenomena accompany the arguments of protons but, anyway, released by the scientists, they're doing their thing.

If you happen to be one of those people who keep abreast of the ever more unimaginable world of physics and astronomy — if you are a regular reader of, say, the *Collider Monthly* or the *Meteorite Collector's Handbook* or the *Geneva Guide to Very Large Dangerous Machines in Swiss Tunnels after 2007* — then you will have a sophisticated grasp of the whole Hadron landscape. A privileged few will even know about the curious, secretive, Dan Brown-like conclave, the Swiss Hermeneutical Hierarchy of Hadron.

But for most of us, knowing only what we learn through commercial channels, the really intriguing, rumoured aspect of the Hadron is that its activation could precipitate the disintegration of the entire galaxy or the universe or some other very large entity that normally we would not anticipate losing. It was this angle rather than the potential scientific revelations about the origins of things that tended to capture the popular imagination.

Not surprisingly, as a matter of fact. The Hadron has simply provided another trigger for humanity's innate proclivity for millenarianism.

The most recent outbreak of this curious rage for finality was at the dawning of the year 2000 but millenarianism — the confident prediction of and preparation for the end of the world and the various episodes of acute and sometimes destructive disappointment that ensue when the stubborn universe refuses to implode — has a long, eccentric and not especially honourable history.

In 1976, South Australia's charismatic premier, the late Don Dunstan, confronted one of these millenarian outbreaks head on. A self-styled mystic had predicted that a tidal wave would destroy Adelaide on 19 January. It was the punishment of God, he said, for Adelaide's having become a kind of Sodom and Gomorrah of the south. A bizarre hysteria gripped the city; some people sold their houses forthwith and left.

On the crucial morning Dunstan marched across Glenelg beach and faced the sea. Thousands watched as, at the appointed time of reckoning, there continued to emerge only the benign wavelets of St Vincent's Gulf.

It seems that even the smallest encouragement by circumstances or fanatics is enough to set off chiliastic impulses — the behaviour associated with the end of thousand-year periods but not confined to exact millennia.

In Lower Burma in January 1931, 700 Burmese peasants armed with knives, spears and a few antique firearms advanced into the teeth of heavily armed Indian and Burmese mercenaries convinced by their magic-inspired leader that they had become invulnerable and would establish the new order on earth. They were of course massacred.

On 22 October 1844, about 20 families assembled on the banks of the Schuylkill River at Phoenixville to watch the second coming of Christ and be drawn joyfully up into Heaven. His failure to show up cast all into deepest gloom and darkened the lives of many of them forever.

And so on. The desire for and expectation of a triumphant, cataclysmic or enlightening resolution has surfaced regularly for as long as men and women have wondered what on earth (!) they are here for.

The Large Hadron Collider is the 21st century's way of pursuing the age-old question of where we came from and why we are here, but for those of chiliastic persuasion, it becomes simply another, if technologically cutting-edge, risky and astonishing, occasion for speculations, forecasts and doomsaying which are as old as history.

Characteristically, as tensions and expectations rose during the final years of the 20th century, satirists posed the power of custom and age-old routines against the pull of millenarianism.

'The world is about to end,' proclaimed Monty Python's Flying Circus. 'Mountains will split open; seas will overflow their shores; the air will be sucked out of the heavens, the planets flung from their orbits. In the afternoon, however, conditions will moderate, rain will contract to the east and temperatures should be average for the time of year.'

US military strikes blunt Pakistan honour

POLITICS

Mustafa Qadri



Early on the morning of Wednesday, 3 September, just before people were waking for the first of their daily prayers, a squad of US and Afghan commandos attacked the small village of Angoor Adda in South Waziristan, Pakistan.

'I saw 15 bodies inside and outside two homes,' Habib Khan Wazir told Associated Press. 'They had been shot in the head.' Most of those killed were women and children.

The attack may not have been the first ground attack by US forces in Pakistan — it has maintained a military presence since soon after September 11, 2001 — but it is the first to be publicly confirmed. Pakistan has also been conducting attacks against militants in Waziristan, but this and other US attacks have not been cleared by Islamabad.

