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## Peter Kennedy's first year in exile

#### VIDEO

Peter Kirkwood

This interview with rebel Catholic priest, Peter Kennedy, took place almost exactly 12 months after his departure from St Mary's Parish in South Brisbane. Since leaving, he and his followers have formed a congregation outside the Catholic Church that they call <u>St</u> <u>Mary's-in-Exile</u>.

Trouble had been brewing between Kennedy and the local hierarchy for a number of years. This came to a head in August 2008 when Archbishop John Bathersby sent Kennedy a letter accusing him and his parish of 'practices that separate it from communion with the Roman Catholic Church'.

A number of heated exchanges followed — exacerbated by taking place in the full glare of the media spotlight — culminating in a letter from the archbishop the following February terminating Kennedy's appointment to the parish. Initially Kennedy refused to go, but he and his supporters finally departed from the parish in April 2009, marking a final rupture with the Catholic Church.

On this anniversary of the split, he reflects on the state of his community, how he views his priesthood, whether a return to the Catholic fold might be possible, and the importance to him of the mystical approach to religion.

The interview was recorded for *Eureka Street* at a conference called <u>Common Dreams</u>, a meeting of religious progressives held over four days at St Kilda Town Hall in Melbourne in mid-April 2010.

This forum is indicative of where Kennedy sees his new spiritual home. As he says in the interview, one of the first groups he connected with after his departure from the Church was the <u>Progressive Spirituality Network</u> in Brisbane, and St Mary's-in-Exile will probably continue to be part of the progressive Christian movement.

This progressive movement has gathered steam in the last ten years or so. It seeks to update Christian beliefs and practice so that they are in line with the modern world, with the latest findings in science, psychology, and sociology. It tends to reinterpret as metaphor, or even deny, the supernatural and miraculous elements of Christianity, including core beliefs like the virgin birth of Jesus and his resurrection.

It straddles denominational divides, and is probably most clearly seen in its intellectual leaders, the chief one being retired US Episcopalian bishop, John Shelby Spong. Others include English theologian Don Cupitt who inspired the Sea of Faith Network, and theologian and Presbyterian minister from New Zealand, Lloyd Geering.

The Christian organisations widely recognised as pioneering the progressive movement are the <u>Westar Institute</u> and its off-shoot, the <u>Jesus Seminar</u>, both founded and based in America.

In the video, Kennedy refers to a book of essays recently published about him and his falling out with the Church. Called <u>Peter Kennedy: the Man who Threatened Rome</u>, it is no mere hagiography. While most writers — and it includes heavyweights like Paul Collins, Martin Flanagan, Hans Kung and Joan Chittister — are in sympathy with him, there is an excellent chapter by Neil Ormerod, professor of theology at the Australian Catholic University, who is critical of Kennedy, and points out very clearly why he can no longer be considered part of the Church.

And that is a pity. As the video shows, he is a man of some eloquence, conviction and charisma, well able to communicate to the broader culture. In these days of shortage of priests, and crisis in the Church on a number of fronts, there is an urgent need for people with his abilities.

# Sympathy for Catherine Deveny

#### MEDIA

Andrew Hamilton



Although I have not met Catherine Deveny, I have followed her path in journalism with some interest. Some years ago she wrote for our sister publication, <u>Australian Catholics</u>, and I have a tribal interest in her subsequent career, like that of others among 'our writers'.

Even from infrequent reading of her columns in *The Age*, I noticed that she wrote often on the Catholic Church, but that her later writing could

scarcely be described as 'Catholic journalism'. The Catholic Church indeed became one of her regular targets. In her early newspaper writing I admired the strength of some of the moral positions she took. More recently, her writing appeared less personally involved, and based more on appearing outrageous.

When I heard that she had been sacked from *The Age* for her outrageous Logie night <u>tweets</u>, I felt some sympathy for her. She seemed the victim of the culture of media commentary. In her column she was encouraged to write stridently and to cross the boundaries of good taste and of ordinary human sympathy. The response expected from the column was, 'Ooh, isn't she awful?'.

Such columns are attractive to newspapers because of their capacity to polarise, and so to grow, their audience, with some people being outraged, while others identify with the causes adopted. I personally did not find Catherine Deveny's column humorous, but those who did saw humour in her over the top critique, particularly of religion, and in her uninhibited sexual reference.

The challenge of this kind of writing is that what yesterday was outrageous is pedestrian today. The ante needs to be upped. Deveny's tweets, which in part served to draw readers to her blog and column, duly upped it. But then she was sacked by the newspaper which set her along this path in the first place. The sacking smells of hypocrisy. Some will say that it was fair enough that those who live by the sword die by the sword. But in this case it appeared that those who provided her with the sword and encouraged her to use it liberally, stabbed her in the back with it.

The incident might make us reflect on a larger point: the increasing amount of commentary in newspapers and their blogs. Many of the commentators, like Deveny, present a public face that is rebarbative and disrespectful of people. People who know the columnists often say that this public face does not represent the personality of the writer.

The columns usually react to groups in the community whom they believe to hold wrong

ideas or to be socially odious. They then try to turn their readers against these groups by presenting them simplistically, taking the wrongdoing or foolishness of the few as representative of the many, and setting a brutally 'realistic' view of the world against the imagined soft-headedness of their opponents.

The columns ultimately appeal to the fears, hatreds and disdain of their audience rather than to reason. The effect of the column is to narrow human sympathy and curiosity, not to extend it.

Columnists who write about political and social affairs are rarely at risk of being sacked. But we might still ask if writing, whether humorous or serious, that depends on sweeping claims, brutal suggestions and dismissal of one's opponents will do anything to encourage a public conversation that is respectful and exploratory. It might sell newspapers, but ought we not to expect something more of our newspapers?

## Politicising women's bodies

#### POLITICS

#### Catherine Marshall

Women's bodies have long been the site of robust political battles. Abortion, prostitution, contraception, virginity, modesty, childbirth: for millennia, policy-makers the world over have sought to influence these issues one way or another in the hope of shaping a society that most resembles their vision of perfection.



Simultaneously, women's bodies have long been used as canvasses on which cultural, religious and political expectations can find expression: bound feet for Chinese women, corsets for Victorians, unshaven armpits for feminists, shaitels for orthodox Jews, uninterrupted ovulation for Catholics, burgas for Muslims, suspenders for strippers, habits for nuns, breast implants for anyone who thinks they might enhance their feminine appeal.

Liberal democracies have tended to debate these and other manifestations of ideological influence with healthy vigour, tolerating practices they don't necessarily agree with (prostitution by drug-dependent women, arranged marriages) and disallowing those that are so harmful as to be indefensible (clitoridectomies, rape within marriage).

Until now, that is. With the call for the banning of the burqa in countries across Europe, common sense and the fundamentally democratic principles we associate with that continent have been shown the door. The nasty storm being whipped up against women who wear the burqa in public — and the men who apparently elicit this practice — is not just bigoted; it is an extraordinary display of hypocrisy, and an affront to women the world over.

In the latest lobby, Silvana Koch-Mehrin, German member of the European Parliament, has called for a Europe-wide ban on the wearing of the burqa, labelling it a 'massive attack on the rights of women'. The burqa, says Koch-Mehrin, 'is a mobile prison'.

But it was French President Nicolas Sarkozy who threw the decisive, opening punch. His veiled prejudice notwithstanding, Sarkozy's condemnation of the 'anti-female' burqa would be so much easier to accept if only his own house were in order.

Burqas, he has said, 'do not pose a problem in a religious sense, but threaten the dignity of women'. If this were really so — if female dignity was his reason for initiating the bill aimed at banning the wearing of the burqa in public in France — he would readily ensure that the dignity of all women was not threatened, undermined, manipulated or, at worst, thoroughly annihilated.

Of course, Sarkozy — president of a country in which women are sometimes objectified, trafficked, abused, degraded, forced into labour, sexually harassed, treated unequally and

subtly humiliated — cannot deliver such an assurance. In France, as in Australia, the dignity of women is too often — and too deceptively — eroded: they are taught from an early age that their physical appearance is the pivot on which their success turns; many learn to accept infidelity as the norm, and others punish themselves with eating disorders, which are linked to self-esteem and, hence, dignity.

In her bestselling book *French Women Don't Get Fat*, Mireille Guiliano attributes this 'success' to 'the useful art of self-deception', which sees French women balancing the joy of eating with the social expectation that they will fit into the latest fashions and be attractive to their husbands. French men, Guiliano says, like their wives to be 'very elegant, very thin.'

