

STATE



APRIL 2012
ISSUE 7

INTERVIEW
WITH SENATOR
SCOTT
LUDLAM

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SMALL STEP
FOR MAN, ONE
GIANT LEAP
FOR STUDENTS

- By Rajdeep Singh

THE LOSS OF
A PROLIFIC
POLITICAL
MIND

- Jesse Rutigliano

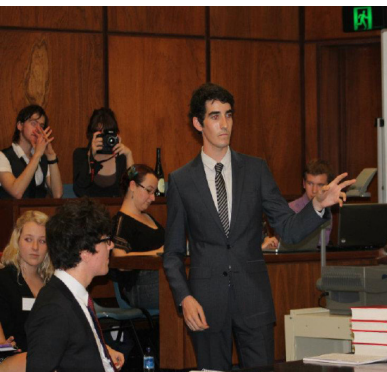
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UWA Arts Union Mock Parliament



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EDITOR'S NOTE

Welcome to Issue 7 of State Magazine! I just wanted to begin by saying WOW. I never thought this issue would be so big – this issue is over 40,000 words, which is a new record! This is my first issue as Publications Officer, and along with the big help of Head Editor Rebecca Anderton, we hope that you enjoy reading this issue just as much as we enjoyed putting it together. I would like to say thank you to every single person who has contributed to Issue 7. The quality of the articles was beyond my expectations and it was all of you who made this issue one of the best yet! We recently received an email from the UWA Library informing us that State Magazine is now being archived in the Scholar Centre. This is a very special part of the library where texts up to 1,000+ years old are stored and maintained. If you want to be a part of history, write to State!

We have recently been in touch with students from The Political Bouillon, who run an online political journal in Canada. They are fantastic and I encourage you all to check out their website. We have established an 'article exchange' with them to expand readership to an international level. They are looking for writers who have an interest in Asian politics and can write to a high standard. This is a fantastic opportunity, and establishing some kind of collaboration with students across the globe can really broaden our audience. For more information on The Political Bouillon, go to: <www.thepoliticalbouillon.com>.

At UWA, you may have noticed Rocketfuel has been set up in the Refectory. The outcome of this trial will be something to keep an eye on in the near future. The Student Services and Amenities Fee (SSAF) has become a hugely important issue amongst students on campus. Many students have voiced their opinions on this compulsory fee and the UWA Guild is working towards something that will achieve the best results for students. On the state level, a recent Newspoll has showed that the ALP is on the rebound in Western Australia. This poll was the first since Mark McGowan became leader and it signifies a huge increase in support for the Labor Party. The recent Queensland State Election caused a massive shake up after the ALP was defeated by opposition LNP, led by Campbell Newman. The ALP suffered one of the worst defeats of a state government since Federation, and

the worst defeat of a sitting government in Queensland history. This defeat saw the ALP go from 51 seats in 2009, to just 7 seats held in 2012, suffering a swing of 15.2%.

On a federal level, the unexpected resignation of Bob Brown from the Greens Party has caused quite a stir throughout Australia. While details on his resignation are minimal, Christine Milne is "readier than ever" to take charge of the Greens. Recent fraud and sexual harassment claims over Peter Slipper are something to keep an eye on in the coming weeks. The government has not asked Slipper for his resignation; however he stepped down from his position as speaker on 22 April 2012. The Minerals Resources Rent Tax (MRRT) was passed through the Senate in late March, after passing with 38 votes to 32. The government plans to use the \$11 billion it will generate over 3 years to boost compulsory superannuation payments, pay for infrastructure and provide businesses a 1% tax cut. This 30% tax rate is due to be implemented June 2012.



Unless you've been living under a rock for the last few months, you will all be aware of the 'Kony 2012' campaign. The online campaign video, produced by The Invisible Children in the United States was splashed out across social-media sites across the world, instantly becoming a hit. The film's purpose was designed to promote the charity's "Stop Kony" movement to make the Ugandan war criminal globally known in order to have him imprisoned before the end of the year. In the United States, the withdrawal of Rick Santorum from the U.S. Presidential race came as a bit of a surprise. He announced his withdrawal on 10 April 2012 in Gettysburg, Pennsylvania after winning 11 primaries and caucuses, and receiving over 3 million votes.

That's it for now! Once again, thank you to all the readers and contributors who make this magazine so successful. Also thank you to Myles Parish, the previous Publications Officer for all the hard work he put into the last issue. I look forward to working with you on future issues!

Amanda Robideau
Publications Officer

PRESIDENT'S REPORT

Well what a Semester 1 it has been so far for UWA Politics Club, never mind the changes we've seen politics. We now have 330 members, we've put on five fantastic events and we are now up to our second Issue of State Magazine for the year.

However, all these achievements would not be possible without you, so I would like to begin by thanking all of you for your continued support. Whether you have joined the Politics Club, attended our events, written for State Magazine or have taken the time to look at one of posters, without you the Club today would not be the Club that it is!

Furthermore, I'd like to introduce you to some new members for the Committee. Welcome to our new First Year Representatives Cailin Molinari and Aiden Depiazzi. Also welcome to our new Publications Officer Amanda Robideau and Head Editor Rebecca Anderton who have done a fantastic job on Issue 7!