The Angoor Adda attack was followed, the next day, by a missile strike that killed five 'foreign militants'. On Friday, another missile attack reportedly killed five more civilians.

All three attacks occurred less than a week into a ceasefire brokered between the Pakistan Government and militants in honour of the Muslim holy month of Ramadan. Further strikes this week have claimed more lives, most of them civilians.

Prime Minister Kevin Rudd endorsed the Angor Adda attack, saying that the US is acting 'appropriately' in this and other unilateral strikes.

It is true that hardcore Taliban and Al Qaeda fighters cannot be negotiated with. But military strikes are a blunt instrument, particularly in the rugged tribal frontier of northern Pakistan. Such strikes end up killing more civilians than militants and offer no solutions to the underlying social and economic conditions that generate conflict.

That reality has yet to dawn on the US, although NATO now claims it will no longer undertake unilateral strikes within Pakistan.

Analysts note that US strikes have increased since Pervez Musharraf, Washington's staunchest ally in the War on Terrorism, resigned as President of Pakistan. Freed from the fear that its unilateral strikes would create resentment towards Musharraf, they have now decided that it is open slather on Pakistan's Taliban, Al Qaeda and affiliated militants. With the increase in attacks comes an increase in civilian casualties.

The presumption underlying this strategy is that the risk of civilian casualties is outweighed by the capture or elimination of high value targets. In this respect the US strategy

has not changed since September 11. There is a belief in the Pentagon that the removal of individual leaders will win the battle against Muslim extremists and reduce the likelihood of attacks in the West.

Yet no major Al Qaeda or Taliban leader was captured or killed during the Angoor Adda raid. And even if other strikes manage to eliminate key figures, the political capital lost from the civilian casualties largely outweighs the tactical gains. They may also constitute war crimes, although the prospect is unlikely to tax lawyers in Brussels and Washington.

The population of Angoor Adda and throughout Waziristan is predominantly Pashtun. They are ethnically identical to the people who live across the border in neighbouring Afghanistan. A civilian casualty in either community is seen as a crime against fellow Pashtuns. The Taliban cashes in on the subsequent resentment these deaths incur by claiming that foreign forces are seeking to subjugate them. Only the Taliban, the movement argues, can keep them safe and guard their honour.

Already the US has killed many civilians in Afghanistan since its October 2001 invasion. It stands accused by the UN of killing up to 90 civilians during an operation in Nawababad last month.

People in these parts are suspicious of foreigners, and with good reason. Much of that sentiment has to do with centuries of interference by external powers, most recently the British Raj and the Pakistan Government, that has left the region politically marginalised and economically undeveloped.

The casual nature with which Western forces excuse civilian casualties as an inevitable cost of bringing the battle to the militants suggests an abject ignorance of this history. Nor does it factor in the 'Pakhtunwali' honour-code of these tribal lands.

'Even people who do not like the Taliban will support [their] attacks against foreigners out of revenge for those slain,' notes Mansur Mahsud, an analyst with the Pakistan Institute for Peace Studies and himself a member of a major tribal family from Waziristan.

The Taliban movement is not a homogenous entity. Some of its members are ideologically driven. Known as the hardcore Taliban, they share Al Qaeda's vision of a strict theocracy along the lines of their narrow interpretation of the Deobandi school of Islamic thought. Others are motivated by local tribal politics. Others still are criminals or mercenaries who have affiliated themselves with the Taliban as a matter of expediency.

In December 2007, British officials held secret talks with a senior Taliban commander in Helmand, Afghanistan, in an attempt to make him change sides. The gesture was quickly withdrawn, however, after news of the negotiations was leaked to the press. Britain faced extreme criticism from Washington, and Afghanistan's President Hamid Karzai expelled the British diplomats involved in the negotiations. This strategy has subsequently been out of the

question.

Yet at some point military operations will have to be tempered with non-military strategies such as this. If a diverse approach is not adopted, Western forces may find that they are opposed even after the last Taliban and Al Qaeda leader has been eliminated by predator drones or commandoes.