So what is the difference, then, between wanting a thin wife, and wanting an invisible wife? Which is more democratic: the common western tendency to idealise the porn-star aesthetic, or the old-fashioned imperative for modesty and virtue? When the chips are down, is raunch culture really more dignifying than discretion? And do women who bare their slimline bodies actually feel more valued — more equal to men — than those who shield themselves from public view? Is the psychological aftermath any different for one group than the other?

While French women have every right to please their husbands by denying themselves food, Muslim women have the equivalent right to please their husbands by concealing their visages from a world that is — in their eyes — too voyeuristic for its own good. The objective observer needn't agree with either of these outwardly harmless philosophies, but in a self-proclaimed democratic society, he or she certainly needs to respect them.

And herein lies the rub: it is too late for France to position itself as a 'devoutly secular' country, impervious to religious enactments, in the way that Saudi Arabia is a self-professed Islamic country; and it is too ludicrous for France to claim the moral high ground when discussing the pressure and expectations that are applied to women. The mantra, *Vive la difference*, cannot suddenly be reversed under the thinly-veiled guise of 'female dignity', a concept which, in truth, is seldom fully upheld in any society, despite decades of lip service.

The call for the ban on the burqa is not a rallying cry against misogyny; it is, instead, a predictable knee-jerk reaction by those who fear Islamic fundamentalism. If only they were honest enough to say so.

# Sport as class warfare

FILMS

Tim Kroenert

Playing For Charlie (M). Director: Pene Patrick. Starring: Jared Daperis, Jodie Rimmer, Shane Connor, Mark Leonard Winter, Charlotte Zerna. Running time: 95 minutes.



Given the perennial challenges confronted by the Australian film industry, it would be easy to write *Playing For Charlie* off as another missed opportunity. In fact many elements in the first feature from Victoria based writer-director Pene Patrick work well.

Not the least of these is a strong performance from Daperis as Tony, a Rugby Union prodigy from Melbourne's western suburbs. *Playing For* 

*Charlie* is Tony's coming-of-age story. Though still at high school, Tony is responsible for caring for his infant brother Charlie (Zerna), as well as his mother Paula (Rimmer), who has MS. When the opportunity arises for Tony to try out for the state rugby team and possibly pursue a dream career, he is torn between his sport and his family. That said, success in the former could see the latter supported for life.

*Playing For Charlie* evokes a sense of sport as class warfare. Tony is the working class underdog battling to excel in a sport dominated by private school boys. The first challenge he faces in joining the team is a financial one: he needs to replace his glasses with a pair of contact lenses, but lacks the money to do so. He's also clearly on the outer, unrepresented in the collegial old boys' club of dads who have the state team coach's ear.

A long lost half brother (Winter) arrives on the scene to help Tony out with contact lenses and flashy athletic gear — the unemployed Scarf is mysteriously cashed up. Or maybe not so mysteriously; the temptation for the poor westie Tony to engage in petty crime is a clich $\tilde{A}$ <sup>©</sup> too far, but does help to highlight the social structures that define Tony's world, that oppress him and his family, and from which he hopes sporting success will free him.

While there is much to enjoy in *Playing For Charlie*, there are fundamental problems too. It has a divided focus, and a lack of balance between its different parts. On the one hand it is a domestic drama that emphasises the struggles of a working class family after the death of the primary breadwinner (Tony's father), and the additional pressure placed on the teenage Tony as student, carer and teenage boy with his own dreams and ambitions.

The mother-son chemistry between Daperis and Rimmer mean this domestic aspect of the film works quite well. But at times it becomes unbearably mawkish. The point where Tony, during a heated emotional exchange with Paula, tearfully declares 'I'm going to show you how to fly mum!' and proceeds to push her wheelchair at speed down the street, is *Playing For* 

Charlie at its corniest. (The less said about the half-baked westie caricature of Scarf, the better.)

On the other hand this is an underdog sports film, and yet for a movie about sport there is scant sport in it. This is a problem, because although it is important for us to understand that Tony is a prodigy, we never see his skills in full flight. Instead we are given fleeting glimpses of choreographed training sessions, and fuzzy flashbacks of Tony tossing a ball around with his father in the shadow of an oil refinery. The latter image is a telling symbol for the blooming of passion and talent in hard places, but it does not reveal Tony's brilliance.

In fact it's fair to say Tony's 'brilliance' is merely 'alleged', primarily by his high school rugby coach Ruddock (a curmudgeonly Connor), whose cantankerous interventions on Tony's behalf play no small part in the boy's incursion into the state team tryouts. But we need more than his word for it. Film is visual, and although we eagerly anticipate the eventual on-screen revelation of Tony's athletic genius, it never arrives.

*Playing For Charlie* falls down on points such as these. Perhaps 'missed opportunity' is the apt phrase after all.

## Making poverty personal

#### COMMUNITY

#### Simon Moyle

No doubt we've all been appalled by recent CCTV footage of people walking past a homeless man as he died of stab wounds on a New York pavement. <u>Hugo Tale-Yax</u> had attempted to intervene in a violent altercation between a man and a woman and was stabbed and left to die as a result. What is worse, security footage shows that over the four hours he lay there, many people walked past his dead or dying body.



People walking past a dead or dying homeless man is a tragedy, by which we are right to be appalled. But what compounds this tragedy is the frequency with which we all continue to walk past living homeless people, often with little or no more regard than was shown Hugo Tale-Yax.

While Australians wring our hands at a story like Tale-Yax's and click our tongues disapprovingly at those who walked past him, 105,000 people still go homeless every night in our country. Only a small percentage of these are living on the streets, with most couch-surfing with friends or relatives, or living in unsafe, insecure or temporary accommodation. Yet housing occupancy in Australia stands at an average of 1.2 people per house. That means the vast majority of homes are single occupancy, if not entirely empty.

Of course, reducing the incidence of homelessness is far more complex than merely providing people with a roof over their heads. But relying solely on government to do all the work is irresponsible and hypocritical. No doubt the Rudd government has to do more if it is serious about its target of halving homelessness by 2020, but when we live in the eighth most wealthy country in the world it is something for which we can all take responsibility.

Making poverty history often means making poverty personal, with all the cost and inconvenience that comes along with it. Only then do we begin to learn the complexities of people's lives and the social dynamics which reinforce and entrench disadvantage, from addiction and mental illness to social apathy and ingrained affluence.

My <u>community</u> has been offering a free lunch in the heart of Melbourne's CBD for about 15 years. We've sought to 'make poverty personal' by offering hospitality in the form of a free lunch, often sharing it with some of the city's most marginalised people. This simple act of sharing a meal begins to break down the barriers between people, allowing conversations to happen and personal connections to develop.

Homelessness in Australia is a complex problem, but if there is a common factor in the stories we hear it is that of isolation and loneliness. People end up homeless when their

support networks fail them or are not there to begin with. Strength to tackle these issues is built when people have the friendship and active support of other people. Building relationships is therefore a better strategy than merely giving money.

But that requires something much more of us than just flicking coins to a beggar. Perhaps instead of giving someone money for lunch, we could sit and eat lunch with them instead. Who knows where it might lead?

Tale-Yax's story is particularly instructive as it was his act of compassion in intervening in a violent situation which led to his death. People on the streets know the dynamics of violence and vulnerability much better than the rest of us. They endure not only the constant threat of violence from drunk revellers passing through the city any given night, but the cold indifference of others. This is a much more pervasive form of continued social isolation than targeted physical attack. A simple smile, acknowledgment or gesture of warmth can make the city a friendlier place for everyone.

Tale-Yax has been compared to the Good Samaritan from the biblical story. In that story, a Jewish man is beaten and robbed and left by the side of the road. Two religious people, a priest and a Levite, see the man but decide to walk on by. But a Samaritan, enemy of the Jewish people and considered the lowest of the low, stops and helps. The person who we least suspect is the one who assists. The one from whom we distance ourselves becomes our greatest moral instructor.

In one of his most famous speeches on this parable, Rev. Dr Martin Luther King Jr said, 'The first question that the priest and the Levite asked was, "If I stop to help this man, what will happen to me?".' This is frequently our preoccupation too; if I stop to help this person I'll be late for an appointment, I might feel threatened, or this person might ask more of me than I'm prepared to give.