So what have you missed so far for 2012 in the UWA Politics Club? The year got off to a flying state with O'Day. This year we made the decision to book a larger stall so that more of you could come find us, join up and say G'day. Thanks to all of you who helped out and I hope you're all getting a good wear out of the fantastic new Club t-shirt. All I can really say is the day was a heap of fun!

Next was our Harold Holt Memorial Sun-drown-er down at Costteloe Beach. We couldn't have asked for a better day for it. The amazing sunset, the surf, delicious pizza, the Sculptures by the Sea and the company of good friends all made for fun Thursday afternoon!

I have to admit that the next few weeks were a bit of a blur as we had an event every week. First was our First Year Representative Election and then followed by The Importance of Young People in Decision Making where we had the State Director of the Left-Right Think Tank Conrad Liveris come and speak. Following that we had

our highly anticipated Socialism vs. Capitalism Debate.

Although there wasn't the same degree of verbal jousting as has been at these debates, the arguments presented by both sides were certainly thought provoking. They certainly tested my views. My thanks must go out to Chad Satterlee, Blair Hurley and Simon Hukin for the Socialism side and Samuel Marks, Vinnay Kolhatkar and Sebastian Younan from the Peace, Prosperity and Freedom Club for the Capitalism Side.



Our most recent event was Bowling for Ban Ki held at the Claremont Bowls Club. It was a fun filled afternoon of lawn bowls topped off by a complimentary sausages sizzle. My thanks must go to Nicole Mumford and UWA UNYA for their help in putting this event together.

For your diary, our next event is a forum on the US Election for 2012. This is set for Tuesday 15th May 1-2pm in Fox Lecture Theatre. We are fortunate enough to US Consul General Ms Aleisha Woodward and Professor David Denmark coming along to discuss the election as well answer your questions. Be sure to keep an eye and ear out for more details.

Finally, I would like to take this opportunity to thank Senator Scott Ludlam for taking the time today to help us launch Issue 7. I would also think to thank all the donators who have allowed us to continue to print State Magazine. My thanks must also go out to the Committee for their efforts in making this semester one of the most successful for the UWA Politics Club. For now I hope you enjoy issue 7 and until next time, make politics sexy!

Angus Duncan
President

INTERVIEW WITH SENATOR SCOTT LUDLAM

Scott Ludlam has been a Greens member of the Australian Senate since 2008 and represents Western Australia. He has an extensive portfolio which includes Broadband, Communications and Digital Economy; Housing; Nuclear; Mining (Western Australia); Transport, Infrastructure, Waste and Sustainable Cities.

State Magazine was very fortunate to have the opportunity to interview Senator Ludlam on a number of issues including the resignation of Bob Brown, appointment of Christine Milne and the placement of Julian Assange's lawyer on an allegedly government-sanctioned "inhibited travel watch list".

STATE: What specifically was it that first prompted you to join the Australian Greens?

LUDLAM: I joined the Greens in 2001, and it was because I wanted to help my friend and colleague Robin Chappelle who at that stage running for State parliament, and I wanted to support his campaign and then we got him elected".

STATE: Do you think that Senator Bob Brown's decision to retire from federal politics will have a significant impact on the policy platform of the Australian Greens?

LUDLAM: I don't think it will have an impact on the policy platform, we've had a stable set of issues we have run on for the last 20 years, and I don't think you'll notice anything changing there.

I think, Senator Milne, when she took the stage last Friday, indicated that the issues that she wanted to

provide a greater emphasis on; one was the economy, working with progressive businesses who have been very poorly represented, thus far by some of the peak bodies. And the second one, which was greater outreach and collaboration on issues in regional communities that we have shared concerns over.

So you will probably see emphasis shift in those two areas, which I think will be very positive. But we are not going to notice any radical changes in the kind of issues that we run on, or the policies.

STATE: Given the quite large personality vacuum that Bob Brown's departure from the leadership has left, do you think that the Australian Greens may start to struggle to get their message across to the electorate?

LUDLAM: We will wait and see the outcome of the Tasmanian pre-selection, because I gather there is some great people lining up there. But I have a lot of confidence in the ability of the team to pull together and keep doing the work. There is a poll out this morning that shows our vote is steady. There are some quarters of the corporate media who would love to see us fall apart post-Bob, but I'm sorry to disappoint them, but that is just wishful thinking.

STATE: What is your opinion of the Greens' new leader, Senator Christine Milne, and her deputy MHR Adam Bandt?

LUDLAM: They are both great. I think Christine really hit the ground running. She is a formidable campaigner and a really good operator. I have worked with her since 2005, and I have a lot of respect for the way she works and her grasp for policy, but also her ability to get results and get outcomes. We saw, in the instance of the carbon price package, that was very much her work.

Establishing the multi-party climate committee was her idea and she worked very hard to make sure the model had as much integrity as possible. I think that gives people a pretty good idea of what she is capable of. I am really looking forward to the next little while. Adam is a remarkable campaigner and a I think a very good local member. So I think the two of them together will be a very good combination.

