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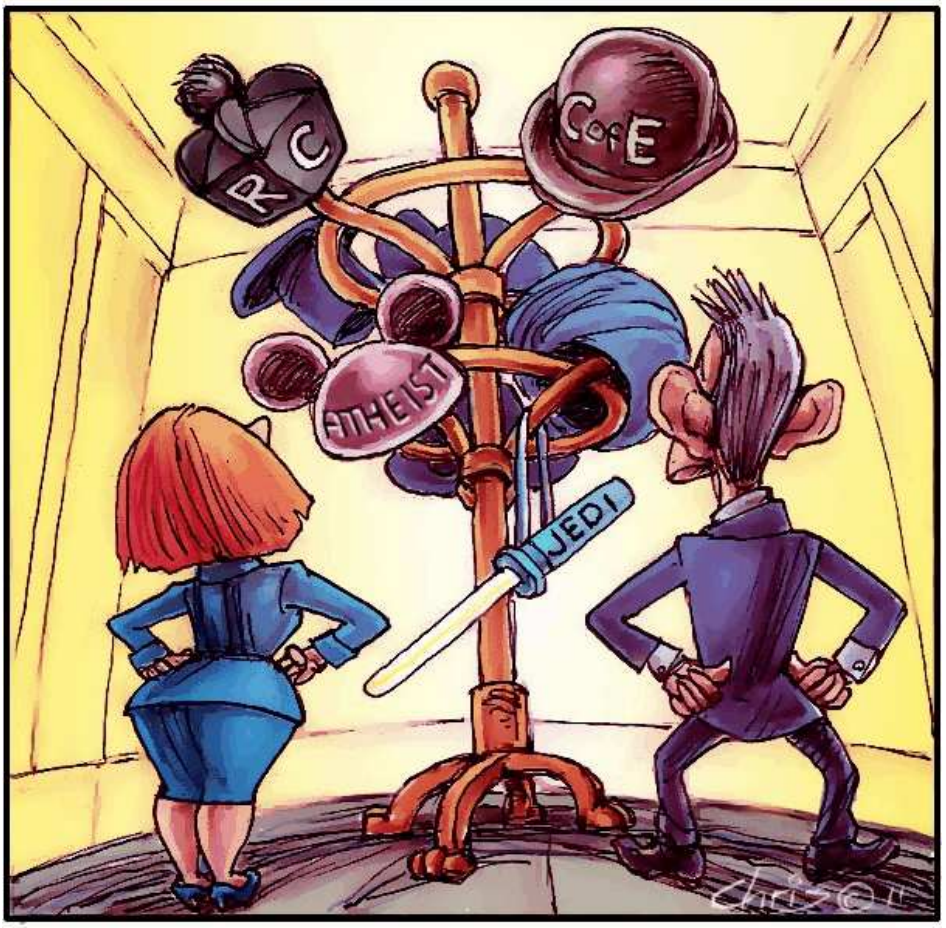

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Former diplomat's Australian-American alliance anger

VIDEO

Peter Kirkwood

This year marks the 20th anniversary of *Eureka Street.* To celebrate the anniversary, the journal presented a series of six video conversations with prominent contributors earlier in the year. This interview is the first in a second series to continue the celebration.

It's fitting that the interviewee is an outspoken advocate for human rights and social justice, as, right from the start, these have been a prominent strands in the issues covered by *Eureka Street.* At the forefront has been the plight of refugees and asylum seekers, along with a raft of other issues, like Australia's involvement in developing countries, and in wars and conflicts around the globe.

Tony Kevin has written with verve and insight on all these topics. He began writing after retiring from a lengthy and distinguished career as a senior public servant and in the diplomatic corps. He worked for 30 years in the Prime Minister's Department and in the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, and served as Australia's ambassador to Poland (1991—94) and Cambodia (1994—97).

Kevin's life and career was strongly influenced by his parents. His Australian Irish-Catholic father, also a diplomat, met Kevin's mother in London before the outbreak of the Second World War. She was a Jewish refugee from Vienna, who'd escaped from Austria with her family at the time of the Anschluss, the annexation of Austria by Nazi Germany in March 1938.

Her family were secular Jews, and so Kevin grew up in Sydney in what he calls a 'fairly secular household'. In primary school he attended the Protestant Cranbrook School in Sydney's eastern suburbs, but every Saturday his father sent him to the Jesuits at Campion Hall for instruction in the Catholic faith. In high school he boarded at the Jesuits' St Ignatius College, Riverview.

Kevin studied engineering, and later economics and politics, at Trinity College, Dublin. Following this he began his long career in the Australian public service. In 1999 he married his wife Sina, a Cambodian woman he had met when he was ambassador there.

Since retirement he has been a prolific writer for a swag of magazines and newspapers. He's led debate on a range of issues; in one article written for the *Canberra Times* in March 2002, he coined the name *SIEV-X* for the asylum seeker vessel that sank the previous October, drowning all but 44 of its 397 passengers.

Kevin has written three books: *A Certain Maritime Incident: the sinking of the SIEV-X*; *Walking the Camino: A Modern Pilgrimage to Santiago;* and his latest, *Crunch Time: Using and Abusing*

Keynes to Fight the Twin Crises of our Era, about the need to address anthropogenic climate change.

Disability reform shows Labor has a heart

POLITICS

Moira Byrne Garton

At a press conference announcing support for the recommendations of the Productivity Commission's report into disability care and support this week, Julia Gillard described current access to disability services as 'a very cruel lottery'.

That the Prime Minister affirmed the Government's commitment amid ongoing criticism of her 'no carbon tax' statement is testament to its significance. And the Government's response demonstrates compassion and goodwill during a time when many citizens have expressed disgust at the Government's treatment of unaccompanied asylum seeker youths.

It is a sweet result for Assistant Treasurer Bill Shorten, whose vision and drive to reform the fragmented and under-resourced disability sector has finally paid dividends. Shorten's work in this area was largely unnoticed by the broader public, as it was understated and without media fanfare.

As Parliamentary Secretary for Disabilities in the previous Government, he visited a specialist school last year in Canberra. Parents of students with disabilities expected a media presence, but Shorten's role was purely about information gathering in the pursuit of better policy and better outcomes.

It was to Shorten's credit that the Productivity Commission's inquiry was initiated: in his first junior ministry he became well aware that the current system was 'not delivering the kind of care and support Australians expect for people with disability'.

The final report's recommendations differ little from those in the draft document. The pleasant surprise was the Government's response, which supports the Productivity Commission's vision for the disability sector — to provide individuals 'with the support they need over the course of their lifetime', and financially sustainable reform of disability services.

The main recommendation is for a National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS), which will provide all Australians with insurance for the costs of individual care and support if they or a family member acquire a disability. An adjunct National Injury Insurance Scheme will provide no fault insurance for anyone who suffers a catastrophic injury.

The schemes will provide peace of mind that if something goes wrong, there will be a 'safety net'. In the Government's words, 'care and support should be based on people's needs, not a lottery of what kind of disability they have, how they acquired it or where they live'.

Of course, it's only 'in-principle' agreement — but it's exactly the beginning that people with disabilities, their families and carers, and disability advocates were seeking.

The Government will immediately commence working with states and territories to start building the scheme, and has allocated $10 million towards the technical policy work required. A COAG Select Council of Ministers will be established next month, and an expert advisory group will advise it on establishing foundations for reform and preparation for the scheme's launch.

There is significant work required to build the capacity of disability services and, by extension, the profile of careers in the disability sector. Currently there are two universities offering degrees in disability, and continued professionalisation of disability work will result not only in greater support for people with disabilities, but in greater expertise and innovation in other areas of the sector.

More importantly, the proposed reforms will improve the lives of many Australians. Gillard stated that the Government 'was informed by our Labor values ... giving people the opportunity to get ahead, [and] ... making sure nobody gets left behind.' Certainly, John Della Bosca's involvement in Every Australian Counts helped build support for the proposed scheme.

Cynics who suggest the beneficiaries of these reforms comprise a significant block in Labor's base, forget that disability is not a partisan issue. Besides which, the Liberal Party also backs the reforms.

Those affected by disability tried not to hope too much for an NDIS. The costings in the draft report led some commentators to wonder whether the Government would adopt such recommendations.

Thankfully the Government has not used the budget to kybosh or postpone the scheme, though it noted that 'future reform of disability services will require investment from all levels of Government' and that 'reforms will be delivered in a way that is consistent with the Government's fiscal strategy'.

Tellingly, there is very little online commentary decrying the NDIS, which suggests there is broad support for these proposals.

The only downside to the scheme is that it won't be established for a long time, because the Commission found that to transform the disability sector would take 'at least seven years'. But that's alright. If we wait a little longer it will be done properly.

Discerning Britain's smoke and fire

POLITICS

Andrew Hamilton

One of my British colleagues commented drily about the London riots, 'It's what happens when it's the school holidays, the kids are bored and we get two weeks of long, warm, dry evenings. Bit of heavy rain would put a stop to it.'

A minimalist explanation, but its earthiness and local sense rightly question the huge theoretical, not to mention apocalyptic, superstructures that are being erected on the nihilistic behaviour of excitable young people. Such events have everyday causes. They conceal as much as they reveal deeper, underlying conditions.

That said, it is possible to reflect, not on the deep causes that we cannot see, but on the normal things that we might have expected to see in the scenes of destruction in London, but did not see.

The most striking absence was that of authoritative adult figures. The figures we saw on TV screens were young, many of them children. We saw no sign of parents searching for or curbing them; no local community leaders intervening in the mayhem; no mayors or councillors, no local clergy or doctors, no police. Almost the only adults we saw were those who had suffered powerlessly in the riots.

Only at the beginning, when a group of local women went to the police station to find out what had happened to the alleged police shooting victim Mark Duggan, only to be rebuffed, was there space made for the authority of elders. That in retrospect was the last opportunity of avoiding the riots.

Ultimately the only figures of authority who seemed to matter were the Prime Minister and his police chiefs. He returned from holidays, gathered with the heads of the police, and they planned the fight-back. That was the lowest level, it seemed, at which authority could be exercised.