One could understand why Hugo Tale-Yax might have taken this attitude towards the altercation in which he intervened. But as King goes on to note, the Good Samaritan reversed the question, asking instead 'If I do not stop to help this man, what will happen to him?'

Jesus tells the story of the good Samaritan in response to the question, 'If I am to love my neighbour as myself, who is my neighbour?' He does not give the answer though, leaving us to fill it in ourselves.

So before we direct our moral indignation at those 'priests' or 'Levites' who walked past Tale-Yax, perhaps we would do well to ask ourselves which character we most identify with in the story, and then ask ourselves what it means to be 'good neighbours' to the vulnerable people we encounter.

## Rudd and the art of talking in circles

NON-FICTION

Bill Collopy



Most esteemed reader, you honour us with your presence.

Rituals of courtesy can mask fear and loathing, though this takes patience. In certain cultures, to state one's aims in blunt terms can be as rude as prolonged eye contact. A virtual dance of the seven veils is expected: no clumsy gestures or bald statements; the roundabout approach, with honorifics and courteous nods.

Not in the sunburnt country, mate. Aussies belong to a group of so-called developed nations, where we tell it like it is and people know where they stand. So goes the myth.

But words of power take an indirect path here as they do in any kowtowing or curtseying culture. Certain sworn enemies must refer to each other as 'the honourable member' or 'my learned colleague'. Certain sworn officials are known as 'Your Honour,' 'Your Excellency' or 'Mr Speaker'. Physicians without a doctorate are called 'Doctor', Catholics address a celibate priest as 'Father,' and a raft of protocols is required for conversation with any member of the royal family. One knows one's place, ma'am.

Our prime minister, the ex-diplomat, has raised circumlocution to an art. In his speech to the Brookings Institution in April 2008, he outlined 'a natural complementarity between these two philosophical approaches and a complementarity that could be developed further in the direction of some form of conceptual synthesis'.

In his address to the London Progressive Summit that same year, Rudd said there had to be 'a greater synergy between, let's call it our policy leadership in this, which has been focused so much, legitimately, on targets and global architecture, almost reverse-engineered back to the means by which you can quickly deliver outcomes, and on the demand side in our economy we're looking at potential advances in terms of 20 to 25 per cent range if you do this across the board ...'

Whew. Is this language or labyrinth? Sometimes jargon — rather than Julia — fills in until the boss returns. Talk about a scenic route. Is he showing off, obfuscating, sugaring a pill, or all three? I suggest that our best known Sinophile has an aversion to plain prose. Why use one word when ten will do?

Most esteemed public servant, we do note that in recent months your polysyllabic heart rate appears to have slowed. What's changed? Could it be the patter of Tony feet? The polls have spoken. They favour populism over prolixity. Time to restart that 'working families' mantra. Plain beats purple, right?

Problem: false prophets of clarity often assail our collective ear thus, armed with some oily sales pitch and using plain words as camouflage. *Caveat emptor*, anyone? We need to be on our guard against lulling simple rhythms, such as those purveyed on a certain Australian bank's website with linguistic mutton dressed as lamb. 'Our brand promise, Determined to be different, was launched on 26 January 2008 and encapsulates the determination we have to be a different bank, and to be different from all banks in Australia. Determined to be different is underpinned by the new truths of banking, which are five key platforms for our differentiation ...'

Huh? This drivel might mollify a few shareholders but nobody's the wiser for it. Does the writer even care? Meaning comes second after intoning the buzzword liturgy. Anyway, I'm suspicious of scenic language from banks, in case they charge a listening fee.

Surely we deserve better communications from business and government. Instead of bombastic terms like instigate, impacted or suboptimal, official correspondence should contain simple alternatives like 'start', 'affected' or 'imperfect'. Instead of managerial claptrap like push the envelope or drill down, we are entitled to intelligible speech like 'test the limits' or 'analyse'.

Henry Lawson and Henry Handel Richardson would shudder at the balderdash from contemporary commerce. Alfred Deakin and Edmund Barton would barely recognise the bureaucratese. Why surrender to this argot of management consultants and PR spinners? A plague upon them!

Examples of clear speech abound in our history. One hundred years ago, Nobel-prize winning scientist, Sir William Bragg, spoke at Adelaide University on the usually penumbral subject of physics. 'For ages,' said Bragg, 'men have asked themselves "What is light?" When the ancient writer recorded as one of the great acts of creation the command of God, "Let there be light!", he testified truly of its importance to mankind, and bore witness to the extent to which the seers of his day had grasped that importance.'

*Fiat lux*. That's more like it. If he were writing today, Bragg might be tempted to use vogue phrases such as 'illumination event' or 'luminosity occurrence'. In a less pretentious Australia, even esoteric writers didn't call a spade a 'manually-operated excavation implement'. There were giants in those days. We have colossi now but all too many lose their way via peregrinations of prose. Let there be light.

## After the Latin

POETRY

Peter Steele

#### After the Latin

(for Peter Porter)

It's florets of thought that take the palm, but remember

to use moderation in jokes. The gods,

those connoisseurs of quipping, as they suppose,

are easily bored. A dolphin in the woods,

a boar in the waves - it's all too Disney for the deathless,

and they won't buy the smoke you blow.

Cheese is healthy when given with a sparing hand, but an empty keg is easily rolled,

even a hair has its shadow, the ticket to Dis

is always single, a gilded bit

won't cure a horse if he's turned funkstick and propped,

and yes, new fields of corn are waving

where Troy once stood.

They change the sky but not their soul who run

across the sea: the impartial earth

gapes for the child of a pauper as for a princeling:

forget the abacus when you're counting

the lucky — they're matched by white crows. At a crossroads,

a hare is biffing a dead lion,

some wolves shepherding their flock, a jackdaw

declining the lute. All praise to virtue,

shivering in the Arctic weather, but silver

won't stink, and every staff of empire's truly crooked at the top. Good luck to you, son: remember the fig-tree: it turns marble to shards.

Climate action after Rudd

ENVIRONMENT

### Tony Kevin

Kevin Rudd's <u>decision</u> to shelve till 2013 his Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme bills invites two questions. Is the Prime Minister still serious about Australia contributing to urgently-needed global action against the gathering climate crisis? If not, how should concerned Australians now respond?



The scientific prognosis of anthropogenic global warming (AGW) has been generally understood and accepted by an overwhelming majority of world scientists now for about 30 years (for the best citizen explanation, see climate scientist James Hansen's masterly 2010 book, Storms of my Grandchildren). Climate crisis denialism, still rampant in Australia, is best understood as a cognitive disorder not amenable to reasoned discourse.

Labor came to office 29 months ago promising serious policies on climate change. Remarkably, every one of its announced policies has now 'turned to dust', in Senator Eric Abetz's contemptuous <u>valediction</u>. Kevin Rudd casually informed Australians, almost as a by-the-way after the Anzac long weekend, that the centrepiece of his climate crisis policy, the CPRS, is off the agenda at least until his second term and until the political climate improves.

Kevin Rudd is technically correct that this is the opposition parties' fault: the Coalition and Greens parties rejected the Government's CPRS bills. But in most ways that matter, the buck stops with Rudd's deeply disappointing climate policy leadership since becoming PM. For almost everything that this government has said and done on the climate crisis since taking office in December 2007 has encouraged indifference, complacency and scepticism.

Labor has methodically massaged down the public appreciation — which was high in 2007 — of the imminence and seriousness of the crisis of AGW, to the point where it is now fairly politically painless to announce the inner cabinet's decision to shelve the CPRS bills for at least three more years, and perhaps indefinitely. Rudd has, it seems, seen off the climate crisis as an election issue — at least for now.

During 2008 Ross Garnaut expertly reported on the scale of the coming crisis and the needed national emergency response. He proposed a bold emission trading scheme, aiming for around a 20 per cent national emission reduction target by 2020 and a 60 per cent cut by 2050. Under political pressure from industry lobbies, Rudd during 2009 pared down the 2020 target to 10 per cent and later to a laughable 5 per cent.

In an Emissions Trading Scheme rendered impotent by massive handouts to heavy

industry, Rudd proposed to achieve this minor cut, not by reducing carbon emissions in the expanding Australian economy, but by buying green carbon credits from poor countries. Rudd dressed up this essentially phony ETS with minor feel-good spending initiatives: home solar and insulation subsidies and cheap loans; solar and coal carbon capture and storage 'flagship' power station programs which still have not materialised; and a complex and weak incentives program for infant renewable energy industries.