STATE: What is your take on the recent controversies pertaining to Peter Slipper, and do you think it was right of him to step down as Speaker, even if only temporarily? Do you think the altered dynamic within the Parliament will have an effect on the upcoming Federal Budget?

LUDLAM: No, I don't know that there is going to be any

direct impact; the Budget is still a couple of weeks away, so I'm not sure that there will be any impact there. Our view is that some of the allegations are pretty serious and it is appropriate that some of them are tested in court. We will wait for the outcome. I think that it can be a bit of a scary precedent when people on potential criminal matters are tried in the media and treated as if it's partisan political issues. So in this case, we will wait and see what falls out of the investigation.

STATE: As a parliamentarian in a minor party, you have a very extensive and highly diverse parliamentary portfolio – namely including Broadband, Communications and Digital Economy; Housing; Nuclear; Mining (Western Australia); Transport, Infrastructure, Waste and Sustainable Cities. Do you ever find that you have difficulty keeping track of things?

LUDLAM: I have brilliant staff and we work pretty hard. When I first went to work for Rachel Siewert, there were only four state MP's in Federal Parliament. I've worked in State politics for four years where there were only five MP's, and they had balance of power as well. It's difficult, but I have actually greatly enjoyed being in an expanded team where I was able to drop a couple of portfolios. You just have to work really hard, and we work with extremely motivated people.

STATE: What is the economic justification for having an inefficient tax on mining companies in Australia, such as the Mineral Resource Rent Tax (MRRT), when there are arguably other, more efficient alternatives?

LUDLAM: I think there's some truth to that. There are models even within Australia including the Petroleum Resources Rent Tax, that you can argue are simpler and more efficient. Some of the people who are arguing for more efficient taxes are using no tax or a greatly weakened one. I tend to look at whom it is promoting efficiency before I evaluate the proposal myself.

STATE: In the last few days, you have been among the most outspoken critics of the apparent placement of Julian Assange's lawyer on an allegedly government-sanctioned "inhibited travel watch list". Considering that the existence of such a list has been flatly denied in media releases from several government departments, why are you pursuing this issue so aggressively?

LUDLAM: Well I think it is scary that human rights lawyers are being placed on watch lists. The most recent evidence that I have seen is that in fact, the US Department of Homeland Security list, and they use the term 'inhibited list', and we have statements now from the Australian Government – the Department of Foreign Affairs and

Trade, from the airline and the British Home Office, all denying responsibility and pointing their finger elsewhere and saying "it had nothing to do with us, it was somebody else". The reason I'm pursuing the issue, is the idea that we would put human rights lawyers and campaigners on watch lists that were presumably designed around blocking terrorists, and around legitimate security issues. It is yet another sign that we're on a pretty slippery slope. So think the idea that someone like Jen Robinson would find herself on one of those lists would need to be pushed back very strongly.

STATE: In your opinion, what is the one issue that has been largely ignored by mainstream politics since the last election, and why?

LUDLAM: Probably the most serious one in my mind is around oil depletion, peak oil issues. Which is treated the way climate change was being treated 20 years ago. I.e. there is a huge amount of evidence by non-government organisations and independent analysts that we are now at the plateau of easily available and affordable oil. But there is systematic policy blindness within senior levels of government and both the old political parties, that there is any public policy issue here at all.

You look at the official graphs of fossil fuel demand running out into the 2020's and 2030's, and there is this blind assumption that we will be able to just keep doubling our oil imports. It has huge potential impacts about the balance of payments, obviously, but the oil physically just isn't there. So that is something that I have found difficult to get traction on within Federal politics, because of this systematic blindfolding around the issue. So that is one that I think we need to work on a lot harder.

STATE: What would you consider to be your most significant personal contribution to the community during your time as a politician?

LUDLAM: There are a bunch of things that I am really proud of, but the general area that I am particularly proud of is communications policy – in highlighting issues of interest to the online community, whether it is the Internet filter, data attention, surveillance spy police and security agencies or copyright issues. So the general communications portfolio and the ability to have stronger safeguards for public ownership of the NBN and support for that project.

The communications portfolio is probably the general area that I am happiest with. Specifically, probably the Perth Light Rail, which has gone from being a idea to a project within the State Government that has happened reasonably quickly. Which I am proud of.

THE LOSS OF A PROLIFIC POLITICAL MIND

By Jesse Rutigliano

Rarely is there such an individual that can so effortlessly insight contemptuous disgust, and only minutes later, inoculates you with harmonious praise and adulation for his cause. This is one of the innumerable talents the late Christopher Hitchens possessed. The late Christopher (not Chris) Hitchens was indeed aware of his pending demise. He had stage four esophageal cancers, and as he so dramatically put “there was no stage five.” Briefly after his death, I would encounter a spooky moment when reading Mr. Hitchens’ memoir; Hitch-22.

Early on in the publication, Mr. Hitchens describes the acute awareness of death the revered poet and friend Phillip Larkin suffered throughout his life. He mentions Larkin’s poem “Aubade”, that describes the insufferable fear of not being anywhere, nor hearing anything, nor feeling anything that death so cruelly promises to bring. Hitchens concurs with this understandable fear. The spooky part is that Hitchens and Larkin died at the same age, from the same cancer. Two prodigiously efficacious writers, whose brilliance was silenced by such a destructive, cowardly disease.