This leads to the second thing lacking in what we saw. There was no sense of society, nor of connection of the kind that generates respect. The furniture shop of a patently good man, a feature of his suburb for some generations, was burned down by people who would have been his neighbours. The experience of the rioters seemed ecstatic, an ecstasy that alienated them from everyone else.

The absence of adult authority and of connection underlines the perceptiveness of my colleague's remarks. Schools provide adult figures of authority. They also provide predictable forms of connection.

The third thing lacking was a sense of purpose. If there was a grand design in the riots, as some suggested — the hidden hand of masterminds with blackberries — it was not evident in the smashing and grabbing. The reality was banal. The pillaging was a matter of every individual for themselves. The booty of choice was a low range of consumer goodies. What mattered were not essentials but superfluities.

These absences invite us to reflect on the deeper things that may be lacking in our society. The emphasis on individual choice, which has freed us from the unreasonable constraints of tradition, does weaken connections through families and natural groups.

It also weakens, sometimes helpfully, sometimes corrosively, hierarchical authorities. It hollows out some of the pillars on which society has rested. So it is legitimate to ask how we can encourage forms of connection in society that nurture a variety of forms of authority.

The riots also raise questions about the Big Society which is the ideological badge of the current British Government. The slogan points to the need to develop intermediate bodies between Government and citizens. But it has been used to cut government funding to precisely those bodies that are points of connection for individuals.

Is not the misuse of money evident in the GFC and in the subsequent crippling of social programs in the name of consumer capitalism the one thing that might dimly be discerned in the smoke and fire of the riots?

Britain's riots and the new financial crisis

POLITICS

Michael Kelly

London is burning. The violence and looting have spread to other English cities. Thieves outnumber police. The situation appears to be beyond control and its growth contagious.

Throughout the rest of the world, stock markets are tumbling at a rate not seen since the 2008 global financial crisis.

Are these two phenomena related? If so, what might their relationship say about where we are and where we are headed?

The violence and looting tells us that people are angry, and that in apparently affluent societies, the benefits are not shared in a satisfactory way. Riots throughout history have been driven by grievances which come down to basics: food, security, confidence about survival.

What is happening in London has not been contained to that city. And, I suspect, it won't be restricted to the UK. Unemployment in the US and many European countries is high and refuses to come down. Behind the unemployment figures hide people who are underemployed and others who have just given up looking for work.

This formula suggests the precedent in Britain could be just the beginning for people seeking a way to vent their frustrations.

The collapsing stock markets and the downgrading of the credit rating of the US tell us that the problem is only going to get worse. Investment capital is disappearing from markets, hidden, if it exists, in the deep pockets of terrified individuals and companies. These investors have suddenly seen their net worth collapse again for the second time in four years.

And what will be the effect? No new jobs created; people being made redundant because their companies can't afford to pay them; the government of the wealthiest nation on earth (the US) now virtually insolvent, and unable to stimulate an economy on whose prosperity so many others depend.

The result: more frustration among alienated people who see no future for themselves in societies where the financial gap between people is growing larger each day; riots driven by resentful people trying to settle scores they've wanted settled for a long while; crackdowns by governments whose legitimacy and control are threatened; misery and misfortune for any swept up in this whirlwind.

Trouble is ahead. There's no end in sight just yet to the stock tumble. And the frenetic energy of angry and frustrated people in Europe and the US is far from spent.

Apparently untroubled by this US/European collapse, Asian economies appear to be chuffing along at a great rate: high growth rates, export surpluses. China is the biggest holder of US currency. The sky is the limit as both the absolute and relative positions of Asian economies get stronger.

But not for long if US and European currencies decline, purchasing capacity reduces and banking strength is compromised. In such an interdependent world, what happens in Europe and the US will have an impact in Asia, probably sooner rather than later.

What will be the response? The reaction of governments, particularly in China and Vietnam, to the Arab Spring earlier this year is instructive. Non-democratic governments across Asia were terrified that what has been happening in North Africa and the Middle East might spread to Asia. That provoked heightened activity by the police and internal security officials.

The impact upon the Church will be significant.

In the first instance, if instability leads food shortages, medical needs or traumatised people, Church agencies will be involved in addressing these issues.

But the impact on the Church in some countries (China, Vietnam or Myanmar) might be sharper. Authoritarian governments across Asia see the Church as a threat — an independent community that can go its own way, relate to foreigners and, in the view of some, be the basis for sedition.

China has long been known to have a life of demonstrations and riots that rarely get reported. There are allegedly 20 to 40 million workers on the move around China all the time looking for work. The social instability and its impact on the economy are abiding concerns of the Chinese leadership and a constant force for many commentators on China's ballooning growth.

Such a period of instability could lay ahead if the European and US volatility endures. For Asia, the impact will be later but significant.

Heroes and villains are only human

FILMS

Tim Kroenert

***Green Lantern* (M). Director: Martin Campbell. Starring: Ryan Reynolds, Peter Sarsgaard, Tim Robbins, Blake Lively. 114 minutes**

In a modern era where we have seen some excellent film adaptations of comic books, it must be said that *Green Lantern* is decidedly middling. Its eye-candy special effects and a handful of enjoyable performances just don't quite make up for its shoddy script.

That said, for those who seek role models at the multiplex, through the polarised lenses of a pair of cheap 3-D glasses, *Green Lantern* contains two types worth considering. One is 'the villain I hope I'm not'. The other is 'the hero that I could be'. These characters inhabit a story that posits *fear* as the mark of evil, and *will* as the heroic attribute that is able to overcome it.

Ever-affable Reynolds portrays brash test pilot Hal Jordan, who is 'chosen' by a mystical ring to join the Green Lantern Corps, an intergalactic army charged with defending the galaxy against evil. He is 'the hero that I could be'; personally flawed, but possessing the mettle required to ultimately overcome these flaws and behave in a heroic manner.

The same alien presence that marks Hal stains biology teacher Hector Hammond (a nicely creepy Sarsgaard). He is respected by neither his students nor his colleagues and perennially put-down by his politician father (a miscast Robbins). In this he is a sympathetic character.

For this reason, we can understand why his new powers might put him on the path to selfish, even evil ends. However, where we might aspire to the personal growth and integrity discovered by Hal, we would not readily view ourselves as being as weak-willed as Hector. He is 'the villain I hope I'm not'.

Hal, meanwhile, undergoes training with the Green Lantern Corps. Summoned to a distant planet, he learns the Corps' particular brand of combat (which involves summoning energy into solid forms by strength of will and yielding it against enemies). He is also instilled with the mantra: that members of the Corps must be fearless, because only in a state of fearlessness can the will truly succeed.

There is another reason for this mantra. The Corps' most formidable enemy, Parallax, literally feeds on the fear of his potential victims. Thus fuelled, he is able to wipe out worlds in moments. He has recently returned from a prolonged and enforced exile, and has universal destruction on his mind.

Hector, who is already a slave to his own fears and insecurities, naturally becomes Parallax's villainous minion on earth, and Hal's nemesis.

But Hal is struggling with self-doubt. Members of the Corps are meant to be fearless. Yet he is full of fear, and his bravado is a mere faÃ§ade, a fact that he is finally ready to admit to himself and his friends. How can he possibly confront such a vast enemy?

Here there is a further nuance to *Green Lantern*'s fear-will dichotomy. Hal's would-be love interest Carol (Lively) points out that there is a distinction between fearlessness and courage. Fearlessness implies a lack of fear, which is an idealised and probably impossible state. Courage, on the other hand, is the owning and overcoming of fear.

Courage, therefore, is the twin of will. The ability to proclaim that one is 'only human', yet still strive to make the 'only' redundant, is a mark of strength. Of such, heroes are born.

Child migrant trauma

POLITICS

Gillian Bouras

If you close your eyes, there is no knowing where you are; so it has been said, at any rate. When I close my eyes, I am most often in one of two places: Melbourne, or the Greek village where I have lived on and off for the last 30 years.

When I was first in Greece, and had come to accept that I would not be returning to Australia any time soon, I would close my eyes and see not rocks, tufted mountains, olive trees and cypresses, but a maze of suburban streets edged by clipped nature strips, each of which had a prunus tree planted in its centre. It was one way of coping with the pain of migration.

Now that I'm in Melbourne on yet another visit, I close my eyes, and am immediately 10,000 miles away, wondering how my two Greece-resident sons are faring. My eldest, who lives in Melbourne, wonders this, too. Greek life is very hard: again.

My sons are no longer little boys, but how clearly I remember the way they were. The third was born in Athens, but his brothers had been born in Melbourne, and migration was the last thing they had expected: they were still only seven and five when this happened.

Yet for them, as for me, transplantation was a benign experience compared with that of so many people. We were welcomed by a family, we were not a different colour, and our dress did not distinguish us markedly from the local population, even though I was the only jeans-wearing woman in town at that time.

We were not escaping from war, likely death or persecution. We had not been detained in a refugee camp, had never endured squalor or hunger, and had not been threatened with a move to yet another very foreign place, where we might have had to face the prospect of more suffering.

The ABC news is providing background as I write: the High Court is in session in Melbourne, in an attempt to prevent the Federal Government from going ahead with its plan to send a batch of asylum seekers to Malaysia. In another report, a seven-year-old child refugee is refusing to eat.

I am not sure why this incident is deemed newsworthy: the only wonder is that the report mentions just one child. My eldest son had a session of not eating, despite more favourable circumstances. And indeed, his migration as a child had such an impact on him that it remains the defining fact of his life. He returned to Australia nine years ago and has not been back to Greece since.

Any migrant's life is divided into two: the before and the after. But at least adults have a

little hope of understanding the pain, and coping with it, although some find the experience almost unendurable: I once read of a man who kept on fainting for no particular medical reason. Even the most equable of children must find the experience bewildering at best, and agonising at worst. And if they migrate alone? Such a plight defies the imagination.

I ponder these matters as I walk around Flemington, my very temporary home. The Sudanese and Somalian women float gracefully along Racecourse Rd, often smiling shyly. They seem to manage the shopping and office routines with great calm and dignity, which is more than I can say for my old self in Greece. And the shopkeepers and office workers deserve praise, too: I have observed only tolerance and courtesy.

But the real wrench at the heart comes when I see mothers with children. My eyes are well open then: to the little boys in their hoodies, to the little girls in their pretty winter frocks and little headscarves. So far, so good, I think to myself. At least as far as I can tell. But the real struggle lies ahead for these families, as the children become, in my mother's phrase, dinkumised, and the parents try to resist the process, mostly to little avail.