Meanwhile, Rudd stroked the growth lobby and economic nationalist sentiments. He stressed the difficulty of international negotiations and assured that Australia would not get out ahead of any other countries' offered sacrifices. He welcomed the prospect of unconstrained economic growth, growth in coal output, and a rapidly growing Australian population.

Rudd's refusal to integrate a true policy response to Australia's climate crisis into real-time national economic management and budget-making encouraged public perceptions of the climate crisis as something distant and unreal. The gains in public understanding made during the later Howard years were eroding, but Labor did not seem to care. Foolish climate change denialism, and a justified scepticism as to the value of the highly disruptive and compromised ETS, fed off each other.

More and more, the question was asked, did Rudd really believe in his own words on the climate crisis, or was this just a constituency he was feeding with gesture politics, to the extent necessary to stay in power?

Tony Abbott's coup in late 2009 shocked Rudd into realising how much ground he had lost. Even the ABC was now infected with climate crisis denialism at the most senior level, with a prominent board member demanding 'balance' between science and anti-science.

Belatedly, Rudd tried to reclaim the truth of the climate crisis. He made a strong speech at the Lowy Institute — using phrases that will come back to haunt him — roundly condemning the follies of <u>denialism and delay</u>. The CSIRO and Bureau of Meteorology <u>stepped up</u> their public education efforts. But it was too late: too much public ground had already been lost.

Crucially, Rudd has never as Prime Minister offered any positive vision of a responsibly decarbonised Australian energy economy, built around non-fossil fuel energy sources. He has always compromised the credibility of his own rhetoric on AGW's clear and present threat to human security, by his refusal seriously to spell out the possibility and affordability of a rapid replacement of coal by renewable-based (and possibly including nuclear) energy. Such things were always for Rudd somewhere off in the vague future — not part of his practical day-to-day politics.

Moreover, 'fair' international task-sharing (whatever 'fair' means on this existential challenge) has always seemed to Kevin Rudd more important than the overall goal of rapid emissions reduction to safe levels.

Australia contributed to the failure of the UN at Copenhagen in 2009. It had already lost (at Poznan) its brief moment of glory in Bali in December 2007 as an honest international broker. Now it was recognised as a self-interested player, concerned mainly to protect the interests of its coal industry in any agreed international program. The widespread international perception of Copenhagen as a failure, and the expectation of a similar outcome at the next UN meeting in Cancun this year, further nurtured public moods of growing indifference and denialism in Australia.

When James Hansen visited Australia in March 2010, no one much could be bothered to hear or meet him. Most of the Australian environmental organisation leaderships were by now deeply enmeshed in the government's compromised climate change gesture politics. They felt threatened by Hansen's <u>stark messages</u> that a simple carbon tax would work far better than over-complicated and corrupt market trading in emissions permits, and that nuclear energy should not be ruled out as part of a balanced decarbonisation solution.

No one from the Government or major environmental organisations met Hansen.

Rudd has never been a real leader in the gathering climate crisis — he has in fact drained and squandered the public trust and potential for real leadership that was invested in him in 2007. He has let himself be driven by the most powerful interest groups around him.

To date, these voices have been defenders of the status quo. Unlike climate crisis activists, who will have to do the hard and emotionally painful work of agreeing on a program of agenda and priorities if they want to achieve real changes, defenders of the status quo do not have to do anything. Simply in articulating their own individual social and economic interests and prejudices, they are collectively defending the net outcome, which is the present status quo.

So it is hard to find villains or conspiracies in Australia's failure to respond to the climate crisis. The enemy is most of us, behaving normally. Some might point fingers at polarising figures like Ian Plimer or Andrew Bolt or the pseudonymous website host <u>JoNova</u>. Far more significant are the multifarious 'common-sense' voices in public life, who project messages of soothing indifference to what climate science warns. These are the voices Rudd hears, and in his own cabinet as well.

Is Rudd then himself a climate crisis denier? Not in words but, we may now conclude, certainly in deeds. This seems to be another variety of the cognitive dysfunction inherent in denialism — Rudd has managed to sequester his knowledge of the climate crisis safely away in another part of his brain. He is too intelligent a man to deny the science, but he has found a way to shrug it off. For as long as he wants to go on being Prime Minister, he will protect himself in this way: and all our children and grandchildren will suffer consequences.

So what can concerned people do now? Conventional Australian parliamentary politics has failed us in the imminent climate crisis. No wisdom can any longer be expected from either

major party, and the minority Greens lack both the prospect of early power and the necessary concentrated policy focus on the climate crisis. Vote Green by all means if you wish, but it is now necessary also to find the courage to support and take part in mass direct non-violent public action — at sites for new coalmines, new coal railway infrastructure, new coal power stations. This movement will have legal martyrs, and they will need expert pro bono public defenders.

The model must be Vietnam War protest (and refugee protest in the Howard years). When conventional politics failed, huge numbers of mostly young Australians took to the streets, to drive home to society and politicians the message that sending our young sons to kill and die in Indochina as part of cold-war alliance politics was intolerably wrong.

Environmental organisations now need to find the courage to disengage from government, to free themselves from compromising entanglements for the fights that must come, and in which if they are at all serious about their role, they will have to engage and lead. They, as well as young people, will need to find that courage — and older Australians such as myself will need to do our homework on the issues, so that we may understand and support them when things get ugly.

Kevin Rudd's announcement last week actually offers a public policy turning point. Will we recognise this moment of decision for what it is?

## Rudd tax act leaves vulnerable Australians hanging

#### POLITICS

Susan Helyar



The final piece in the Government's current ambitious reform agenda was put in place yesterday with the release of the Henry Tax Review and the Government's response to that review. UnitingCare Australia contributed several times to this review because taxation is one of the most important tools at our disposal for achieving economic justice and is vital to a flourishing society.

Central to an effective tax system is the premise that people contribute, according to their means, to the wellbeing of the whole community. Australia's tax system needed substantial reform to ensure it supported the Government in fulfilling its responsibility to ensure every citizen has the means to live a decent life and create opportunities for all Australians to belong, contribute and be valued.

But despite the broad sweep of recommendations in Australia's Future Tax System, the Government has limited its response to introducing a new resources tax which will be used to fund a range of superannuation and company tax concessions and infrastructure improvements. All decisions on personal income tax, personal benefits, pensions, housing, welfare and aged care have been postponed, possibly to be announced in the Budget on 11 May or during the election campaign.

I hope the delay in providing a comprehensive Government response to this once in a generation review is not a sign that the Government has lost momentum following the 18-month-long consultation in the lead up to the release of the review. I hope it means the Government is going to work directly with disadvantaged and vulnerable people and the organisations that support them to determine how best to address the critical outstanding issues considered in the review.

Of these issues, the most important are that we: consider how to ensure people living on low incomes, including those on income support, get a better deal out of the tax system; remove anomalies and poverty traps for people moving from welfare to work; and address the sustainability of social services, including how best to ensure adequacy and certainty of funding.

These issues are complex but important. They have been under consideration in numerous forums for years. In fact services across the UnitingCare network, and UnitingCare Australia, have provided substantial analysis and advice to dozens of reviews in the past decade aimed at improving the effectiveness and sustainability of income support and social services in Australia.

With the release of Australia's Future Tax System, the Federal Government now has all the information it needs to work with us to promptly address the barriers faced by people excluded from community life and the labour market, and the constraints faced by the services that support improved social and economic outcomes for disadvantaged and vulnerable Australians.

Much has been said about the capacity constraints faced in the business sector. Both the Review and the Government response paid close attention to this issue. But limited capacity is not only constraining Australia's ability to get commodities to markets, or skilled workers into the resources sector. Australia needs to pay attention to building both economic and social infrastructure to cope with the demographic, environmental and social challenges we face this century.

Families are constrained in their capacity to access flexible work arrangements, quality childcare and affordable transport to work. People trying to move from welfare to work face barriers to accessing relevant education and training and have trouble meeting the costs associated with seeking work from within inadequate income support payments. On top of this they can face effective marginal tax rates of around 70 cents for every dollar earned when they do get into work.

Older people, people living with disabilities and disadvantaged and vulnerable Australians are not able to access all the supports and services they need. Carers and family do not get access to enough assistance to help them sustain their support roles.

Without considerable reform it will be difficult for services to support the growing needs of disadvantaged and vulnerable people and communities across Australian.