Christopher Hitchens was a socialist in his early years, although, I still think he held the cause close to his heart until the very end. He studied PPE (Politics, Philosophy, Economics) at Balliol college, Oxford. He was a bright student, however, he used most of his study time to attend socialist rallies and befriend those with similar outlooks.

This incredibly social period of his life would benefit him for many years to come. He met his life long friends; novelist Martin Amis and poet James Fenton whilst at Oxford. All three have gone onto become exceptional in their own fields. Contributing to their arts in a manner

so pronounced it is almost impossible for one that is interested in contemporary literature, poetry and political commentary to have not heard of them.

The ferocious intelligence and exceptional polemic ability with which Hitchens attacks many of those foolish enough to debate him, is something to behold. The relentless barrage of refutations, corrections and condescending remarks all intertwined with eloquence so superior to that of the common man, it gives his opponents little chance of success.

Of course some will say, “This is all well and good, but he did attend Oxford – you would expect him to be clever.” Well, we shan’t expect every individual that has attended Oxbridge, Harvard, Yale, UWA or the likes to have the ability and intellect that Hitchens possessed. Prince Charles, James Franco, George. W. Bush and Germaine Greer are testament to that.

Christopher Hitchens had something extra. It was not his ascending coherence and lucidity when drinking his beloved Johnny Walker – Black Label. It was not his no-topic-too-taboo attitude, nor his beguiling condescension or seemingly implacable political and religious convictions. What was most extraordinary and most revered about Christopher Hitchens was his capacious memory.

It was as if he could flick through a mental filing cabinet of documents, articles, books, poems, reviews, quotes, letters and essays and then fire them word for word at will. A lifetime of textual assimilation leads to a voluminous amount of information and knowledge, something that not all that attempt retain as Hitchens did.

Mr. Hitchens had several subsections of adored writing



and writers. Among the fictitious and often politically driven were George Orwell, Richard Llewellyn, Aldous Huxley, Graham Greene and Albert Camus. The satirical included the widely revered and often quoted P.G. Woodhouse and Evelyn Waugh.

The revolutionary writings and influence of Leon Trotsky, Thomas Jefferson, Thomas Paine, Karl Marx, Rosa Luxemburg and Benjamin Franklin are evident and prevalent in Hitchens' own writing; as are the philosophies of Bertrand Russell, John Stuart Mill and Isaiah Berlin. Christopher Hitchens' ability as a writer has never been questioned; his yearning for truth and the revelation of corruption, coercion and duplicitous teachings were at the heart of his texts.

This can be seen with the [shaky] characters he pursued with all his intellectual might including figures such as Bill Clinton, Henry Kissinger and Mother Teresa. I will not delve into what was said on each individual here, however I do recommend searching out a copy of one, if not all three of the controversial and thought provoking books. However, what I will say is the political opinions Hitchens held so unforgivingly, came from a place of heavy thought and first hand accounts.

He was in freshly communist Cuba only months after Che Guevara's death. He was in Russia during socialist rallies in the 1970's. He was in Middle East (Afghanistan, Iran) during horrific bouts of sectarian violence and witnessed the effects of Saddam's despotic reign in Iraq. All of this, coupled with a grand intellectual comprehension for the

events themselves and the cause and effect of previous wars and future battles made Christopher Hitchens a once in a generation journalist.

His career, however, has not been without stern attack or controversy. The best publicized criticism being his contradictory stance on the 2003 Iraqi invasion. This support for the Bush administration's intervention in the small Middle Eastern nation-state is a clear paradox in Hitchens' purported liberalist ideals. Whatever your opinion on the matter, this indiscretion should not cast a shadow on a career as rich and informative as Hitchens' has been. I have no doubt that Christopher Hitchens would have had something interesting to say, or a different angle to put forth or maybe just a refreshing injection of eloquent analysis on the events of the past few months.

The religious/racial shootings in Toulouse, the Russian and Chinese veto against U.N. intervention in Syria, and the Trayvon Martin murder in Florida. I'm sure he would have given his sort after opinion on the United States Presidential nominations in November, as well as many more inevitable tragedies and triumphs that future years will bring.

The fact of the matter is, the world has lost a prolific political mind; a political mind that took a lifetime to build and arguably only months to destroy. If the indolently imaginative creation of heaven and a hell eventuates, I hope Christopher has gone to the latter, because as he so thoughtfully put it "Heaven would be insufferably worse".

“The ferocious intelligence and exceptional polemic ability with which Hitchens attacks many of those foolish enough to debate him, is something to behold.”

THE MAN WHO WAS PURGED: THE MANY DOWNFALLS OF BO XILAI

By Jack Nitchke

In a manic few weeks, China's overly secretive Communist Party has undertaken a thorough purge of one of the nation's most prominent and divisive political figures. As Party Chief of the city of Chongqing, Bo Xilai was the closest thing that China had to a political celebrity. His prominence, revolutionary pedigree (his father was one of the old Bolsheviks who alongside Mao in the Civil War), and the popularity he earned fighting corruption in Chongqing had all but guaranteed him a spot upon the Politburo's inner circle in this year's upcoming reshuffle.