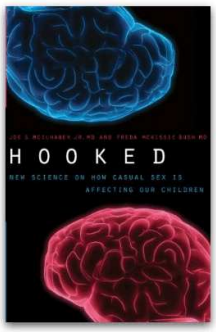
There is no other word for it but hard. I learned that when raising Hellenised Australians. Mothers have to relinquish their power rather sooner than expected. The peer group and host society take over, and while the child is establishing his or her identity, the mother is having hers challenged.

Very often, all we can do is hang on by our fingernails and hope the end result will be worth it. In my case, it has been.

Hooked on monogamy

COMMUNITY

Jen Vuk



We certainly need not venture far — in fact, no further than a simple Google search — to come across humans at their most promiscuous.

It's not just out there in cyberspace, either. It's in nature — all around us — or so we're told. No wonder then that even as we strive for long-lasting love, we seem to constantly come up against a wall when it comes to long-term commitment.

Or do we? What if I were to say that despite 'evidence' to the contrary, we really are monogamous at heart. 'God has set the type of marriage everywhere throughout the creation,' said Martin Luther. 'Every creature seeks its perfection in another.'

But I'm not just drawing on a biblical or conservative viewpoint here. This is about romance, pure and simple.

Yet our need for a soul mate has sociological bearing, too. To be a true romantic is to seek fellowship with another human being. It's about challenging ourselves, putting up with each other's foibles and follies and, ultimately, growing from that association.

Crucially, though, it's about being true to our natures.

In their book *Hooked : New Science on How Casual Sex is Affecting our Children,* Dr Joe McIlhaney and Dr Freda McKissic Bush write that rather than add anything of worth to our emotional development promiscuity can irrevocably lead us away from self-fulfilment.

It comes down to that great sex organ — the brain. The human brain is magnificent, multifaceted and, until we reach the magic age of 25, malleable. And so it is that each thought, emotion and behaviour in our early years lays down the framework for our adult selves.

In a modern world of brief hook-ups, one-night stands and 'friends with benefits' this theory brings with it new urgency. As *New York Times* columnist David Brooks writes: 'The rules of courtship ... have been replaced by ambiguity and uncertainty. Cell phones, Facebook and text messages give people access to hundreds of 'friends'. That only increases the fluidity, drama and anxiety.'

This is certainly supported by the Relationships Australia survey released recently that shows a strong correlation between an online life and chronic loneliness among young people.

The rising call both here and the US for marriage between homosexual couples can be seen

as another case in point. While New York Archbishop Timothy Dolan recently argued that sanctioning gay marriage could lead to demands for the legalisation of polygamy, to invoke such an argument is to undermine the human spirit.

Gay, straight or celibate we all strive for the 'dialogue of giving and receiving' and the 'pair bonding that contributes to equality and unity', as US author Sidney Callahan reminds us. Only in a one-on-one relationship — the dyad — is the 'intensity' of an 'I-Thou quality'.

It's foundational in the sense that it provides psychological grounding, but also, Callahan suggests, its 'power may be a legacy of mother-infant relationship ... In this dialogue, human selves are created — whatever the gender.'

That's all well and good, the critics chime, but it's hardly sexy. They've got a point. Sex can, and often is, the first casualty of a long-term relationship, especially when children enter the equation or when old age slows us down. But while a loving and dynamic physical relationship might have brought two people together it rarely remains the sole driving force.

Like anything over time, romantic love must morph if it is to survive. Relationships that stand the test of time are based upon friendship and honesty. And rather than run away in horror when faced with this truism, young people appear to be signing up with their eyes wide open.

Take 20-year-old US university student Taylor Hamilton. In the 2011 book *Premarital Sex in America : How Young Americans Meet, Mate, and Think about Marrying*, Hamilton, one of many young people interviewed for the book, announces: 'Marriage is not for sex; it's for settling down and having kids.'

Love and emotions are difficult to navigate at the best of times, and this is particularly so if we break out of the dyad. Putting aside the tedium often associated with day-to-day familiarity, only a permanent happy committed relationship can tap into the ongoing and boundless supply of care, support and understanding.

'It's probably one of the most profound human experiences,' Justin Garcia, US evolutionary biologist and, curiously, scientific advisor to dating website Match.com told Salon.com. 'Love drives us to do remarkable things, sometimes crazy things, much more so than anything else, even the sex drive.'

Amen to that.

Gillard's Malaysia solution stumble

THE MEDDLING PRIEST

Frank Brennan

Australia's so-called Malaysia solution for stemming the tide of boats carrying asylum seekers from Indonesia has hit a snag called the High Court of Australia. The Gillard Government is now in very stormy waters, simply because the rule of law and the separation of powers do not readily yield to the sound bites of populist sentiment and the fear tactics of politicians. The wheels of the law turn slowly.

The Australian and Malaysian governments signed their agreement on 25 July 2011. The idea was that all asylum seekers arriving by boat after that date would be turned around and sent to Malaysia within 72 hours. In return for 800 asylum seekers, Malaysia would offer Australia 4000 proven refugees for resettlement in Australia over the next four years.

Australian Federal Police and Malaysian government officials have been waiting on Christmas Island to witness the first departures. Two boatloads of eligible asylum seekers arrived from Indonesia. But on Sunday night, lawyers for some of the asylum seekers approached the High Court for an injunction restraining the government from removing any asylum seekers until the legality of the arrangement could be tested.

Time is of the essence for the Gillard Government, in part because Parliament has been away on its winter break. Parliament resumes on 16 August. The government is desperate to have the Malaysia solution in operation by then. The Opposition parties are adamant that the Gillard Government is in disarray, unable to deliver on this and other policy issues.

On Monday in the High Court, Justice Kenneth Hayne was unimpressed with the Australian Government's behaviour. Government lawyers were wanting the Court to lift the injunction at 4:15pm so that the first asylum seekers could be flown out Monday night. By 3:15pm, the Government had not managed to provide the court with its affidavit setting out the facts on which it was relying.

Hayne, having told the Solicitor General 'It is unsatisfactory that the matter proceed in this half-baked fashion', then pointed out: '[Y]ou have the whole of the resources of the Commonwealth behind you.'

Hayne decided to extend the injunction. He referred questions of legal interpretation to a full bench of the High Court for consideration on 22 August 2011 — a full week after Parliament has resumed.

The Australian Government has to be able to show that it has acted in accordance with the provisions of the Australian Parliament's Migration Act. Under section 198A(3) of the Act, the minister can declare Malaysia to be a suitable country for offshore processing. But he has to

declare that Malaysia provides access to effective procedures for asylum seekers, provides adequate protection for asylum seekers and refugees, and 'meets relevant human rights standards in providing that protection'.

Until Monday, it was assumed that the minister could make such a declaration without any scrutiny by the Parliament or the courts. That may still end up being the situation. But for the moment, one High Court judge is satisfied that the issue is arguable.

He was suggesting that there may be a need not only to look at the international covenants signed by Malaysia and the domestic laws of Malaysia. There may also be a need for the High Court to receive factual evidence about past treatment of asylum seekers, including unaccompanied minors, in Malaysia. That suggestion will be causing many headaches in government offices in Canberra.

The Full Court of all seven High Court judges will be asked to consider the correct interpretation of 198A(3). Before Immigration Minister Chris Bowen makes a declaration that Malaysia is a suitable country for offshore processing, the Court will consider whether he is required to act bona fide and reasonably, and on what information he is required to act, when declaring that Malaysia provides access to effective procedures, provides protection and meets relevant human rights standards.

The Full Court may also need to consider whether an immigration officer has the legal power to remove asylum seekers regardless of whether there is a declaration in relation to Malaysia. If a full bench of the High Court thinks 198A(3) has a contested interpretation, the ultimate decision of the Court could take a considerable period of time.

No asylum seekers will be sent to Malaysia for at least two weeks. Last time the High Court decided a case on the legality of asylum seeking processes, it took 10 weeks to deliver a final judgment. In one notable immigration case, when the court split four-three, they took eight months!

The Malaysia solution may still be found to be legal. But politically, time is now of the essence for the Gillard Government wanting to send a clear message to people smugglers and an even clearer message to its political opponents and wavering voters in Australia.

They say one week is a long time in politics. The next two weeks will be a very long wait for the asylum seekers on Christmas Island and the Gillard Government ministers in Canberra who thought they had covered all bases — except the High Court.

Friday sex and family

POETRY

Margaret McCarthy | Jennifer Compton

On my mind

Fridays are for finishing off, dashing away,
For Friday night drinks.

Fridays are for calculations —

Who to visit, and how many,
In the next two days.

Fridays are for the weeklong day worker,

The old nine-to-fivers, the new eight-to-niners

Fridays run into the Easybeats;

Fridays are a stack of 45 eps —

Stored but never replayed.

On Fridays at three, mothers sigh

At the weekend Siberian landscape —

The forty-eight hours of swing pushing, sport,

And sibling mediation.

On Fridays, school kids forget to bring their homework

In the haste to leave the institution,

And waltz, chatting with their mates,

Home to the land of the free.

There are traffic jams on Friday,

And women, imagining their wardrobe choices for a date.

There are weary smiling workers recovering from a Thursday night event.

There are men planning this, the second weekend, with their family.

There are married couples —

One in the throes of giving up hope of being touched,

The other working hard to ensure the weekend is chaste.

Weekend conferences, workshops, classes and lunch.

Football, club dinners, twenty-first birthdays.

But those belong to the weekend, not Friday.

Friday carries that heavy grey cloud of hope in a drought.

Friday is a ticket to the cinema before the lights go down.

Friday has the lawnmower silent with the blades unknowably blunt.

Friday buys the books and keeps receipts as bookmarks.

On Friday the term 'fair weather' sounds flattering,

sex hopes to be between-two-people-sex, and

sleepiness is permissible at all times — except doing that, and driving.

Friday is the sergeant major, subordinating the previous days of the week.

Friday is the gateway to two days of open promise.

Friday is the superstar walking through your living room.

Friday is a numerical calendrical construct.

This day is a suitcase the weekly traveller holds in his or her imagination,

with a remnant of childhood singing

how extensively delicious the holiday ahead would be.