Auctioning Jane Austen's hair

POETRY

P. S. Cottier

Modern Ovid

In the back of the ute,
linked by two thousand year chain
see them; half man, half beast
leaning round the bends.
The car itself is half lion,
and the field's wattle gold
are the round medals
of too much self-regard,
mirroring vanity, puffed
into tiny tree suns.
Cane toads, carelessly
squashed into tarmac,
are transformed politicians
still spreading venom,
and that endlessly running tap
was a sportsman who urinated
on ordinary people in bars.
Ovidian justice isn't blind,
but apt; appropriate.
That unfunny comedian
laughs at his own jokes forever;
a kookaburra's rehearsed glee
at his own pattering routine.

The lock ‘...a lock of Jane Austen’s hair has just sold at auction for Â£5640 (on today’s exchange, that’s AU\$11,640.73)...’

The Australian Writers’ Marketplace blog, 24 June 2008. A photo of the hair appears in The Guardian, 2 June.

It has been shaped into the crude representation of a tree.

Do they stroke it with avid fingers, this palm tree lock
that once grew from the full head of quietest genius?
Scalping would be too much, headhunting too tropical
but buying the hair of a dead woman you can’t know
is quite the thing. Your age, Jane, would craft sad crap
like this weeping whale-spout from bits of loved ones,
so willowy wrists were always kissed by absent lips,
dead, or gone to Australia. Perhaps the buyer loves
your wit and grace, balanced like a cat walking over
a bark of craning dogs; the way your corseted matter
could expand beyond tight binding without showing
the pumping. Or perhaps your dead snips are stalked
by modern zombies of celebrity, shameless and bloody.
A bit like Bath, but bigger. Personally, I blame the BBC.

Dressing down

Their clothes retired before them,
long ragged procession of rejects;
threadbare corduroy, shiny moons
rubbed into being like lamp genii,
or pink crescents of flesh, peeping
through faded denim skies. Jumpers,
unravelling back to wool, sheepish

in folds of drawers. These scarecrows
of themselves, superannuated coastal
ghosts, wake at night and stroll beaches,
scaring owls and sandy midnight roos.
Neat and immaculate, the shedders
of these wretched snake-skins wind
their way through work's roundabouts;
parallel-parked universe of skirts and ties.
The old rags wave like surf, ageing sirens
croaking your time will come. Tatty livery
of yawning holes and motley patches await
the some-day procession of leisurely,
sloppy, beanie-crowned, ug-boot kicking,
Kings.

When life begins in an ICU

PARENTING

Jen Vuk,

Inside the drawer of our lounge-room cabinet you will find the detritus of a modern woman and her hunter-gatherer husband: takeaway menus, a spare pair of car keys, old birthday and Christmas cards, unused TV remote controls.



But it's also home to something far more valuable — an envelope containing the ephemera of the first week of our son's life: cards welcoming him into the world; hospital information detailing his birth weight, height etc., his birth certificate, a tiny polystyrene arm splint, a hospital wrist band and photos of him moments after birth.

It's not a drawer I often open, let alone look into. In fact, due to the visceral nature of those photos (showing an unconscious newborn fighting for his life) I usually go out of my way to avoid it. So why did I feel compelled to rifle through it now and fan out the envelope's contents before me? Two words: Peter Costello.

Allow me to explain.

Last week, as the Victorian Abortion Law Reform Bill was passed in the Lower House, I caught myself doing what I never thought was possible: siding with the man known for his Cheshire Cat smirk as much as his sound economic record.

On the eve of the release of his memoir, the Liberal Party's former deputy leader and federal treasurer took the opportunity to wade into the abortion debate.

'We will have a situation in this country when in one part of a hospital babies will be in humidicribs being kept alive,' he said, 'and in some other part it will be legal to be aborting them.'

With this off-the-cuff comment Costello achieved what he never could under the pressure of his former leader's thumb. He hit the mark and crystallised the debate, taking those of us on the sidelines along for the ride.

As Frank Brennan [pointed out](#) in *Eureka Street* last week: 'Peter Costello is not alone in his ... quandary.'