Prompt action is needed to address gaps in Australia's social infrastructure and constraints on achieving better social outcomes. Prompt and collaborative action on these issues will demonstrate the Government is going to deliver fully on its ambitious and absolutely necessary social inclusion agenda.

## **Rudd the Terminator**

#### EDITORIAL

#### Michael Mullins

Opposition leader Tony Abbott and executives from Big Tobacco appear to be alone in their opposition to the Federal Government's draconian measures to cut smoking.

Last week Prime Minister Kevin Rudd imposed an immediate 25 per cent tax increase on tobacco products and signalled his intention to require plain paper packaging by 2012.

Abbott stressed that he is opposed to smoking, but questioned the Prime Minister's motives, claiming that Rudd is making a panicked 'tax grab' to pay for his addiction to spending.

While his reasoning suggests opposition for opposition's sake, Abbott is right to ask questions. However it's not so much the tax *grab* that is a worry, but the shift towards regressive taxation to fund the health system. In other words, increasing the cost of cigarettes hurts the poor more than the rich. If James Packer still smokes, it does not matter to him whether he has to pay \$13 or \$20 for a packet of cigarettes. But it makes a big difference to many other Australians.

The regressiveness of tobacco tax is compounded by the reality that smoking is much more prevalent among those from lower socio-economic and disadvantaged Australians. Health policy analyst Jennifer Doggett <u>says</u> that while the 'white collar' smoking rate is just 13 per cent, the Indigenous figure is 50 per cent, and the rate for those with schizophrenia is 90 per cent.

Such figures are quoted whenever tobacco tax hikes are threatened because welfare advocates know that many Australians with a small discretionary income will give priority to cigarettes over food and clothing for themselves and their families. Such is the nature of addictive substances, and it only demonstrates that some form of draconian action against tobacco is necessary.

However Rudd is acting with the callous efficiency of The Terminator when he really needs to find a more equitable incentive to give up smoking. Not only does he appear committed to unfair regressive taxation, but there is a lack of empathy towards those who will suffer most from this particular form of tough love.

He may not be a smoker himself, but he makes no attempt to encourage smokers from lower socio-economic groups to feel that he is one with them. In the past he has demonstrated empathy in some of his prepared speeches, for example the allusion in the health debate to his



upbringing in a family of nurses. Instead his <u>rhetoric</u> here was combative, and it was as if smokers were as much the enemy as Big Tobacco.

'Cigarettes kill people. Therefore the Government makes no apology whatsoever for what it's doing ...| This will be the most hardline regime for cigarette packaging anywhere in the world for which we make no apology whatsoever.'

The action on smoking is clearly part of a strategy of taking an easy option to get runs on the board before this year's election following a series of spectacular failures and backflips. But the punishing manner in which he is executing his plan could cause it to backfire, and leave him offside with the 'battlers' whose quality of life is noticeably diminished by the regressive tobacco tax slug.

# 'Bigot' gaffe jars with British presidential politics

#### POLITICS

Peter Scally



Britain is entering new and uncharted political territory this month. For the last 60 years, its governments have either been Conservative or Labour and have almost always commanded a majority in the House of Commons. But almost every opinion poll for the last few months has predicted a hung parliament in which no administration could be formed without the support of the Liberal Democrats. Britain faces the prospect of its first coalition government since 1945.

The other transition that has been taking place in British politics has been much less dramatic — in fact so slow and gradual that many people don't seem to have noticed.

I was only 12 years old at the General Election of 1979, but I remember an American music teacher at my school saying that, if she had a vote, she would 'vote for Thatcher'. She was quickly corrected — she could vote Conservative, but not for Thatcher, because it wasn't a presidential election. Thirty years later however, it is noticeable that people now commonly talk about voting for Brown, or Cameron or Clegg, apparently unaware that only a few thousand people in the constituencies of Kircaldy & Cowdenbeath, Witney and Sheffield Hallam will actually be able to do that.

Presidential politics has well and truly taken over.

Some attribute this to the influence of the United States. Others to Tony Blair, not only for his 'presidential style' in which Labour's appeal to the people came to rely more and more on his personality, charisma and persuasiveness, but also for a presidential style of government in which debate in parliament, and even in his own cabinet, was circumvented in favour of 'sofa government' — the driving through of Blair's own initiatives, guided by 'focus groups' and a cabal of close advisers.

One of Gordon Brown's first acts when he became Prime Minister was to prohibit politically-appointed advisers from giving orders to civil servants — an aspect of Blair's presidentialism that had most irked the civil service. For a moment it looked like the drift towards presidential politics might be stemmed and some semblance of parliamentary democracy restored.

Such hope was short-lived. Revelations in the last couple of years about MPs' expenses, in which the taxpayer turned out to have footed the bill for, among other things, the purchase of a floating duck house by one MP and the cleaning of another's moat, have grievously

undermined Britain's trust in its parliament.

The party leaders, aware of the damage that any hint of impropriety could do them, have strained to present themselves as beyond reproach, and competed with each other to take the hardest line with their own MPs — with some success, and a resulting media perception of them as white knights, compared to their gravy-train-riding, expenses-fiddling foot-soldiers whose main aim is to get their snouts in the trough and claim the maximum allowance for their taxpayer-funded second home.

Not a good time, in other words, to try and promote the idea of parliamentary democracy.

The final nail in the coffin came during the run-up to this election, when it was announced that a series of debates would be staged between the leaders of the three main parties, live on television. We were told that what the United States had been doing for 50 years, we were finally catching up with now.

The awful thing is, that might be true. Since the first of these debates took place, the attention of the political pundits — and conversation in pubs and at bus stops — has been entirely focused on how each of the leaders did in the last debate and what he has to do to improve in the next one. Did he smile enough? Did he sound sincere? Did he land any blows on his opponent?

The impression is driven home that we are choosing one of these three men to be the nation's leader. Any suggestion that we might be choosing local representatives to speak for us in parliament — the foundation of the British political system — seems to have been completely lost. And, though questions of policy do come up in the debates, they scarcely earn a mention in the post-debate analysis.

Yet these TV clashes seem to be changing minds, and have given a huge boost to what we used to call the 'third party', the Liberal Democrats, because of the widely-acclaimed performance of their young leader, Nick Clegg.

Of course, he has the easiest job. Brown has a record of government to defend, and David Cameron has to offer alternative policies that will stand up to scrutiny whilst making himself look like a 'statesman', a plausible alternative Prime Minister. But in a country where disenchantment with 'the system' seems to be at an all-time high, all Clegg, the 'outsider', has to do is to look cool and say 'let's do things differently' and he's winning hearts, minds and votes up and down the country.

It hardly needs pointing out that all this focus on leaders and their personalities and styles is not good news for Brown. Disaster was deemed to have struck this week when an inadvertent remark he made in a car when he didn't realise he was still miked was whipped up by mischief-making reporters into a huge story. In terms of relations with the media and ease in front of a camera, Brown is to Tony Blair what Pope Benedict is to John Paul II — shy,

serious, a little too 'heavy' for our sound-bite culture, and just not the TV personality his predecessor was..

Brown's opening speech in the second debate included the line, 'if it is all about style and PR, count me out'. Sadly, it looks like that is exactly what's happening.

## Shane Howard's constancy in hard places

BOOKS

Andrew Hamilton

#### Shane Howard, Lyrics, One Day Hill, 2010, ISBN 97809 805 564 358

Reading a book of songs without the music is like watching a grand final with the crowd sound turned off. But even allowing for the absence of music, Shane Howard's book of poems and songs is a delight to read.

It is beautifully produced by One Day Hill publishers, and accompanies the lyrics with evocative paintings by Theresa O'Brien and Howard himself. The songs are colloquial, but their depth of feeling and grasp of imagery and rhythm engage the reader even without their musical setting. Martin Flanagan introduces the collection with an illuminating foreword.



The lyrics record Howard's preoccupations over almost 30 years. He came to public notice in the 1980s through his band, Goanna. He has continued to pursue his music and his commitment to the truth of Australia and its histories, living with Indigenous communities and visiting his ancestral Ireland and deriving the inspiration for his music from the places and people with whom his life is intertwined.

The themes of the lyrics are familiar in folk song - love, struggle, freedom, the beauty found in unexpected people and places, love of familiar land and the pain of absence.

The point of interest is the singer's individual perspective on these themes. Here, the focus is on constancy. Constancy is a particular kind of faithful and enduring love that must necessarily face and conquer all the intractable forces in yourself, in circumstances and in others that make you give up. Howard's commitment to justice and his companionship with Indigenous Australians has taken him into hard places. His songs form a dialogue in which constancy is sought, feared, loved and finally embodied.