His apparent purge is the first of its kind to be meted out to a senior official in over six years, and paints the party in an uncomfortably unstable light at a time when it seeks to portray itself as a paragon of political stability. It appears that the imperative to destroy Mr Bo overshadowed any such concerns.

The first signs of trouble came in February, when Bo's lieutenant Wang Lijun had to be escorted from the US embassy in Chengdu after allegedly trying to defect. A few weeks later, after being publicly criticised by Premier Wen Jiabo, Bo was stripped of his job as Chongqing Party Chief. On April 10th, it was announced that Bo had been relieved of all his duties within the party, and also that his wife, Gu Kailai, was a suspect in the alleged murder of a British businessman last year.

There is no realistic possibility of Mr Bo being rehabilitated after such a throttling; his political career is over. Xinhua, China's state news agency, employs its

usual, chilling doublespeak when it reports upon Mr Bo's "serious violations" and promise to investigate such violations further. The accusations against his wife point to a broader attack upon his family that bodes ill for his future. This is a man resigned to a fate which has already been determined for him.

The reasons behind this purge are mysterious, as are most of the internal machinations of the Chinese Communist Party. Rumours flew about in the wake of this scandal that Mr Bo had attempted a coup. The imminent reshuffle of the Party leadership gives currency to the inference that the Party's destruction of Mr Bo was a move to on the part of his political enemies to preclude a future power struggle. So little is known of the party's inner workings that it is futile to try and map out the factions that exist within it, but seeing what is at stake, it stands to reason that they would be at each other's throats.

Bo earned great renown and popularity for his fights against corruption within Chongqing and for the social welfare meted out under him. However, such programs were not without their critics. There were concerns that Bo used his crackdown upon Chongqing's "mafia" as a pretext to purge political enemies and consolidate a stranglehold on power. He also drew fire for his perceived dalliances with Maoism, most evident in his championing of "Red Songs" over the vile extravagance of the West, and his perceived preference for State owned enterprise.

It was perhaps to this that Mr Wen was alluding when he warned, in his thinly veiled criticisms of Mr Bo, of a potential return to the hysteria that accompanied the Cultural Revolution if China does not undergo political reform. This is mere hyperbole on Wen's part. Although it was a rather notable concern that such a prominent party figure as Mr Bo should give China's diehard Maoists so very much to cheer about, Mr Bo is hardly Mao Zedong, and China is very unlikely to return to the frenzied insanity which gripped it in the 1960s and 70s, whomever it is that holds power in Beijing.

Whatever their reasons; the Party is now rid of Mr Bo. His celebrity will no doubt linger, he had many fans in his native Chongqing, but this is of little consequence now. Things will no doubt continue to get worse for him, his family, and any stalwart allies he still may possess. He has become a totem by which the Party can measure the ostensible accountability of its senior cadres to the rule of law. Xinhua conveniently captures the remarks of a senior Party official within Chongqing, "There is no privileged citizen before the law. No one can interfere with law enforcement and anyone who violates the law cannot be at large." This is a lesson which Mr Bo now serves to teach, whether he likes it or not.

GAY RIGHTS, CHRISTENDOM AND WESTERN MORALITY

By Christopher Dowson

This is a polemic against what appears to be an alarming trend in Western democracies around the world, viz. the rise of militant-homosexuality or “gaydom” as the in-vogue culture critics call it today. I am personally against the idea of caving-in to minority lobbyists who call for sweeping reform against common law, legislative and social paradigms that have been built and developed over hundreds upon hundreds of years based on a sound Western morality. Such a morality is the product of political freedom, religious freedom and values that enshrine vital cultural institutions such as the Catholic Church or the Constitution of the United States of America, or the Constitution of Australia.

Politicians in this country recognise that allowing “gaydom” to dominate our way of life will alienate voters and no doubt call into question the precepts of “democracy” itself. We derive this fundamental system of government from the Ancient Greeks, who valued the voice and the ideas of the *ἄνθρωποι* or “the people” – that is the crux of the debate really – we must listen to what “the people” of our nation believe and value, more specifically, what the majority of the people believe and value. Now would one just assume that the oligarchs of the Greek city-states would simply allow laws to be created on the basis that a small group of people wants them to? Would we assume that the chief Archon or the Ekklesia itself would allow males to “get to know” other males in public (i.e get to know them a little too well if you catch my drift)? Well maybe they would, considering they invented the activity, but we are missing the point – or was that Sparta?

Aussies are tolerant and easy-going people – but push them too far and they get stroppy, look at Ivan Milat or Martin Booth. Foisting marriage between a “bloke” and another “bloke” is just un-Australian, but let me be clear – this is not because Australians hate homosexuality (although there is an argument that we may fear it to an extent, because we all fear what is alien or unnatural to us, like Megatron or King Kong). I am a proud Western Australian and cherish the morality of my forefathers

which was handed down from Christendom (necessarily) and the rise of Western, free-market economies post-World War II. All such histological facts allow me to safely say that most Australians have similar standards of morality and similar values, such as loving your bloody neighbour (not literally, but in a good-Samaritan sense) or you’s shall not kill. These values are the foundations of a working, civilized society and coincidentally, they stem from the Old Testament.