For one long week my husband and I knew what it meant to be on the other side of a humidicrib's perspex window while our son lay strapped to an arsenal of tubes and wires in the Royal Women's Hospital's neonatal intensive care unit (NICU).

To us, our son, who found himself in such exalted company courtesy of a bilateral pneumothorax (collapsed lungs) at birth, seemed as fragile as a fig. And yet at full term and just over 3000 grams, he was positively sumo-like next to the wisps of premmies, all born less than 32 weeks.

Those such as Molly-Rose who came into the world at 26 weeks weighing just 880 grams.

'It took me 15 minutes before I could approach Molly-Rose's incubator,' writes her mother on the support site lifelittletreasures.org.au. 'All I could see at first was a lot of tubes and wires, then somewhere under them ... the tiny form of our little baby girl ... we sat by her all night, praying God would let our little girl live and give her the strength to battle this.'

In most cases, the difference between premature babies such as Molly-Rose and foetuses aborted at, say, 22 weeks is a few weeks and a world of circumstance.

As Costello intimated it's quite possible that medical staff will be terminating a viable unborn life on one floor while on another an equally dedicated group bends over backwards to give a child a fighting chance, despite knowing that one in five premature babies will be left with a disability.

Abortions (including those that are late term) are funded by Medicare, yet it costs \$2000 a day, according to some estimates, to keep each premature baby alive, adding up to the tens of thousands as they remain in intensive care for weeks or even months.

And while there are those not yet ready to become parents, overwhelmed by the thought of bringing up a disabled child or pressured into making a terrible decision, in amongst the NICU hubbub you'll find the ever-grateful walking dead (aka 'the premmie parents').

Lost, confused, and fighting for control where there is none, they quickly become part of the décor, existing for the day they can pluck their precious bundle out of the humidicrib and hold them close — and preferably forever.

In this parallel universe known as NICU there's one other thing in abundance. Hope. And for those parents born under a lucky star, a year or so after the sheer terror and trauma of that experience, and the trepidation that follows, they fall into bed exhausted not by anxiety but by the non-stop energy of a happy, healthy toddler.

A child, whose right to life was never in question, and whose perilous start is now a memory; a keep-safe tucked inside a rarely opened envelope in the back of a drawer.

SIEV-X questions sink leadership credentials

EDITORIAL

Michael Mullins



We have now had our first opportunity to read excerpts from the memoirs of former deputy Liberal leader Peter Costello, which were published in the Fairfax press at the weekend ahead of tomorrow's release of the book. For most of this year, the widely anticipated work has focused public attention on who would have better led the Coalition into the 2007

Federal Election.

This discussion has assumed a narrow definition of leadership that does not go beyond the ability to win elections. It makes sense, as far as it goes. John Howard won more elections than any other prime minister since Menzies, therefore he is Australia's best Prime Minister since Menzies. The supposition that Costello might have had more chance than Howard of defeating Labor in 2007, is enough to conclude that the Liberal leadership should have passed to Costello some time before the election.

The assumptions underlying these commonly accepted propositions have rarely been questioned. If the discussion of recent months had included scrutiny of the qualities required for leadership, we might have revised them to include moral fortitude.

If morality becomes a criterion for leadership, we then need to ask different questions. Such questions are asked by a study that was released last week, just ahead of Costello's memoirs. It is [*The SIEV-X: Insidious Conspiracy or Fortuitous Tragedy?*](#), a seven-page position paper published by the Melbourne-based Christian lobby Social Policy Connections.

As is known, though not so widely, 146 children, 142 women and 65 men died when an old wooden fishing vessel being used by people smugglers, sank while en route from Indonesia to Australia on 19 October 2001.

The paper's author Emmy Silvius points out that a month before the SIEV-X sank, John Howard revealed that he had authorised 'saturation surveillance' of international waters between Australia and Indonesia.

Howard said: 'We don't, in this nation, sink boats ...! But we're certainly talking about acts which are designed to deter.'

But deterrence became disruption, which in turn could very well have become sabotage — the Australian Government's answer to the French Government's Rainbow Warrior deterrence bid.