—Margaret McCarthy

The crowded train

I am looking down

at a blind man's legs

and his white stick.

Then I see a wedding ring

on an old man's hand

close up.

The girl next to me
is a voice
and the smell of wet.
She was stuck at Richmond
I was caught at Laburnum
the sky spoke in extremis.
The rain was horizontal
the wind blew us together
onto this very late train.
I am the brim of my hat
perhaps, or a glance
from under it.

—Jennifer Compton

The Census and Labor's Catholic vote

POLITICS

Brian Lawrence

Information gathered in the Census will play a central role in the planning of the next Federal election. Over the next year all manner of information will be collated, sliced and diced for a range of purposes. The most important for politicians and party strategists will be the collation of that material on an electorate by electorate basis. Groups will be targeted and messages honed.

This will include detailed data such as age profiles, income levels, family composition, education qualifications and religious affiliation. The 2006 census data has been twice sliced and diced. The second time was after the redistributions for the 2010 election.

When adjusted to reflect the results of the 2010 election this data presents us with an opportunity to compare religion, incomes and political outcomes in a finely balanced hung Parliament of 150 members. It presents some valuable insights which are likely to be confirmed by the 2011 Census.

In the 2010 election Christians (63.9 per cent of the population) tended to support the Coalition, but not by much. Of the 75 most Christian electorates, the Coalition holds 39, Labor holds 33, and rural Independents hold three. However, of the 50 most Christian, Labor holds only 20. Prior to the 2010 election Labor held 43 of the 75 most Christian electorates and 27 of the 50 most Christian seats.

The distribution of those with no religion (18.7 per cent of the population) ranges from 6.5 per cent in McMahon to 30.1 per cent in Kingston. Labor has less than half of the electorates that have the highest proportions of those with no religion: 33 of the top 75 and 23 of the top 50. So Labor appears to get no electoral benefit from those who report no religion.

How did Labor get enough seats to form a minority Government in 2010? The answer is found in the separation of the Catholic vote from the total Christian vote. Catholics (25.8 per cent of the population) provided the votes that underpinned Labor's electoral survival.

The Catholic population varies from 44.5 per cent in McMahon to 12.7 per cent in Mayo. Of the 75 most Catholic electorates Labor holds 46, the Coalition 28, and Independent Bob Katter, one. Of the 50 most Catholic electorates, Labor holds 33. Labor holds eight of the 10 most Catholic electorates. At the other end of the scale Labor has only 17 of the 50 least Catholic electorates.

So the more Catholic the electorate, the more likely it is to vote for Labor.

Is this a reflection of the socio-economic position of Australian Catholics? To test this we

can match the most Catholic electorates with the median incomes of households across the electoral divisions. The incomes data shows a spread from Cowper, at $798 per week, to Wentworth, at $2307 per week.

Perhaps surprisingly, only 21 of the 50 most Catholic electorates are in the bottom half of the income ranking; 19 of the 50 most Catholic electorates are in the wealthiest 50 electorates; and 11 of those 19 electorates elected Labor members.

Labor's origins and its traditional base has been among lower income earners. But this was barely evident in 2010. In the bottom half of the household income scale Labor holds a bare majority: 38 of 75. In the poorest 50 it holds just 24. Labor holds 34 of the 75 wealthiest electorates. Its 72 seats in the hung Parliament are close to equally divided between the two halves of the income scale.

The data also ranks electorates by the proportion of families with incomes of less than $650 per week. Of the 50 electorates with the highest number of low income families Labor holds just 25.

These figures show that while low income earners have abandoned Labor, a solid base of Catholics have stuck with it.

Why did the most Catholic electorates vote for Labor in 2010? Why did so many Catholics prefer a party led by an atheist over a Coalition led by a committed Catholic?

One reason is that Catholics have traditionally voted Labor, and family voting practices have been maintained, despite the social mobility of recent generations. Another is that Catholic belief in social justice means that many Catholics prefer a party that is seen to be, or hoped to be, committed to a fairer and more egalitarian society. Social justice remains part of the Catholic DNA.

The problem for Labor is that Catholics may lose faith in it as the party best placed to deliver fair and just outcomes. For Labor, much of its working class base has left the building, and many of its Catholic supporters are standing near the doorway bemused or angry.

The problem for the Coalition, and Tony Abbott in particular, is that he is coming under pressure to adopt policies that this large part of the Catholic constituency would regard as unjust. He does not want another Work Choices debate, which cost his party so dearly in 2007. That debate raised a range of social justice issues; fairness in the workplace cannot be separated from fairness in society.

Of course, the better the polls for the Coalition, the more likely Abbott will come under pressure to throw caution to the wind and revisit Work Choices.

A requirement of political success is the ability to attract non-traditional support while keeping your base. Between now and the next election Labor will have to do some hard

thinking about what it stands for and who it represents. Should it adopt policies that will alienate its best base support in the hope of picking up new pockets of support?

Rather than this, Labor should re-engage with its traditional low income base. This presents its best chance of holding the Catholic base and restoring the non-Catholic Christian support it gained in 2007, but lost in 2010. It will also send a reassuring message to Australians of non-Christian faiths that this is a nation that cares about social justice and the protection of the poor and the vulnerable.

Anti-gay laws and the right to privacy

POLITICS

Justin Glyn

What is the Government's role in your love life? As privacy law reform is in the news these days, I was interested to see reference to a famous decision in the '90s which raised just this question.

Late last month, Navi Pillay, the UN Human Rights Commissioner, went on YouTube to recall the Human Rights Committee's 1994 ruling in Toonen v. Australia and its impact on gay rights. It raised thorny questions that keep cropping up in various contexts. What is the state's role in moral issues and what are the limits of privacy?

Australia is a party to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR). Although it has not incorporated it into domestic law, it has signed up to an international Human Rights Committee which hears claims of breaches of the ICCPR and recommends redress.

Nicholas Toonen, a gay-rights activist, challenged Tasmanian laws (ss. 122 and 123 of the Tasmanian Criminal Code) criminalising homosexual acts, including private ones, between consenting men. (The Code did not criminalise homosexual acts between women.)

Although Toonen had not been prosecuted, he argued that the law contributed to a toxic climate for gay men and led to harassment of himself and others by the authorities. His complaint to the Committee saw him fired from an AIDS awareness group because the Tasmanian Government threatened to withdraw funding if he stayed.

Toonen claimed that the law was an 'arbitrary interference with [his] privacy' (prohibited by Art. 17 of the ICCPR) and that he was being discriminated against because of his 'sex' or 'other status' (contrary to Art. 26).

Tasmania's view was that homosexuality was a public health issue as it led to HIV/AIDS and that any interference with Toonen's privacy was therefore justified. Anyway, it argued, the ICCPR was not intended to stop states regulating moral issues.

Although the Federal Government was the formal party to the proceedings, it hardly barracked enthusiastically for Tasmania's cause. It noted that all other Australian states had repealed homosexuality offences and that criminalisation hindered rather than helped anti-AIDS campaigns.

The moral question is particularly difficult. Since many legal issues also engage moral ones, the Committee had no difficulty deciding that the ICCPR applied to 'moral issues'. However, it then had to balance Toonen's privacy against a government's rights to enforce public

morals.

Toonen's argument was that Australia is a multicultural society with multiple moral codes; the state could not prefer one over another. This looks like an argument for moral relativism. If so, there was some irony about it. The ICCPR, to which Toonen looked for relief, itself embodies particular moral standards, including most of the classic civil and political rights recognised in various countries since the 18th century.

On the other hand, there is a real question about Government intervention in private conduct which only affects consenting parties. As the Committee noted, the offences did not distinguish private from public conduct. Is it the business of a government to police sex in private homes between consenting adults? And if so, why only between men?

Toonen was correct in arguing that the moral code reflected in the sections was not shared by all Tasmanians. The offences were the source of division in the state with periodic calls for repeal to bring Tasmanian law into line with that in other states. The Tasmanian Government acknowledged that a prosecution had not been brought since 1982. This made the Committee doubtful about its claim that the offences were 'essential' to protect public morals.

As a result, the Committee held that the moral arguments were insufficient to outweigh Toonen's Art. 17 rights to privacy, particularly since the law did not appear to be effective as a public health measure. The privacy finding meant it did not need to decide whether there had been discrimination.

This was a landmark — the first ruling by a global body that laws criminalising homosexuality violated the ICCPR. Tasmania eventually abolished the relevant offences and the decision has laid a basis for subsequent jurisprudence.

Australia is currently considering whether it needs to tighten privacy laws, in the wake of the hacking scandals in the UK. The question about what a 'right to privacy' means in practice and how legislation can or should affect such a right makes it timely to revisit the Toonen case.

It remains a good illustration of the deeper questions about the balance between state power and competing moral claims which face anyone who considers issues of human rights.

Elders' wisdom could save us

EDITORIAL

Michael Mullins

Why do we consider it a joy to look after infants and children, but a burden to care for the elderly?

A degree of self-examination along these lines could provide a useful backdrop for community discussion that will follow today's announcement by Prime Minster Julia Gillard of sweeping changes in the way aged care is organised and funded.

The power of imagination allows us to look at the face of an older person and cherish the child that is obscured by the frail body and/or mind. Alternatively we can look at age as a value in itself, almost a tradable commodity. Many non-western cultures refer to the aged as elders and regard them as a vital source of wisdom that sustains their societies.

Gillard is right to stress that the increasing aged population must not be seen as a 'problem' requiring a 'solution'. But it would be better if she was able to go further and lead us to understand that our elders are an asset. In other words, what is derided as 'grey power' could contribute to our overall economic and spiritual prosperity as much as our mineral wealth.

She refers to the two generations of retired — baby boomers and many of their parents — as if the cost of supporting them is a double burden rather than a double investment. Clearly that is the way most of us read the numbers as well.

Yet if we were able to convince ourselves that the larger non-working population is in reality a bank of wisdom, we would have a positive incentive to work harder to support older Australians.

This may sound far-fetched, but it is arguable that a society will benefit economically if it is fuelled in greater measure by the wisdom of its elders.