In some of his early songs the invitation to constancy involves naked courage in the face of brutal force:

But when they're coming with daggers in their eyes

Don't take that nowhere ride

Stand yr' ground.

Other songs celebrate the inevitable and hard struggle to keep going despite our own failures, disappointments and brokenness:

So get out of your head and face the day

No-one's goin' to take the pain away

Got to find the strength within, to get up and start again

Now you know you're not the only one.

But constancy demands more than endurance and the refusal to bend. If it is to be human, it also asks for the capacity to let go and find simple ways of accepting oneself and others. This tension between endurance and sweetness recurs in the lyrics:

Give a little before it gets too late

Give a little now, it's everything can wait.

Above all, though, constancy is the flowering of love. Most of these lyrics could be described as love songs, even when they focus on the land, on values or on people overwhelmed by the misery of their lives. Although they tap deeply into the darkness of being human, the songs are sweet and wistful in the hope that animates them.

The bird of paradise just won't land

On the greedy, grasping hand

Surely love is the sweeter thing

It can heal the wounded heart and the broken wing

Love will always find a way.

Howard comes from a part of Western Victoria that was settled by Irish immigrants. Their symbols run through his songs. He was also involved in the struggle of the local people to prevent St Brigid's church at Crossley being alienated. When the Catholic parish remained determined to sell it, locals raised enough money to buy it as a community centre. The final poem in this collection celebrates the spirit of the early Catholic community that built the church.

So devoted so devout

They had so little but went without

To build that church up on the hill.

Howard's feeling for the church and his commitment to the campaign to save it embody the world represented in this collection of his songs. His appreciation of the constancy of purpose of earlier generations, his recognition that their constancy makes a claim on their decendants to respond in kind, and the image of the church on the hill that represent both the hoped for end of the uphill struggle and the inspiration to continue the journey, frame a generous and courageous vision.

Of course, the albums are the main course but this book is excellent as either aperitif or desert wine.

## A childish view of Melbourne Storm

#### APPLICATION

Andrew Hamilton



When I first heard of the Melbourne Storm tragedy, I laughed. It was a great story: one to be enjoyed, but not taken too seriously. But I was soon told that my attitude was childish, and that the events mattered very much. So I was forced to examine my conscience.

I recognised that my attitudes to games had indeed remained stuck in an ill-spent childhood in which a little cheating was part of playing games.

Calling your opponent's serves out when they were just in, moving inconveniently placed golf balls slightly so you could have a decent whack at them, and failing to follow suit in cards when advantageous were devices not unknown. And as you did, so you were done unto.

Even now, I confess, I enjoy stories of cheating done in style. Tales of ringing in horses on country tracks, putting a block of ice on the pitch the night before the opposing team bats, or nobbling the goal umpire in a footy final always bear retelling.

I suppose it is a sign of a childish attitude that I am not only indulgent to cheating, but also approve heartily of the retribution exacted by the NRL on the Melbourne Storm. For a child it is important that when cheating is discovered it should be sanctioned. Unless the rules of games are strongly affirmed and cheating is heavily penalised, there is not much point in cheating.

Children are also partisan in their judgments. So my insouciance about the dark doings and retributions at Melbourne Storm may not be unconnected with distaste at having to read about a Melbourne rugby league club in Melbourne newspapers. My wistful regret that the AFL did not strip Carlton of a couple of premierships when they had the chance may also be used as evidence of immature judgment.

Convinced that my initial views were indeed childish, I asked those of patently mature judgment why the Storm affair mattered so much. The first response was that rugby league and the Storm's place in it were significant in the Australian economy. It was not simply a game but a money-making business, and money mattered.

How could any serious minded person argue with that? But I raised a difficulty. It lay in the heavy financial penalty levelled on the Storm. That might have been appropriate when something less significant was at stake, but not in the case of something that mattered, like money.

I noted that in the week that the Storm story broke, there had been many business stories. They included the rorting by companies of the insulation scheme, bribes paid by miners in Cambodia, a minimal sentence given to an inside trader, and the general confidence expressed that Goldmann Sachs or any other firm whose practices had contributed to the GFC has little to fear from mere charges of fraud.

Where money is at stake, it seemed, it is the business of regulators to avert their eyes and encourage successful moneymakers to pursue their craft with more abandon. So how could my interlocutors justify imposing such heavy financial penalties on Melbourne Storm for adopting practices that built the club into a formidable money making enterprise?

One person of mature judgment murmured that if serious money was threatened the penalties would be modified.

But others said that the affair was serious because people also mattered. I should have had some fellow feeling for all the innocent players at Melbourne Storm, their families and friends, the supporters who found meaning in the club, especially the children, who look to their sport to learn their moral code, and idolise their players and their club. As they contemplated premierships becoming virtual but not virtuous, a reality with no medals and medals with no reality, and an idolised club with feet of sodden bank notes, they would be devastated. Their sense of purpose and trust in the moral universe would be eroded.

I contemplated this devastating outcome in silence. But then I wondered aloud whether it was not a little condescending to encourage people to keep these apparently childish attitudes. If people matter, should we protect them from the grief that comes when they realise that Santa doesn't exist, that their parents and clubs they idolise are not perfect, and that love is vulnerable to betrayal and death? Should they never be confronted with the invitation 'to strive and not to seek reward', to see virtue as its own reward, and to recognise that money doesn't matter all that much?

The people of mature judgment looked at me with distaste. 'But if they cease to be childish,' they said, 'how could you ever monetise them?'

# **Music as religion**

FILMS

Discerning humanity

Tim Kroenert

# *The Concert* (PG). Director: Radu Mihaileanu. Starring: Aleksei Guskov, Mélanie Laurent, Dmitri Nazarov, Valeriy Barinov. Running time: 119 minutes.

A trio down to one. Gypsy bluesman, guitar and a spotlight halo. Mind tuned to a numinous frequency. Fingers, impossibly nimble, driven by soul and muscle memory, weave melody amid the dappled tips of sunny seas. Rush it to foamy, gushing peaks. Drop it amid thundering, vigorous rolls. Then set it adrift once more, wet, bruised and quietly thrilled. The saga concludes in a cacophony of chords that leaves instrument, artist and audience ecstatic, reverent. It's music that transfixes; transcends.



I have witnessed this guitar solo of Australia's John Butler (of the Trio fame), 'Ocean', live, twice — most recently within the warm dark space of an Alice Springs evening: 'Ocean' in the middle of the desert. It's one of those performances that prove the transcendence of music; when the artist's skill, passion, and the audience's collective emotions are caught in a breathless swirl of sound and feeling.

It's the moment when God arrives, who or whatever it is you understand 'god' to be. As such it is music as religious experience; rock concert as church.

Whatever your musical poison, you've probably experienced something like this. The French film *The Concert* depends upon it.

It showcases Tchaikovsky's 'Violin Concerto' — a far cry from Butler's contemporary acoustic guitar solo, but equally magnificent. The film builds towards a performance of this ebullient concerto by a motley crew of musical Muscovites. Their conductor, AndreÃ<sup>-</sup> Filipov (Guskov), intends to present them fraudulently as Russia's premier Bolshoi Orchestra for a one-off concert at Paris' prestigious Théâtre de Châtelet.

Andre $\tilde{A}^{-\prime}$ 's attempt to pass off this ragtag and often boozy bunch as a distinguished and dignified orchestra is ripe with comedic potential. The film exploits this to occasionally irritating, slapstick effect. But centrally the film is interested in the human story of, particularly, Andre $\tilde{A}^{-}$ .

The former conductor of the Bolshoi, AndreÃ<sup>-</sup> was fired during the Communist era for refusing to expel Jewish musicians and has since worked as a cleaner. The hoped-for performance is less about recapturing fame than finally resolving past regrets. He is flanked in this endeavour by bearlike cellist Aleksander (Nazarov) and nostalgic KGB agent-turned-publicist Ivan (Barinov), each of whom played an untold role in that decades-old

#### trauma.

Discerning humanity

Unknown to her, AndreÃ<sup>-</sup>'s featured soloist, celebrated French violinist Anne-Marie Jacquet (Laurent), is also at the centre of his quest for resolution. Laurent's dignified luminosity emphasises Anne-Marie's near angelic role in AndreÃ<sup>-</sup>'s and the orchestra's journeys. They in turn enable her human and artistic blossoming.