Then Minister for Immigration Philip Ruddock claimed some time afterwards that physically disrupting the work of people smugglers was one of the main reasons for the decline in asylum seeker boats coming to Australia. Australian Federal Police Commissioner Mick Keelty explained that the AFP provided equipment, training and travel costs to those Indonesian authorities involved in disruption activities.

So far none of the ministers involved in the people smuggling disruption program has categorically denied that the disruption program in Indonesia ever involved sabotage of a people smuggling vessel. The Howard Government ignored Senate Committee advice and Senate motions calling for a judicial inquiry into the sinking of the SievX. As Silvius concludes:

‘This has to be the lowest point of Australian politics. How is it possible that a government can get away with covering up the largest Australian-related civilian catastrophe in the history of this country?’

The voices of political leaders with moral backbone should have been heard above the silence that surrounded the handling of this issue. They were not, as leadership efforts were focussed on issues such as border protection and economic prosperity, in the interest of winning elections.

Voters value Independents

POLITICS

John Warhurst

Independent members of parliament used to be seen as dinosaurs, utterly unsuited to modern parliaments dominated by disciplined big party politics. As political parties expanded during the 20th century so did the apparent limitations of representation by Independents.



But times have changed. Political parties are on the nose. Independents are increasingly in tune with the times at both federal and state levels. They are still the exception rather than the rule, but they have won a new-found respect.

The recent federal by-election for the NSW central coast seat of Lyne, vacated by the former Deputy Prime Minister and Nationals leader Mark Vaile, was won by an Independent state MP, Rob Oakeshott. The Nationals had never before failed to win this seat. Oakeshott now joins Bob Katter and Tony Windsor to make three rural Independents in the House of Representatives.

The Western Australian state election, lost by Labor's Alan Carpenter, also elected one or more Independents who may ultimately determine the outcome in concert with the Nationals. This fact has been overlooked in all the attention focused on the possibility of the Nationals holding the balance of power in that state.

The view that it is folly to elect an Independent is widely shared because our way of thinking about politics is so political party-centred. In this view Independents don't achieve anything for their constituents because they are not at the table inside the party room of a major party.

Not being part of a party, in this jaundiced view, means that they cannot influence party policy nor can they win advantages for their own electorate. In other words Independents are presumed to be frozen out of the parliamentary power structures.

There are major problems with this interpretation despite its apparent insights into how politics works.

Some Independents, like former Senator Brian Harradine and potentially Senator Nick Xenophon in the Senate, do achieve results for their constituents and for the nation if they are lucky enough to hold the balance of power.

Most backbench MPs don't achieve anything out of the ordinary for their electorate even if their party holds office. If they hold a safe seat their constituents may even be neglected as the parties chase marginal seat voters. Furthermore, few backbenchers are able to exert an

influence on overall party policy greater than the influence exerted by an Independent.

But more importantly this critique of Independents is based upon a very narrow, instrumental view of the political process that is increasingly out of step with what many voters value in a parliamentary representative.

If you don't trust the integrity of the political process you won't trust an individual to work within it to your benefit. The apparent weakness of Independents in being outside the mainstream becomes their strength because they represent an alternative way of thinking about politics.

Voters are increasingly willing to run the risk of being neglected by both the government and the opposition. They feel neglected by the system anyway and therefore don't hold unrealistic aspirations about advancement for their electorate. Voters value an Ombudsman-type role for MPs in dealing with the individual problems of constituents above any grand view of the political process.

They like the personal touch that an Independent free of a party machine can offer. They like the fact that Independents by definition have no entanglements with party politics. They are even prepared to overlook the fact that many Independents, like Oakeshott, Katter and Windsor, were once in the party machine themselves before they saw the light.

Voters like the fact that the centre of gravity of an Independent is the local electorate. They welcome the fact that very little career advancement is possible for their local MP, unless it is to take a position above party politics as Speaker, like Richard Torbay, from Armidale, has done in the New South Wales Legislative Assembly. They don't mind having a local representative without aspirations to climb the greasy pole to become a minister.

If their local Independent member just happens to fluke a balance of power position then that is a bonus. But the essence of the support for an Independent increasingly demonstrated by a minority of voters stems from more local and high-minded aspirations.