If we ask ourselves why society doesn't learn from its mistakes, the answer could be that we listen to our youth and not our elders. For instance, it looks as if we could be heading into a new global financial crisis (GFC). The reason is partly our failure to learn from the mistakes that caused the GFC three years ago.

Many of the decisions on the financial markets are made by financial traders who are in their 20s. If they valued and sought the advice of their elders — including those with memories of the Great Depression — it is possible that a further GFC could be averted. This may seem a simplistic assertion, but it is one that is yet to be tested.

Youth may be the future, but there will be no future without the wisdom of the elders. If we look at challenges posed by our ageing population through the prism of this insight, we will

have ready answers to many of the painful financial questions that confront us as a society.

The commercialisation of the ABC

MEDIA

Paul Collins

I begin with a confession: when I worked for the ABC I participated in the 'axing' of a couple of programs, one of which was very popular with a dedicated group of listeners. So I don't come to this story as a complete innocent.

ABC TV recently confirmed it is cutting *The New Inventors*, *Art Nation* and *Collectors*.

Is this just an example of programs having run their course? Well, no, according to Director of TV, Kim Dalton. The reasons are 'falling audiences ... increasing financial pressures ... and a strategic commitment to prime-time programming'. He also said that the ABC 'proposes to reduce the level of staff' in all states except, apparently, the ACT.

Most viewers will probably shrug their shoulders and say 'Well, it's sad to see my favourite show go, but that's the way it is.' But the reality is that there is a deeper agenda running here and it is important for those who value the ABC to bring it into the light.

The clue is in Dalton's comment that the ABC has not abandoned so-called 'factual entertainment'. He mentions two new 'initiatives, one with Screen West and one with the South Australian Film Corporation'. In other words, non-internal ABC productions, but outsourced material that the ABC simply broadcasts. Here lies the rub.

What we are actually seeing is the ABC 'outsourcing' more and more material to commercial production companies who make programs that, after their ABC broadcast, can be 'on-sold' to pay-TV and other channels, both here and overseas.

Increasingly the ABC makes few of the programs it broadcasts; it transmits material made by outside interests rather than produce its own.

This is why we are seeing so much lightweight 'infotainment' now on the ABC — that is, when we're not watching endless re-runs of British cop shows. Commercial interests, by definition, don't make risky programs or explore unpopular issues. So the ABC regularly broadcasts programs that are neither cutting-edge nor different to commercial TV. It's essentially the same old pap you can get anywhere.

Yet, as a public broadcaster, the ABC has an unequivocal legal obligation as a publicly-funded organisation to produce material that is not produced by commercial operators, especially in areas like culture, art, religion and science.

Glenys Stradijot of the Victorian Friends of the ABC comments that 'The ABC is envisaged as a producer of programs of cultural value and intellectual integrity. Instead it is being transformed into a platform for carrying commercial content.

'This is privatisation by stealth ... TV programming has become too populist and less innovative — the entertainment less stimulating, and factual programming more lightweight.' Precisely!

Kim Dalton and ABC General Manager, Mark Scott — and presumably the Board of the ABC — don't seem to understand that their approach undermines the whole purpose of public broadcasting.

The ABC is not just a 'platform' for broadcasting watered-down infotainment from the commercial sector. It is taxpayer-funded precisely to be an independent, non-commercial production house of quality programming that is not available in the commercial media.

To achieve that you need trained, experienced staff who work to priorities that are ultimately determined by the ABC Charter and the legislation governing the Corporation as a public entity.

But with the winding-back of staff, resources and in-house production what is actually happening is that ABC managers simply commission content from external commercial sources that then make programs according to their priorities, not the needs of the public or the requirements of the Charter.

Religion is an area that is already being hard-hit by outsourcing. The best you can expect of commercial interests 'doing' religion for the ABC is a show like Judith Lucy's *Spiritual Journey*, which has been pretty superficial and, after two episodes, hit and miss at best.

Given the parlous results of 'outsourcing' all who value the ABC need to support the call of the Friends of the ABC for a public inquiry. This is the only way that those who value public broadcasting can call ABC managers to account. As the FABC says, 'Scott and the ABC Board seem to have forgotten that they are the caretakers of this great national institution which belongs to the people of Australia. They have no authority to commercialise it.'

I couldn't agree more.

Gandhi and Richie Benaud's perfect storm

BY THE WAY

Brian Matthews

I have just finished re-reading Sebastian Junger's great book, *The Perfect Storm* — a true story which makes one marvel at, among other things, the way events separated by vast distances and times, and decisions made in isolation, can conspire to produce unpredictable and unmanageable results.

At the same time I was well into Richie Benaud's latest, *Over But Not Out: My Life So Far*. I'd just reached Benaud's account of a highly eccentric figure in the history of Indian test cricket, a character called the Maharajkumar of Vizianagram, or Vizzy, as he became known.

Vizzy's path crossed Benaud's when, in the second test of the 1959—60 tour, India defeated Australia — the first Indian win against Australia on home soil. Generously recognising the importance of the occasion, Benaud went on to the ground to shake hands with the victorious Indian captain, Gulabrai Ramchand, then lined the Australian team up to form a guard of honour for their opponents and joined them in the dressing room celebrations.

It was a splendidly sporting gesture which Vizzy, reporting for the local paper, praised extravagantly, while rating the victory itself as equal to that other epic event of 1959, the first moon rocket.

In a different and contemporaneous article, however, written for the distant Northern Indian Patrika and a different audience, Vizzy slated the Australians and Benaud as cheats and poor sportsmen. When Vizzy visited the Australian dressing room before the start of the third Test at Bombay (Mumbai), Benaud confronted him with both articles and threw him out when he refused to apologise.

As far as Benaud was concerned, that was that. But in an eerie way, their fractious meeting and Vizzy's acrimonious entanglement with an Australian test cricket captain was like the perfect storm: distant events and forces seemingly buried in the past had inexorably found their moment ...

... In 1930, the year in which Benaud was born in far off Penrith, NSW, Mahatma Gandhi's civil disobedience campaign began in India with the famous Salt March, and the resultant tumultuous civil unrest forced the cancellation of a planned MCC tour of India.

Cometh the hour, cometh the man: Vizzy stepped into the breach with a team of his own to tour India and Ceylon. Pre-dating the seductive IPL by some 80 years, he induced two of England's greatest batsmen, Jack Hobbs and Herbert Sutcliffe, to play for this team.

The tour was a great success, with Hobbs and Sutcliffe both scoring heavily. They were no

doubt unburdened by anxiety or nervousness because neither of them regarded the matches they played in as anything more than exhibition games and they duly used their extraordinary batting talents to provide the expected entertainment.

Wisden, the cricket bible, also saw the matches as having less than first class status but some later cricket statisticians took a different view so that both players have two versions of their career statistics, one that recognises their feats on Vizzy's tour (500 odd runs and two centuries to each of them) and one that does not.

But Vizzy's self indulgence would have a bigger impact on cricket history. Sutcliffe had declined to join an MCC tour to South Africa in 1930—31 which clashed with Vizzy's Indian/Sri Lankan venture. He was replaced by Andy Sandham, a capable, recognised batsman. Sandham started the tour well with 72 against Western Province but was then injured in a car accident and took no further part.

As *Wisden* bemoaned it: 'The absence of [Sutcliffe] became a very serious matter when [his replacement] Andy Sandham ... met with a motor accident which prevented him from playing any more during the whole course of the tour'.

South Africa won the first Test by 28 runs and the ensuing four were drawn. Returning home as a 1-0 loser, the England captain, the charismatic but by that time declining Percy Chapman, was replaced by Douglas Jardine.

Jardine thus took the English team to Australia for the 1932—33 series and it was Jardine who masterminded and conducted the infamous 'bodyline' or leg theory attack which, designed expressly to nullify Bradman, almost brought the series to a standstill during the Adelaide Test, and looked likely to provoke a diplomatic incident.

It is doubtful if Vizzy would have noticed but his initiative in securing the services of Hobbs and in particular Sutcliffe was the precipitating move that created the conditions for the storm of bodyline.

When Benaud banned Vizzy from the Australian dressing rooms he was on the distant end of an extraordinary series of connections. A perfect storm: indirectly initiated by Mahatma Gandhi, given momentum by Vizzy's rampant ego, shaped and structured by the calculating Jardine and concluded with a last explosive dressing room confrontation a generation later.

The butterfly effect in action as I live and breathe!

My life as a bully

FILMS

Tim Kroenert

We passed Paul's house each day on the walk to primary school. One day on a whim we knocked and invited him to join us. Once out of sight around the corner we proceeded to berate him, and to rough him up. Not my idea, but I went along. We thought it was such fun that we did it again the next day.

On the third day, his mother answered the door, and sent us on our way with a menacing reproach.

Later, there was Sean. Frequently our friend, constantly our fall-guy. Day trips to Ringwood Lake or into the city morphed into endless verbal assaults against hapless, loyal Sean. Far too easy to get sucked into the psychology of the group: our collective strength, his individual weakness.

Kids can be cruel. I'm ashamed to say I was.

Finally there was Travis. On a church camp we handcuffed him to a pole, poured soft drink in his lap, paraded about him in uproarious glee. Then quietly released him when he started to cry — a wailing sob that overran his brazen laughter. We'd thought it was a game. It wasn't. Never had been.

I had my bullies too. But if that explains my behaviour, it doesn't excuse it. It doesn't matter that I was not the ringleader. Whether sadistic shepherd or sheep, to these bullied boys I was simply a shit.

For the past two weeks I've served as a member of the TeleScope jury at Melbourne International Film Festival. This official capacity has at times been subsumed by powerful personal responses. Several films have again unearthed these distant but still guilt laden memories. Films that reflect upon the ways and reasons that children and adolescents exercise power over each other.

She Monkeys (Sweden) portrays teenage gymnast Emma's (Mathilda Paradeiser) relationship with her teammate, Cassandra (Linda Molin). In this competitive environment they are equally colleagues and opponents, and this tension expands beyond their sport and into their friendship in general.

The relationship is marked by seduction and sensuality and lashings of sadomasochism. But these things are more about power than sex. Ultimately the power games escalate to a point where both girls are damaged by them, either physically or morally.

Ideally, such hard lessons lead to the eventual discovery of compassion and forgiveness.

She Monkeys ends before we see if this is the case with Emma and Cassandra.