*The Concert* is a funny and endearing story of which Tchaikovsky is ultimately the star. His concerto swells at the heart of the film and, during the climactic moments, becomes the aural bed for a redemptive and literally magical conclusion. It is during these final moments that the viewer, like thousands of music lovers standing, awe-struck, shoulder to shoulder on a football field in The Alice, will appreciate the potential of music to enable miracles.

## Why NAPLAN boycott must happen

#### EDUCATION

Fatima Measham



It is all-out war between the Australian Federal Government and the Australian Education Union (AEU). Up until this month, the conflict has played out in the media as a war of words, centred on the publication of results from the National Assessment Program — Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) through the MySchool website.

The stage is now set for an industrial action showdown, with the 180,000-member AEU maintaining its ban on teacher supervision of NAPLAN, despite an investigation by the Fair Work Ombudsman. Any order against unprotected industrial action will cover Victoria, Northern Territory and the ACT. In other states, education ministers have pursued such an order to prevent a teacher boycott.

There would have been a few die-hards who hoped until the last minute that Education Minister Julia Gillard could be brought to the table to negotiate terms.

She has not, however, truly engaged with concerns from teachers, principals, academics and — yes — parents, regarding the flaws in determining groupings of 'like' schools, the use of MySchool figures by the media to create simplistic rankings of local schools, the promotion of a professional culture that teaches to a test, and the creation of an adversarial relationship between parents and teachers.

What intensifies the conflict is that both sides actually agree on a core point — that NAPLAN provides valuable information. In fact, Gillard and teacher unions present a similar argument that the national tests are not to be taken lightly. The divergence of opinion over the use of test results is thus made sharp by the fact that both parties are righteous in roughly the same spirit.

Yet the Federal Government has carefully crafted its communication so that it would seem teachers do not share its goals nor the values of parents. Prime Minister Kevin Rudd has stated, 'The Australian Government is on the side of parents and we're on the side of MySchool because we want to lift the standards of all Australian schools.'

The rhetoric echoes Gillard's proposal that parents be recruited as replacements should the teacher boycott go ahead. It is a kind of brinkmanship that discomfits even her state counterparts, Geoff Wilson (Queensland) and Jay Weatherill (South Australia), who oppose this move. Weatherill went as far as saying that 'a number of the suggestions [made by the union] about improving the quality of information on the MySchool website seem sensible to me.'

Indeed, the use of data is the area in which stakeholders, who would be normally aligned, are divided. Catholic and independent schools, for example, will not be boycotting the national tests despite stated concerns over MySchool (a telling move, given that such schools would generally sit in the top half of any league table).

According to Dr Julie Faulkner, senior lecturer at the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology School of Education, Labor voters would be similarly divided. She says that those who had expected a 'progressive approach' from the Rudd-Gillard partnership 'are dismayed by the confrontational stance'. She fears 'teachers will again be used as scapegoats for deeper systemic social inequities, while the government positions itself as a tough, can-do leadership'.

Such a situation would be catastrophic because the relationship between government and the education sector should be one of shared vision. After all, the modern socioeconomic engine is driven by the literate, numerate, and functional masses who spent most of their formative years in a classroom. It is therefore in the government's interest to get education right.

However, it has failed to do so by alienating educators. Gillard has drawn the line between teachers and parents, as if teachers are not naturally supportive of parents' desires regarding their children's education. In challenging state schools, it would be the reverse — teachers often wish that parents were more involved in their children's schooling.

'We need to move from the overused 'accountability' catchcry,' says Faulkner, 'and think about 'support', 'resources' and 'relationships'.' Unfortunately, while Gillard has stated that the MySchool data will help governments identify schools in most need, she has not gone as far as saying that the data will be used to craft more equitable funding arrangements for public and private schools.

The point is that the best outcomes for students come from a collaborative partnership between governments and schools, between schools and families, and among teachers — not the adversarial relationship that the Federal Government has so far promoted for its own end.

Already, media outlets have been trumpeting how much it will cost taxpayers for teachers to walk out on NAPLAN. What has been buried in the debate is the idea that, unlike other industrial disputes over employment conditions and workplace policy, the May boycott will be one of principle for participating teachers.

As Faulkner points out, the overemphasis on NAPLAN-based school comparisons 'exacerbates the tensions between quality teaching and learning. In the long term, it leads to teaching to the test, due to fear of results.' For many teachers, the professional — and for some, the only ethical — thing to do is to oppose such moves.

# Confession of a football criminal

NON-FICTION

Frank O'Shea

I think I may have a police record, but I'm not sure. Bear with me while I explain.

Where I grew up in Ireland there were plenty of fields; not large enough to qualify as Australian paddocks, just enclosed spaces varying in size from a tennis court to the 17th green at St Andrew's. The grass was a bit long and you rarely saw the cow pat until you stepped in it, and although they often

had the rolling undulations of the 17th at St Andrew's, there was always a definite uphill, which is not helpful to football.

That's not the point, of course. Even if we had an MCG to frolic in, we wouldn't have bothered, because playing on the street was more exciting and guaranteed you spectators and occasional encouragement from a tipsy supporter on his way home to his dinner.

So when a new sergeant came to town, determined to clean up the streets, we were first in line. They would call it zero tolerance these days, but in that little town, we were what passed for major crime. There were six of us: my brother, myself, two O'Briens, a Healy and a fellow named 'Babs' Cronin who had a withered arm, the relic of childhood polio, and whom we always put in goal. All six of us were summoned to appear in court on a charge of playing a game, to wit handball, in a public place.

We weren't worried because we knew we were not playing to wit handball but to wit football. 'Babs' thought he had a particularly strong case to show that he could not have played handball even if he tried.

Jack O'Brien, who grew up to be a seriously pious sexton at the local church, assured us we would get off. But the judge was not impressed and said it made no difference what we were playing and fined each of us five shillings. He probably wasn't a judge at all, maybe only a minor magistrate, but five shillings had to be deposited in court.

The case was not reported in the local paper, much to our disappointment, so we never had the distinction of being described as 'local youths'. We didn't mind the fines, which our parents duly paid. In our pre-teen innocence, we were convinced they would appeal, all the way to the High Court if necessary. They had more sense. Times were different then: if you did something wrong, you got a good walloping and were sent to confession and your sister was the pet for a few weeks until it all blew over. Which is what happened to us.

I've often wondered if there is a dusty file somewhere which describes the six of us as 'felons' - or even as 'youths', which would be almost as bad - but I've always been too



frightened to find out. I suspect not, because some years later when as a young adult I wanted to go to America, I had to get a letter from the local police to say that I was well behaved. The town sergeant was the same man who had brought us to court many years earlier, but as I was in his football team by then, he may have decided to cover up my criminal past.

Incidentally, my brother also got a US visa and recently retired as a school counsellor in the South Bronx where he would have loved to be able to persuade some of his charges to play street games to wit handball or to wit anything else which did not involve white powders or funny smelling leaves.

America has never been given full credit for keeping law and order in Ireland. It is not easy to get young Irish people, university students in particular, excited enough to become involved in street demonstrations or marches because there is always the danger they would give the police who love picking on smart alecs an excuse to swoop. The result could easily be a police record and the young person would be barred forever from getting to America where the last things they want are young desperadoes.

Australia too does a thorough check on migrants to make sure they don't have a criminal past. However, because I originally came to this country from America, I only had to make sure I behaved myself there and played no games to wit handball on the streets of New York.

Which brings me back to where I started. I still don't know if I have a record. Maybe it would be better to leave it like that.

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Discerning humanity

## Rise of Tasmania's 'Green devils'

#### POLITICS

John Warhurst



The new Tasmanian Labor government now includes one Green minister and one Green cabinet secretary. The discussion of this development has been too narrow, failing to learn from the ACT experiment of Green support for a minority Labor government.

This neglects useful ACT lessons, including the current productive relations between the Greens and Labor, as well as the previous effective example of Independent Michael Moore serving as a minister in the Carnell Liberal government.

The discussion also neglects developments elsewhere, including the role of Independent and National Party ministers within the Rann Labor government in South Australia until the last election. Once again this produced stable and effective government. Only passing consideration is given to the Liberal-Nationals alliance in Western Australia which supports the Liberal government of Colin Barnett.