Today, these very tenets, the very cornerstones of what our ancestors fought for in the World Wars – even before that perhaps in various conflicts and achievements which asserted Australian, American, British or New Zealand identities – these cultures handed down values and a code of morals which we cannot forsake in order to score quick and easy political points with pushy pressure groups. Life is tough – we must adapt or die, but we Australians don’t want you, homosexuals, to shag a Sheila once and a while, we do not even want you to stop out-styling straight men in public, all we ask is for you to fit in or fu – freely move away. Accept that marriage between men is not all it is cracked up to be. Society accepts you, for who you are – not for your Prada skinny jeans. Go free, all equal (though 1 in 10 is probably an overestimated figure) but just know that some things are simply not part of the “Aussie way”.

I conclude with a life-experience: I acquired two children’s books last month for a young male cousin of mine to see what he thought of them. The first book was from eBay, entitled “My Mommy is a Boy” about two New York male fashion designers rearing a child in Alaska and the rambunctious shenanigans that result. The story and the illustrations were truly disturbing. The second book was entitled “Two Mommies are better than One” about two young Latino women adopting a child in Arkansas. The illustrations in the first book about the two dads were just plain wrong and morally despicable – however there were some rather compelling illustrations in “Two Mommies are better than One”. We thoroughly enjoyed reading and re-reading it. I mean wow! What a truly great and stimulating read.

THE TIMES THEY ARE A CHANGIN': GAY MARRIAGE, CONSERVATISM AND THE MYTH OF THE SOCIAL PARADIGM

By Francis Cardell-Oliver

As is often the case in this day and age, in the fullness of time, amidst the ever changing preoccupations of a public discourse with the attention span of a goldfish, the subject of gay marriage has, after a brief renaissance, joined the pile of abandoned policies and forgotten aspirations which must be accumulating in the waste paper bin in the Federal Cabinet room. Although two bills to amend the Marriage Act are awaiting introduction to the Parliament, their fate was probably sealed at last year's ALP national conference.

That extraordinary circus of arcane factional manoeuvring and the less-than-subtle display of personal animosities produced really the only likely outcome: a half-hearted move to a conscience vote which ensures – between the Coalition and the ALP Right – that the issue will be neatly disposed of for the foreseeable future, after token legislative consideration. And yet the volcanic flurry of enthusiastic advocacy from both sides of the debate produced by this brief appearance in the spotlight provides some rather more far-reaching insights into the national psyche.

In Australia's history, only eight of 44 constitutional amendments have been carried by national referendum. The Parliament is not, of course, burdened by the impracticalities of direct democracy in respect of this issue, but the record does tell us about public opinion on political issues which go to define who and what we are. We do not like change. It threatens us. Those opposed to extension of the institution of marriage to gay couples thus paint it as a fundamental redefinition – maximising the perceived change – and consequently as an assault on

– that is, impliedly detrimental to – our cultural heritage.

There is in this attitude an unhealthy dose what I would describe as mindless, literal conservatism: hanging on to the past just because it is there and we find that comforting. Difference when it comes to things as fundamental as familial structure or sexual attraction makes many people uncomfortable. It's a psychological predisposition we can trace back to childhood. It is irrational and it is dangerous: without wanting to draw qualitative comparisons, we may note that the same neurosis underlying most forms of racism and other irrational discrimination.

All this is not to say that opposition to gay marriage consists entirely in mindless conservatism. Plenty of arguments have been advanced in defence of the status quo. At the epicentre of last year's debate, a number of popular second-hand lines tended to appear repeatedly on TV screens, newspaper columns, blogs, round dinner tables and in the street: attempts to rationalise what was for many a deeper fear; to reduce feelings to apothegms. But when we look at some of the most popular of these in the harsh light of day – objectively, stripped of the fog of familiarity and fear – they don't really stand up to scrutiny.

Given the preponderance nowadays of (a) successful de facto relationships and (b) divorces, we might well question the assertion, adopted by both sides of the debate, that marriage is still a valuable institution, rather than a left-over bit of property law from an age of misogyny which has been reinvented for its own salvation



as a pillar of social cohesion, as if, to paraphrase Oscar Wilde, loving couples couldn't keep themselves together without the disincentive to separation of Family Court proceedings, and as if it were fair to place such obstacles in their path if they realised that being together was really a destructive waste of time. For the sake of argument, however, we shall adopt that assumption. Why, then, deny the benefits of marriage to homosexuals who have feelings indistinguishable from a pair of heterosexual newlyweds?

A key argument (more accurately an assertion) is historical: the model of monogamous, heterosexual marriage, it is said, has served us well for time immemorial. This can be disposed of pretty quickly. Firstly, the model of marriage we adhere to today – a union of equals – simply was not there for much of human history. Even a few decades ago the average marriage was based on a highly unequal power dynamic. Legally, it was not dissimilar to the relationship you might have with a subordinate employee, or, going back a few centuries, with your dog. Secondly, nostalgic types might like to recall that we also had slavery, small pox and absolute monarchy for millennia. History is not a reason in and of itself for the preservation of otherwise unjustified practices. Lastly, and most tellingly, how on earth are we meant to know straight marriage has served us well when we have never seen the alternative (at least in this country; the results elsewhere do not presage social implosion)?