The Solitude of Prime Numbers (Italy) could be a thematic sequel. It records the echoes of childhood trauma, including bullying, that continue to resonate in adulthood. It weaves together the present and the past to expose the lifelong effects of these traumas.

Mattia's (Luca Marinelli) suffering stems from his failure as a child to meet perceived expectations. His mother resents him and demands that he care for his autistic twin sister. This is a large burden for a young boy who is desperate to be accepted by peers who have their own expectations of behaviour. Mattia's temptation to be, for once, selfish, results in tragedy.

Throughout life Mattia is drawn to Alice (Alba Rohrwacher) , who is similarly damaged by parental and social expectations. She was a childhood skiing prodigy, but her potential was snuffed out after her taskmaster father cajoled her into practicing under perilous conditions.

As a teenager, now walking with a permanent limp, Alice is teased then befriended by a popular but troubled girl, who, like Cassandra in *She Monkeys*, coddles her with both sensuality and sadism. The friendship ends in humiliation for one, and moral degradation for the other.

As adults Mattia's and Alice's traumas draw them close while also keeping them apart. They are twin prime numbers, similar in their uniqueness, but destined never to touch. The past appears to be forever within and between them; its pain, permanent.

Childhood traumas are not easily overcome. Do Paul, Sean and Travis ever think about me, and wince? Do they have scars on their confidence roughly the size and shape of the barbs with which they were barraged, by me?

A post script. After Sean, but before Travis, there was Adam. He was smarter and more self-assured than any of us. I don't know if he suffered badly from our bullying, but if he did, it was in silence. And, remarkably, he remained a close friend.

I'm sure now that he saw through my cruel bravado to its source in fear and adolescent self-loathing. It was more than I deserved. I can only wish that I am capable of such grace.

Names have been changed.

Morality plays in sport and politics

APPLICATION

Andrew Hamilton

One of the beauties of sport and politics is the morality plays that they enact. They display in minor key all the basic human drives, passions and political moves that we find on the larger public stage. Melbourne (AFL) Football Club's sacking of coach Dean Bailey, and the forced departure of South Australian Premier Mike Rann, are cases in point.

The classical morality plays subverted large myths. The public heroes were kings and emperors who fought their way to power and then set out on a plan of conquest that made their names immortal and their kingdoms glorious. The plays presented a human being who was first attracted to wealth, and then used his wealth to gain a position of honour in order to have the glory of conquest.

In morality plays, this is shown to be a path of illusion. It hollowed out the humanity of the king and led him to disregard the humanity of the people he rules. His glory was secured by treating his subjects as expendable. The cost of victory was their suffering and oppression.

Ultimately, too, the glory proved fleeting. It was undermined by the motivation that inspired its pursuit. Because there was no concern for human values, the trust and the cooperation that were needed for large enterprises were lacking.

In Christian morality plays the way of truth was paradoxical. The good king was motivated by a vision of the larger, shared good of human beings as Christ's brothers and sisters. In the pursuit of this vision, the king welcomed poverty, lack of position and humiliation. Through these things a kingdom based in respect and constancy could be built.

Morality plays, of course, are just that. They dramatise an ideal and make available a spiritual rhetoric. Even good kings never embodied fully this large vision. But the values made a claim on the spectators.

And so to football clubs and political parties. Those who are attracted to football clubs are often fairly wealthy. The football club becomes their cause. So they are drawn to seek a position in the club in the hope that the club will glory in a premiership. Similarly, members of political parties are attracted to seek political office in order to share the glory of nation building.

The morality plays that are sport and politics can then be played in two ways. If the goal is to shape a club that develops the humanity of its members, is based on mutual respect and decency, and sets sporting or electoral success within a deeper sense of what matters, the poverty, lowly position on the ladder and humiliation that go with defeat will strengthen character and commitment.

But if a driving force is the desire for personal esteem and reputation for being successful, people will be treated without respect. The quest of glory will undermine the club and the party.

So the replacement of Rann and the sacking of Bailey in response to bad polls and a heavy loss respectively raise questions about the Melbourne Football Club and the South Australian Labor Party.

For Melbourne the walloping by Geelong brought humiliation. Glory departed from the club, and in the media (the tent where glory dwells) former players connected with the club displayed resentment.

A few days before the loss the Melbourne board had decided to let the chief executive go at the end of the year, and to extend the coach's tenure. But the day after the defeat it sacked Bailey, and reappointed the chief executive for a year.

In terms of morality plays, this response seemed to represent the decisive rejection of the way that leads through humiliation to constancy. The lack of respect involved in the summary sacking of a coach whom they had endorsed only a few days ago would naturally lead to a collapse of the trust on which the success of any organisation depends. The change of coach only underlines it.

Even those who themselves are attracted by the myth of money leading to glory will sense that this dream cannot be realised at Melbourne. Those who have more modest hopes of playing a game that they love in good company will see little to hold them. They can have no confidence that the club grasps what really matters.

At first glance the replacement of Rann is the same morality play. It seems that those for whom the glory of electoral success is everything have dumped him when his popularity lessened. Will electors trust a party to whom nothing other than glory matters?

Australia's burqa fallacy

RELIGION

David Tittensor

Given recent media coverage, one could be excused for thinking the Taliban had set up shop in Australia.

Last month alone there were *Today Tonight* promos exclaiming 'burqa rage'; an episode of Channel 7's panel discussion program *Can of Worms* which featured debate about whether the burqa has a place in Australia; a report about a group of Geelong men who created a 'Ban the Burqa' protest on Facebook; and a brief and less than satisfactory discussion of Islamic dress on ABC1's *Q&A*.

The burqa it seems is *du jour*. Yet there seems to be not pertinent reason for this.

There was the recent Carnita Matthews court case, wherein footage caught by a dashboard camera proved she had wrongfully accused a police officer of trying to forcibly remove her niqab (face veil, not burqa). But this one incident, which occurred last year, surely cannot be grounds for debate.

Perhaps the debate is not really about Islamic dress or even Muslims. It is about Australians.

Not once in any of the recent coverage has there been any information about the composition of the Muslim population in Australia or about how many Muslims actually wear the garment in question. It is more about whether or not we can handle it, irrespective of the actual lay of the land. We debate it because we can, and because we live in a liberal democracy and have the freedom to do so.

But just because we can debate whatever we so choose, doesn't mean we should. As with any right there is the responsibility to exercise it judiciously. In the discussion about burqas this seems to have fallen by wayside.

The aforementioned *Q&A* episode illustrates this. The show began by discussing the Rupert Murdoch *News of the World* scandal and a lack of ethical reporting. This was followed later by a discussion about Islamic dress. In fairness the question was raised by an audience member. But rather than shut the question down as unjustified, on account of the fact that very few women wear the *niqab* (often confused with the burqa) , the discussion gave oxygen to those who are ill informed.

A quick survey of the Muslim population in Australia highlights the absurdity of discussing whether there is a place for the burqa or niqab in our society.

According to the 2006 census only one third of the Muslim population in Australia are from

Arabic speaking backgrounds. Many of them wear the hijab (headscarf) rather than the burqa or niqab.

For example, 8.9 per cent of Arabic speaking Muslims migrated from Lebanon where the hijab or chador (a loose head-cover similar to the hijab) is preferred. The next largest population hails from Turkey (14.6 per cent), where once again the hijab is favored.

The countries where the burqa is worn are comparatively poorly represented in Australia. Afghan migrants, for example, represent only 4.7 per cent, and not all Afghan women wear the burqa. Immigration figures from the Horn of Africa are also low .

In fact, the likelihood of seeing someone in a burqa or niqab in Australia is probably less than what it would be in France, where it was estimated that only around 1900 women wear the niqab (less than 0.00003 per cent of the French population).

The upshot of this is that those debating whether the burqa has a place in Australia are not dealing with reality, and are in fact just a little self indulgent. Yes, we live in a liberal democracy. We have freedom of speech. But debate for the sake of debate is pointless and vain.

I'm not suggesting there shouldn't be healthy debate around Islam. Debate about what Islam is and what it means for the many different groups that comprise the 'house(s) of Islam' is essential. But debate needs to focus on developing understanding rather than fostering division and difference.

The kind of 'Mickey Mouse' journalism we have seen regarding this issue functions as grist for the mill of bigots and should have no place in Australia. It strengthens unwanted stereotypes and cultural rifts. Things that a truly free and open society should seek to avoid.

Buying and selling skin

EUREKA STREET/ READER'S FEAST AWARD

Meg Mundell

Small change

The woman's blink rate tells him she's nervous: almost once per second, four times the normal count. Jack knows a touch of nerves can help soften up a client, especially in the clinic's private waiting cubicles, but if he overdoes it she may fear opening her wallet. And that must be avoided at all costs.

Today's tuning strategy will combine his intuition with her file data: Kate Moore, 36, legal consultant, IQ 128. Single, lives alone, one cat; decent income, eldest child, immigrant-made-good parents who scrimped to afford private schools. Non-smoker, gym-goer; moderate drinker, wheat allergy. Likes the ocean, cinema games, soul music, fresh flowers — especially jonquils. Favourite colour: orange. No illicit drugs, no major social transgressions. Dog phobia. Body issues. Unremarkable sexual history. Referred by her mentor, who's treating her for Type B depression, mild anxiety and low self-regard. Anxious about ageing, lack of partner, declining fertility, career plateau, etc.

Yep, he gets the picture. And visually? A six out of ten. For now.

He has a few minutes before the medico summons her. He pipes a generic instrumental soul ballad into her cubicle, then dials up a subtle scent, a blend of seaspray and jonquils, just below the threshold of consciousness. It takes less than a minute to bring her blink rate down, but hey, thinks Jack, let's not overdo it. If she gets too tranquil, he can always dial in some dog.

Kate has just begun to relax when a woman's voice addresses her from the ceiling. 'Ms Moore, Dr Paige is ready for you. Please proceed to consult room 3, on the left.' Kate pads down the thickly carpeted hallway, self-conscious in her white robe and paper slippers. 'Senior Medico Elaine Paige,' reads the door plaque, 'Rejuvenation specialist. BASc(Hons), MD, MSc, MappPsych'. All those letters, she thinks, must spell experience.