One consequence of these oversights, particularly of the ACT Greens, is that speculation on the likely role of the Greens in the new Tasmanian government has looked back two decades to the failed Labor-Green Accord in Tasmania. This encourages extravagant criticism of the Greens as Green devils. Admittedly Labor's David Bartlett before the Tasmanian election did describe the prospect of working in tandem with the Greens as like supping with the devil. But it is a silly choice of words.

Behind this criticism is an old-fashioned yearning for majoritarian rather than consensus government. It also reflects an unwillingness to recognise the Greens as a legitimate third party, representing not just 20 per cent of the Tasmanian electorate but 10 per cent (12 per cent in the latest Nielsen Poll) of the national electorate.

The party and the people they represent are not going to go away. The major parties and all supporters of majoritarian government must recognise this. Australian politics will benefit when the Greens are better integrated into the system rather than frozen out.

The Greens represent the views of a significant minority of Australians on many current issues, including sustainable economic growth, forestry policy, peace and war, refugees and asylum seekers and climate change.

The Greens can be difficult, uncompromising partners. Moreover many Greens are anti-system on economics and politics. They prefer to stand outside the mainstream rather than to be incorporated within it. But the time will come when Labor-Green alliances of various sorts will be seen as just as normal as Liberal-National coalitions.

They will not be condemned as unworthy because of the size of the Green vote. National Party deputy prime ministers have held office in Coalition governments for years with a national vote smaller than the Green vote. Senior Liberals have wished the Nationals away, but they go along with the Coalition to maintain political dominance over Labor. Likewise, the Nationals have often bargained hard, just as the Greens have done, in order to secure ministerial posts.

The simplistic argument against such Green involvement is that the conservative parties have more in common with each other. This is an unduly rosy picture of Liberal-National relations, forgetting the many occasions in the past where relations have been extremely tense. It also forgets the distinctive culture and ethos of the Nationals, though that has been eroded over time.

The tense occasions at the national level include the black-balling of William McMahon as Liberal leader and Prime Minister by Country Party leader John McEwen after Harold Holt's death in 1967. This was not just about personalities but about deep ideological disputes over an open economy.

The same is true of Sir Joh Bjelke-Petersen's wild foray into federal politics in 1987, which destroyed John Howard's chances at that time. Once again this was not just about Bjelke-Petersen's personality but about deeper issues like rural alienation. Bjelke-Petersen represented an anti-mainstream movement.

At the state level there was an acrimonious history between the Liberal and Country parties in Victoria. This led to the Labor Party supporting minority Country Party governments from the 1930s to the early 1950s.

Observers need to know their history and to get used to the participation of the Greens in the mainstream. Not all Greens will like this development, because it will mean inevitable compromises. But the full inclusion of the Greens will eventually happen.

# In the suburbs of glut

#### POETRY

Les Wicks

#### Life is just a bowl ...

Where there is stone, add stone. The dearth of construction

beside an unruly line of river

left a clamour of crabs. Men planted

civilised trees as bastion.

1930/ money stopped. No one quite understood but

hated the banks. We are colonised in our pockets ... chains

clutter the soul. Make-work, The Oatley Park Castle stands yet as

councils again spend to keep ratepayers busy & liquid. We forget

in our conflux of cages

the suburbs of glut that's

all happened before as

we water our money & count on permanent shelter.

Our leaders are aflame with cobbles,

every recovery has its kernel in a list:

re-tint the angophoras, paint the toilet block, massage

a cracked path perhaps

guttering is the new hat.

New workers will purposefully stand around -

slack back perhaps inspirational wounds from Afghanistan

or Saturday night at Revesby.

Some say only the fear is real,

but they've got jobs. This latest Big Empty

is reaving across the globe, migrant workers

bring nothing to nothing home. We can barely chart their return, microscopic retreats as nannies desert KL for a village SW Java where the men haven't produced much for years. The same delusion that made us rich leaves a Hungry by the doors. By comparison the 'wealthy' ones, Australian with homes on the market, no offers, bereft in Bankstown wails in Warrimoo. People are & want good. Philosophy or psychology is useless. The Castle is a landmark, folly simultaneous ... pointless poetry, bread & sausages. You're at a slit in the suburbs of the Lower Superfluity, offer shade with a hail of arrows. Throw a confetti of langrage — kill the neighbours with rubbish — pottery shards, old nails. These skirmishes & rout across real estate, all of us stand in our small, spotless pits with adamant walls. The dead in her parlour, Castle's blocky virility nulls the sun. Deft stonework is roofed by concrete, the woman climbs the ramp to stand on the platform to look out because one does. On cue she says Oh. I imagine the battlements manned as we fight again for stable booty. This rectangle of promise above the tides, undertows of business swollen with debris that sees all the plans burnt off like sunspots on superannuated backs. This is embodied memory of works, working.

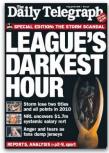
The weave slightly, cold days in a limp, heady smell of territory — today. Our soggy inferno, cinched tight in each mind, life is an old habit ... promises persistence, if not joy. South of savagery we are beneath the East, becalmed in the wake of American shoppers, those burly trolls. We hope quietly against reason when reason is not even in play.

## Storm blows Anzac values

#### SPORT

#### Michael Visontay

The salary cap in sport is one of the last remnants of Australian egalitarianism, and this is one of the reasons why the Melbourne Storm's behaviour is so offensive. The Storm's salary cap breach is much more than an accounting deception and a betrayal of the other clubs, players and the public. Because it is so systematic, and stretches back so long, it is an offence against one of the values that Australians hold so dear, especially at Anzac Day: a fair go.



As a nation that has historically used sport to punch above its political weight, Australians are acutely aware of the inherent advantages that larger, wealthier countries enjoy in sport. That awareness is expressed through the salary cap: let everyone have a chance based on skill, not money.

Almost alone among the world's great sporting societies, Australian domestic competitions accept the idea that there needs to be a limit to the amount of money clubs can pay to players. The NRL (league), AFL (Aussie Rules) and FFA (football) have accepted and prided themselves on this fairness principle. It allows different clubs to prosper, rewards innovative coaching, and helps the code stay less predictable — all crucial elements to credibility and popularity.

The salary cap is a regulation to keep the playing field as level as possible, a mechanism to promote competition and avoid the problem afflicting sport in Europe and America: in the northern hemisphere a rich businessman or consortium buys a club as a trophy and uses their fortune to buy all the good players, such as Russian oil tycoon Roman Abramovich has done with Chelsea football club in England.

The Storm may weather the financial fallout from this scandal. It may survive and continue within the NRL, although it faces enormous hurdles with a new stadium almost finished and little prospect of filling it for the rest of this season.

The greater problem is the moral stain, which will be exacerbated by the fact that it's in Victoria, the Aussie Rules heartland. It took several years for Melbourne Storm to build up a following; every fan who walks through a turnstile has been weaned away from Australian football. All the more so because Rugby League is a Sydney game, which makes it the game of the enemy to most Victorians.

Those supporters will now reassess what the club actually means to them as Victorians. Will they want to continue supporting a club that has consistently cheated its way to the premiership, in a code that is foreign to them? It is hard to see any Rugby League fan, north or south of the border, feel ongoing loyalty to the Melbourne colony.

In the Rugby League family, the Storm has become, overnight, a source of universal shame. Every player, coach and official will be tainted with the unspoken doubt: Did they know? Did they do anything about it? Did they turn a blind eye?

Already, other clubs and regions have put up their hand to replace the Storm within the competition. That is slightly premature and dancing on a grave that has not yet been opened, let alone closed.

But the systematic nature of the deceit and the severity of the NRL punishment indicates the depth of outrage felt by administrators, and the example they want to show. The logic is brutal: the Storm stole the past from the other clubs; the NRL has now ruined its future.

The larger picture is that modern sport is in a period of transition: from a game that was run by ex-players and saw itself as a self-enclosed world, to a business governed by modern commercial laws and judged by wider social ethics. Holding all of this together is the principle of social trust in the institution of sport, just as the recent GFC highlighted the importance of our capacity to trust financial institutions.

The Storm breached everyone's trust and has lost the most important asset of all: goodwill. Sport is popular because the public has innate goodwill towards sports figures. They forgive individuals their mistakes because of that goodwill. Matthew Johns' rehabilitation is an obvious example.

Johns' return started when he faced the music after the group sex scandal, went on TV and showed the public his remorse. Now the Storm, like the Catholic Church, has to demonstrate its remorse. The question is: will anyone be watching?