On the assumption that heterosexuality is a defining feature of marriage, some have suggested a compromise – gay couples could be allowed “civil unions” (in some States they already are), but not the name of “marriage”.

As a matter of language, this is a fairly stupid position. We live in a secular state. Marriage, insofar as the federal Parliament has the power to define the concept, is already an entirely civil relationship. If people want to give “marriage” a meaning which would distinguish it from a “civil union” perhaps they could coin their own term. If the content of the arrangement is the same, and the difference in words really means nothing, there can be no justification for a half-way house; it's revealed for what it is: a weak attempt to appease people who cannot be convinced.

Still others have tried to remove all these awkward questions from the agenda. Only a minority of society is inconvenienced by the status quo, so why should everyone else (especially those who object) have to roll over? That is a pretty feeble excuse for inaction. It displays reptilian levels of sheer apathy and a startlingly selfish indifference to the interests or concerns of anyone outside one standard deviation from the mean. It seems trite to say it, but unjustified inequality is just plain wrong. Treating someone differently because of an aspect of themselves which they cannot change offends basic notions of fairness. We should object to such discrimination everywhere and on any scale because even the smallest practical lack of benefit is symptomatic of a broader offence against principle.

Perhaps the most cogent argument against gay marriage runs thus: Marriage is the basis of families. The best basis for a family is one man and one woman bringing up children. We should encourage this model by limiting marriage to heterosexual monogamous relationships.

To start off with, this conflates two issues. Marriage is

not inherently about babies: it is about the two people standing before the registrar, celebrant or priest. Many heterosexual couples do not or cannot reproduce: that does not mean we imbue their marriage with a different character. If your problem is with homosexuals having children, forget the Marriage Act – pick a fight with adoption or artificial reproduction laws. Nonetheless, in many cases there is a strong practical link between marriage and babies, so there is some argument that in defining marriage to some extent we define what we expect of families.

Is it true, then, that two men or two women will be worse parents than one man and one woman? Firstly, this is a simplistic view of parenting. Good parenting mostly depends on aspects of character which have nothing to do with sex. Plenty of straight couples are appalling role models, who lack basic competency to care for others, and bring their children up in mentally and physically unhealthy environments. Indeed the means by which many gay couples actually get their hands on a child guarantee that they will be better parents than many heterosexual couples. Couples wishing to adopt a child in WA must demonstrate that their relationship is stable, they are mentally and physically capable of caring for the child, they can provide a suitable family environment, they are not guilty of certain offences and that they are of good repute. Age, other children and ability to meet the child's cultural, religious and educational needs may also be relevant. They must attend education sessions and undertake interviews with psychologically qualified assessors.

Secondly, it is simply not true that, questions of character aside, a man and woman are better than two people of the same sex at bringing up children. The assertion certainly has some intuitive attraction: it accords with most people's experience and quasi-Freudian pop psychology. But it is not supported by the body of scientific evidence. In a 2009 report, the Ethics Committee of the American Society for Reproductive Medicine states:

'[W]e do not believe that one can reasonably claim that unmarried persons or gays and lesbians harm their children by reproducing outside of heterosexual marital relations. Children born in such situations do not appear to have appreciably worse lives than do children born to heterosexual married parents.'

They cited a report from a taskforce of the American Psychological Association which concluded that:

'Research suggests that sexual identities (including

gender identity, gender-role behavior, and sexual orientation) develop in much the same ways among children of lesbian mothers as they do among children of heterosexual parents....Studies of other aspects of personal development (including personality, self-concept, and conduct) similarly reveal few differences between children of lesbian mothers and children of heterosexual parents....Evidence also suggests that children of lesbian and gay parents have normal social relationships with peers and adults....Overall results of research suggest that the development, adjustment, and well-being of children with lesbian and gay parents do not differ markedly from that of children with heterosexual parents.'

With respect to gay male couples, studies have shown that gay fathers are actually 'more alert to children's needs and more nurturing in providing care than heterosexual fathers, who may see themselves primarily as the person providing financial security' (from the ASRM committee report).

“I think we can safely say that child would have been better off in the hands of a loving gay couple.”

I shan't start on assertions about the origins, nature or morality of homosexual relations taken verbatim from the laws of Moses: I trust the reader is

intelligent enough to prefer explanations of the world with a little more empirical support (at least in respect of this issue). This does not seem to have stopped former Wimbledon champion (though I fail to see how that achievement affects her authority on any matter other than '60s women's tennis) Margaret Court from spouting page after page of historically and legally misguided assertions about the role of the Holy Bible in the Constitution, or from suggesting at one point that the sun might not come up if the Federal Parliament were to legislate in defiance of Leviticus 20:13.

Religion aside, we should remember that history doesn't hold all the answers, or even most of them. Human progress – moral, technological and social – is dependent on sometimes fundamental change. I hope the above goes to show that there aren't actually any cogent reasons not to support gay marriage. So perhaps we should come to terms with the reality that, were the Federal Parliament to amend the Marriage Act 1961, the overwhelmingly likely result would be – as it has been across the world – that some gay people would get married, that most heterosexual conservatives would not know a thing about it, that the moral fabric of society would remain intact, and the sun would rise on the morrow.