So she's not prepared for the fresh-faced woman behind the desk; the medico can't be older than late 20s, which Kate knows is impossible. Dark glossy hair swept back off a porcelain forehead, immaculate skin and symmetrical features, generous lips and a bright blue gaze. Slim, of course. And pale, fashionably pale. She stands to greet Kate, offers her hand: her smile is assured and perfectly aligned, her hand soft. Kate tries not to stare. The woman's skin appears completely poreless. Focus, she tells herself. The medico is speaking.

'Primarily we use infralight and dermaceuticals, so there's minimal downtime,' she's saying. 'You're an excellent canvas, so we have a decent substructure to work from.' The woman checks her notes. 'I've reviewed your profile and goals, and tailored a range of

options, which can be package-purchased. If you decide to proceed, we can revise you from a Visual Six up to a guaranteed V8.5. That rating's independently reviewed, of course.'

Kate knows jargon when she hears it, but she also knows the commonsense translation: as her mum used to say, you catch more flies with honey. She's read the research. Good-looking people earn more, court better opportunities and command higher-quality suitors. That's why it's called 'attractive' — beauty is a magnet for good fortune.

Client e-liaison at her firm is mostly face-based, and first impressions count. The software lets you make minor cosmetic adjustments — evening skintone, softening dark shadows — but it can't fix genetic flaws or reverse the effects of time. Kate is overdue for promotion. And for other things, too. She won't admit to loneliness, but knows the euphemisms: unsettled, adrift, disconnected.

The woman glances up and smiles, and it's like sitting near firelight: Kate is suffused by an amber glow, that watchable face turned full beam onto hers. Before she knows it, she's removing her robe in front of a 360-degree mirror, as the medico uses a remote control to activate the body scanners and display screens. 'You can pay by instalment, but it's really an investment,' she's saying, 'a way to advance your interests in a competitive market. When you weigh it against the payoffs, the doubled or trebled income generation over one's lifespan, it's just small change.'

Jack zooms in on Kate standing naked before the mirrors. He cranks the consult-room lights up high, creating a chilly glare that throws every flaw on her body into harsh relief, and lowers the room temperature: not quite cold enough for goosebumps, but too cool for comfort. That's him for the time being: now it's the medico's move. Still, he can't help thinking that this woman, Kate, looks more than uncomfortable. The word that comes to mind is mortified. He wants to look away, but that's not an option. He has a job to do.

Kate is huge: on every side, in the surrounding screens, she sees a magnified section of herself, a collage of fleshy surfaces filmed from every angle. It's all there, blown up under the unforgiving lights: the pale stretchmarks patterning her breasts and hips, purpled scars from childhood falls, the dimpled flesh of her buttocks. And her face: the tired skin with its blotches and gaping pores, a tracery of fine lines around her eyes, broken capillaries blooming like tiny undersea flowers. Thick hairs sprouting from the mole on her cheek, and the marionette lines etched around her mouth, like two sour parentheses. 'Oh my god,' she hears herself say, the facial images quivering as she speaks. 'What a disaster.'

From behind Kate's shoulder the medico makes a sympathetic sound. 'Nobody looks fantastic blown up this big,' she says, but Kate glimpses the woman's forearm in one corner of a screen, the skin smooth and pale as pearl. 'We just need to identify the trouble spots to help you prioritise, determine what's most urgent.' Kate resists the urge to suck her stomach in. No point in kidding yourself.

'My first recommendation,' says the medico, 'is facial elevation. That will take off ten to 15 years. We tone the underlying muscles, plump the skin, refine the texture and tighten everything back onto the underlying bone structure. Watch.' She tinkers with her remote, and one screen zooms out to frame Kate's face. 'This is just an approximation,' says the woman, 'but it gives you the general idea.'

As Kate watches, the image softens, morphs, and materialises into her younger twin. A little thinner, yes, but unmistakably Kate in her mid 20s, while Aden was still around and her adult years lay ahead of her like an unwrapped gift. A heaviness falls away and she feels herself stand taller; her on-screen doppelganger shimmers a moment, then her face comes back into focus, fresh and unspoilt and optimistic. This is procedure A, apparently; the medico is detailing the cost, and Kate finds herself nodding.

Now the woman has moved on. 'Under career goals you've listed promotion — working with blue-chip clients in the European market.' Kate nods. There have been rumours of downsizing, so she must be proactive. 'If that's a serious target, I'd also recommend dermal illumination, full body. It's very popular since the China relationship soured and our borders tightened. Skinwise you're a mid-four on the Fitzpatrick scale; we can lighten you to a mid-3, but unfortunately your Asian traces won't let us go further without risking complications.'

Kate's read this research too, and although she doesn't like it much, the evidence is clear: in her field some ethnic markers can be overlooked, but skin colour has an undeniable influence on earnings. These are suspicious times, and while the war might be geographically remote, everyone's seen the enemy's face. Australia's old alliances have dissolved and there's big money riding on the new ones. It's paranoid nonsense, of course, but she's seen the figures — and the unemployment queues. Even the new finance minister, whose grandmother was apparently Aboriginal, caved in to pressure and became noticeably lighter prior to his new appointment.

And look at her brother: stuck working in debt recovery, where your looks don't matter and your salary reflects that. Why make life harder for yourself? 'The good news,' the medico is saying, 'is that it's fully reversible. When the zeitgeist changes, so can you.' This, she notes, is procedure B. The on-screen Kate is now several shades lighter, a colour the medico calls 'bisque'. As the woman cites the cost, Kate is already budgeting the cutbacks in her head.

The final procedure is no surprise; it's commonplace these days. Kate has considered eye augmentation before, despite her brother's oft-expressed contempt for it. That's all very well for him, she thinks, with a flash of anger — but who does he call when he needs to borrow money? Procedure C does involve some downtime, the medico is explaining, as there's a minor surgical element. 'But is it safe? Will it look natural?' asks Kate, watching her own eyes on the screen — or are they hers? Already they are widening, opening up, a neat eyelid crease appearing above each eye.

The medico's lovely face joins hers onscreen. She smiles at Kate, a genuine smile, and winks one of her own beautiful, bright, round eyes. 'What do you think?' she asks playfully. 'Does it look natural to you?' Kate is smiling back now. 'You're kidding me,' she says. The woman laughs, and her face disappears from view. 'One-quarter Chinese,' she answers. 'I can't tell you what a difference it's made for me.'

Jack checks his controls for the final phase. The consult is almost over; the medico has left Kate alone, remote control in hand, to flick through her before-and-after shots. This is the critical point: without the doctor present to guide or influence her, Kate will feel that she's making an independent choice, a decision that's all hers. She's wrapped in her robe, settled in a comfortable chair sipping herbal tea, and he's raised the room temperature slightly. Beside her lies the contract, flagged at the spots awaiting her signature, and a silver pen.

He watches her carefully, timing his sensual choreography to match her thoughtful navigation of the slide-show, her back-and-forth flicks between the old Kate and the potential new one, the yet-to-be-realised beauty that lies just a click away. Thankfully, she's slow and considered as she switches between the images; some clients go too fast, making his task near-impossible.

Scent lingers too long to be useful here. Audio is Jack's trump card now: subliminal, immediate and quick to fade, it's perfect for the closing stages. When Kate's old self fills the screen, an unflattering body shot or facial close-up, he shoots a single pulse of infrasound into the room — a subtle touch, not enough to induce nausea, just a mild twinge of unease. When Kate flicks back to her rejuvenated self, he rewards her with a gentle hum, subaudible and womblike, the softest touch of gold-tinted light, and a milli-second image of a handsome man, caught mid-smile. It doesn't take long. Jack breathes a sigh of relief as she picks up the pen: this month's rent is in the bag.

Gillard's chaplaincy challenge

POLITICS

John Warhurst

Pressure is building on the Federal Government's National School Chaplaincy Program.

This month a challenge to the constitutionality of the program will be considered by the High Court. It claims that the program is contrary to s. 116 of the Australian Constitution (the framework for the interaction between church and state) and also that the program is beyond the Commonwealth's powers. Several state governments have intervened in support of this second argument

This particular program, initiated by the Howard Coalition government in 2006—2007, has been confirmed and expanded by the Rudd and Gillard Labor governments. It funds schools up to $20,000 per year to establish or expand school chaplaincy services.

Currently about 2700 schools receive such funding; this means that overall 28 per cent of schools benefit, including the same percentage of government schools; 46 per cent of independent schools take part, but only 17 per cent of Catholic schools are involved. The Catholic Church is not the leading player; Evangelical Christians have led the lobbying.

The program has long attracted controversy and has recently been the subject of a government discussion paper and a community consultation as well as expert reviews and several investigations by Ombudsmen. Some academic scholars have justifiably warned that the program looks like a dangerous incursion by religion into the delicate balance between church and state.

The High Court case may well be successful on this ground if not the other. The politics is another matter.

One of the prime lobbyists for the program has been the Australian Christian Lobby. At the last two federal elections ACL has organised public leadership forums at which both the major parties have committed themselves to the continuance of the program; in evangelical church circles the question was seen as critical to establishing any political party's religious credentials.

Labor wasted no time in trying to outdo the Coalition in making clear that it was so enthusiastic about the program that it would expand it.

One argument against the program relies on the necessary separation of church and state, especially when it applies, as in this case, to staffing in supposedly secular government schools, but it is also relevant to church schools in terms of the use of public funds.

Chaplains are supposed to operate according to strict guidelines. They should not

proselytise their faith, but must act in a secular role as a type of counsellor. That in itself is problematic, but there have also been questions asked about the qualifications of such chaplains to act as counsellors.

Within religion and politics there is a constitutional-legal arena and the practical arena of government policies. Political parties are more interested in the latter. That explains the leverage of lobby groups and the stances of recent federal governments and oppositions towards this program.

Christian organisations are better placed to lobby than their secular counterparts, which have fewer political resources and lesser standing. ACL is stronger than the Australian Secular Lobby, though teachers unions and the Greens add significant weight to the latter.

In the schools themselves any additional funding is usually welcomed, as it is in other spheres. An extra pair of competent hands is welcomed in most situations whatever their title.

For all governments there is a trade off in rewarding special interest groups and their particular claims. This program is not particularly expensive in the bigger scheme of things, though it has cost $437 million, and is widely distributed in different types of schools, reaching lots of parents and students. That makes it an attractive option for governments.

In the midst of debates about same sex marriage that will test and probably break relations between the Gillard Government and some Christian communities, the chaplaincy program is seen by both camps as a win-win situation. Some churches want it badly and the government is keen to provide it because of its political benefits. Nevertheless the High Court could change all that.

Homeless Grace

POETRY

Brian Doyle

Poem for Grace Farrell (1976—2011)

A thin column in the newspaper; she died in an alcove
Outside Saint Brigid's Church. She was from Wicklow.
She had been an artist. She came here at age seventeen.
She drank. She married a man who slept on the avenue,
Not near the church. He didn't like the church and said
That the church talked to him at night in a stern rumble.
He beat her. Her friends on the street beat him and told
Him to stay away from her. Her alcove had a roof on it,
In a sense, as there was a construction scaffold above it.
The folks like us — nobody knows us until we are dead,
Said a friend of hers on the street. Her family in Ireland
Accepted her body, from the medical examiner's office.
We told them that she was homeless, but they chose not
To believe that, said the examiner. Her name was Grace.
So that's the end of the article. But what if that's not the
End at all? What if the old church spoke to Grace Farrell
That night, held her in its southern arm, sang very gently
To her as she died, caught her spirit as it hit the scaffold,
And handed it up, weeping for the sweet broken woman?
Couldn't that be? Couldn't it be that we don't know who
She was and wanted to be, and maybe she was a wonder?
That could be. Maybe she was what she was invited to be.
Maybe her soul said yes to pain in this world to save kids

Somewhere else. Maybe she was brave in ways we never

Will know now. Every time I think I know something for

Sure I get the gift of not being sure at all; isn't that grace?

Mrs Simmons says

That the question *do animals go to heaven* is a silly question,

And that the reverse is the question to be asked — can people

Ever achieve the blunt holy unselfish nature of other species?

She asks this with an artful artlessness as she wraps an order:

A meat pie, made from one creature that never killed another,

As she says. Though surely the cow mowed the sentient grass.

Did you think that the grass was not alert to the lovely world?

Surely it was, sensing the sun, sucking water and the minerals
Below, what there were of them, old Australia, we're a desert

With a scraggy green rim, is what it is. Now when I was a girl,

She says, longer ago than you can conceive, I thought we may

Be speeding up evolutionarily, what with the War fresh in our

Minds, a terror that nicked everyone in the world, and animals

Too, people forget this, but such has not proven to be the case;

However I do still believe that we will someday perhaps arrive

At the unselfconscious nature of other creatures — we've had it

All backwards, that we were all advanced and them not so; but

People kill people for reasons other than food — how advanced

Is that? So history books are the stories of how not evolved we

Are, as yet. Now did you want coffee with that? A long black?

The pearl

The lesson I remember clearest from college?

When a girl named Melita, draped in a towel,

Emerged just after dawn from the dorm room
Of a guy we called Bimbo. *That* was a shock.
She was a goddess, and he was as advertised.
She smiled politely and vanished. I discussed
This for days with my friends; how could this
Be? How could such a thing actually happen?
She was a goddess and Bimbo was serpentine.
Maybe she wanted to reach as low as possible,
Said one friend of mine. Maybe it's like a test
Of some sort for girls. Maybe she went insane
For a night from being a goddess, said another.
Maybe it's hard to be normal if you're like her.
Maybe she wanted to see what stupid feels like.
No question stupid felt like Bimbo — but it was
Bimbo feeling *her* that had us reeling for days.
Sure, all these years later I think it could be we
Were wrong about him, perhaps he was a great
Guy, gentle and alert, and we just didn't see it,
Or she was a sham and a fool, a confident shell
Hiding mere wind, or perhaps a frightened girl;
I mean, it's very probable that we, or really me,
Were utterly mistaken, as I have almost always
Proven myself to be; but maybe not, and Melita
Emerging like a pearl from Bimbo's dank grasp
Was a thorough lesson about how most of what
You know you actually don't; whatever you are
Sure of, don't be, and maybe then we will learn;

Something like that. Perhaps knowing what you

Don't know is the road to knowing what you do.

Hinch and other 'hardened criminals'

EDITORIAL

Michael Mullins

In many ways, broadcaster Derryn Hinch has been an outstanding social justice advocate over many years. But as a repeat offender with contempt for the law and no sign of remorse, he is also what is commonly referred to as a 'hardened criminal'.

This moral ambiguity is a trait Hinch shares with many, perhaps most, prisoners. They have an essential goodness that is frequently accompanied by a chronic inability to live and work within society's norms.

The difference is that Hinch has always had a platform to speak for himself. He is well known and understood, and largely respected by many in the community. Most so-called criminals do not get the opportunity to explain themselves and rise above the stereotypes. They are regarded as low-lifes, even years after they have paid their dues and been released from prison.

Much media and community discussion of sentencing focuses on retributive rather than restorative justice. Fear and community sentiment unduly influence decisions about the release of prisoners hoping for freedom after completing their minimum sentence. They are often kept in jail for political or other reasons that have little to do with justice and good public policy.

This is especially true in cases involving prisoners serving time for crimes that provoked widespread outrage, such as the 1991 murder of heart surgeon Victor Chang. In 2009, then NSW Corrective Services Minister John Robertson argued that Phillip Lim, one of Chang's murderers, should not be released from prison because 'Victor Chang was an incredible doctor. I think his murder shocked everybody.'

The progress of Lim's rehabilitation, it seemed, was less relevant than continuing community outrage. Such attitudes on the part of politicians surely betray a contempt towards the law, which could be seen as equal to that of Hinch and other offenders. At times, it seems, there is little difference between what politicians and shock jocks say on sentencing.

The Australian Catholic Bishops' forthcoming Social Justice Statement is titled *Building Bridges, Not Walls: Prisons and the justice system.* The bishops describe the 'potent' role of community fear in 'get tough on crime' policies, which usually involve building more prisons and winding back innovative strategies such as community detention. Public sentencing policy, they insist, is not about addressing community fear and outrage, but assisting offenders to become constructive citizens.

'It is time for all Australians to revisit the needs of prisoners, their loved ones and those

who work with them ... It is time to knock down the walls of social exclusion that increase the prospects that a person will end up in jail. Before and after jail, we need bridges, not walls.'

Because Hinch has a voice, he has managed to avoid such social exclusion. It is time other prisoners were given a voice.

Tony Abbott's FUD factor

POLITICS

Neil Ormerod

In the 1980s computer journalists used to refer to the 'FUD' factor and its impact on computer purchases. FUD — Fear, Uncertainty and Doubt.

With the various changes in technology, new operating systems, processor chips, computer architectures and so on, it was never clear which way the market would go. As long as fears, uncertainties and doubts remained, purchasers would simply sit tight, hold on to tried and tested technologies and wait for things to settle down.

The FUD factor has now found a home in politics. Tony Abbott has become the master of the FUD factor in the present debate over climate change and the carbon tax.

First, sow the seeds of doubt — climate change may or may not be real:

We can't conclusively say whether man-made carbon dioxide emissions are contributing to climate change. If they are, we don't know whether they are exacerbating or counteracting what might otherwise be happening to global climate. Even if they are adding to climatic extremes, humanity may be able to cope with only modest adjustments.

Then sow the seeds on uncertainty:

There may even have been a slight decrease in global temperatures (the measurement data differs on this point) over the past decade despite continued large increases in emissions associated with the rapid economic growth of China and India.

And to cap it all play on people's fears, especially in relation to the proposed carbon tax:

The important thing is what will it do to people's cost of living and if it drives up your cost of living it is a tax. It's effectively an increase in the rate of GST…‰ — …‰that's what it is.

In fact Abbott has been so successful in his campaign of fear, uncertainty and doubt that some commentators have credited him with having an impact on consumer confidence, as people adopt a 'wait and see' attitude to the proposed carbon tax and are saving rather than spending their incomes.

The problem in discussing Abbott's stance on climate change is that, in a clichÃ© he himself would use, he has held more positions than the karma sutra.

Earlier this year Crikey published an article, 'Climate change cage match: Abbott debates Abbott', consisting of a string of quotes in which he took up just about every position under the sun, from supporting an emissions trading scheme to rejecting it, acknowledging the reality of human induced climate change to casting doubt on it and so on.

Since then we have had the more recent spectacle of Abbott rejecting the notion of a 5 per cent reduction in carbon emissions declaring it 'crazy', only to be reminded that this was in fact his own party's policy; and telling an audience that carbon dioxide is an 'odourless, colourless, and weightless gas' and so is difficult to measure. Abbott is clearly scientifically illiterate if this is what he truly thinks.

A somewhat shameless Abbott then attacked Julia Gillard on the ABC AM show (25 July 2011) for not saying what she really believes on climate change and the best way to manage it. He wants *her* to be more truthful!

How can we understand such flexibility in Abbott's stance? Have we, as some have claimed, reached the stage where we are facing the prospect of a first post-modern prime minister, someone freed from the shackles of facts and a commitment to truthfulness?

As I have observed before, I think Abbott is best understood as a debater, first and foremost. He will say anything he needs to in order to win a debate. Whatever the audience will accept, he will reflect back to them and use for his own end. And that end is to win power.

This flexibility with facts is disappointing in light of Abbott's Catholicism.

In many ways Abbott embodies the Church's understanding of what the role of the laity should be. As explicated in the Vatican II document *Lumen Gentium*, 'the laity, by their very vocation, seek the kingdom of God by engaging in temporal affairs and by ordering them according to the plan of God'.

The Council document on the laity spells out this vocation in terms of 'the good things of life and the prosperity of the family, culture, economic matters, the arts and professions, the laws of the political community, international relations'.

Abbott is out in the world seeking to make a difference. But the difference he is seeking to make bears little resemblance to the values of the 'kingdom of God'.

On matters such as asylum seekers, industrial relations, the unemployed and welfare recipients, and climate change, he is more interested in playing on the fears of the people, while protecting the position of the powerful. Always an appeal to self-interest, the hip pocket nerve, the lowest common denominator; never an appeal to self-transcendence, to generosity or largeness of heart.

Fear, uncertainty and doubt win out every time over a thoughtful, well-reasoned, generous position.