APATHY TOWARDS MENTAL ILLNESS IN THE U.S. MILITARY

By Joey Shea - The Political Bouillon

On March 11, 2012, US Army Staff Sergeant Robert Bales left his military base in Southern Afghanistan at three in the morning, walked a mile to a rural village and went door to door, methodically stabbing and shooting sixteen Afghani civilians. Among the dead were nine children, four men and three women. After his spontaneous murderous rampage, Bales walked back to his base, raised his arms in surrender and confessed immediately to his horrendous crime. He is currently residing in a high security prison in Fort Leavenworth, Kansas under solitary confinement.

Described as a 'really, really nice guy' by his family friend Edith Bouvette, one cannot but ask the question, why would a soldier randomly commit such a heinous act?

Bales first enlisted in the army a few months after the September 11th terrorist attacks, out of a sense of duty and patriotism for his country. Over the past ten years, he has been deployed four times to Iraq and Afghanistan. During this time he lost part of his foot and sustained a concussive head injury.

Before his last deployment to Afghanistan, he was denied a promotion to Sergeant First Class and was experiencing financial struggles. Most importantly, however, he explicitly stated that he did not want to be redeployed to the Middle East. The night before his unprovoked, brutal attack on the sixteen innocent Afghani civilians, he witnessed a fellow soldier lose his leg in a land mine explosion and was seen drinking on the base.

Clearly Robert Bales was a mentally disturbed man; most would be after four consecutive military deployments to the Middle East. However, once these circumstances are considered, our main question is no longer why he would commit such an atrocious crime, but rather why the US military would force a soldier to serve a forth deployment, especially after having sustained a brain injury and explicitly requesting not to return to the Middle East.

The effect of multiple deployments on the mental health of soldiers is certainly not a new issue. The Medical Surveillance Monthly Report found that 'larger percentages of deployers were diagnosed with PTSD [Post Traumatic Stress Disorder] and anxiety related disorders after second and third deployments than first deployments.' The Joint Mental Health Advisory Team found that 'soldiers in their third or forth deployment report significantly more psychological problems than soldiers on their first or second deployments.' After serving in the Middle East, 10-20% of soldiers suffer from PTSD. These facts are not disputed by the US military, but rather accepted as consequences of warfare. However, the question must be raised: to what extent is the army (US military?) liable for the mental health status of its soldiers?

Robert Bales is a glaring example of this issue. The army should be responsible for the mental health status of its soldiers not only for the sake of the soldiers themselves, but also for the sake of the innocent people whose lives are put at risk by having mentally unstable people serving, fully armed, in the military. The mental health

issues Robert Bales may have been experiencing are absolutely no excuse for his horrendous crime. Post Traumatic Stress Disorder is not a defense for committing multiple murders of the innocent civilians whom you are supposed to be protecting. However, someone should be held accountable for creating the circumstances under which this horrendous act was committed.

Current US soldiers serve in combat longer than almost any other US soldiers in the past. This long and repeated exposure to combat is what makes the wars in both Iraq and Afghanistan unique. Multiple deployments make soldiers three times more likely to develop PTSD and major depression, according to the American Journal of Public Health. Only 53% of those who met the criteria for PTSD or major depression actually sought help and 57% of those who experienced a traumatic brain injury had not been evaluated by a physician.

These statistics exemplify the gross level of apathy by the US military towards soldiers desperately in need of mental health services. The military fails to provide these necessary services and then continues to deploy mentally unstable soldiers into intense combat situations. Robert Bales's actions were horrendous and he deserves to be held accountable. However, we must look beyond the individual in this particular circumstance and evaluate the wider issue. Having mentally unstable soldiers serving third or forth deployments is morally repugnant and the US military should be held responsible for the desperate acts of desperate soldiers.



FINALLY, BECOMING BRAZIL

*By Jaïs Mehaji and Lorenzo Garcia-Andrade Llamas
- The Political Bouillon*

As Brazil, the Latin American powerhouse, is becoming more of an important actor on the world stage, questions arise as to what this means for the Southern hemisphere and the United States, for whom Brazil has been a strategic sphere of influence since the 1823 Monroe Doctrine. Brazil just took over the United Kingdom as the world's sixth largest economy, with a GDP of 2.5 trillion dollars, and growth rates of 7.5 percent in 2010, and that despite a contraction over the last years. In addition to a population of 200 million, economic success will certainly be translated into diplomatic, political, and geostrategic clout. What kind of rising Brazil should we expect on the world scene, particularly in its foreign relations with its Latin American neighbours, and what does this all mean for the U.S' waning hegemony?

Economic Modernization

Brazil's ascendancy as a global power in the last twenty years has been a result of the country's long, effective strides in two overlapping fields: its economy and politics. It could not have been expected otherwise, given that Brazil constitutes forty-three percent of the South American continent, and with an explosive multicultural demography of 200 million, Brazil is one of the most naturally endowed countries in the world.

As take-off conditions have been met, the country has been propelled into the modern global economic order with unrivalled impetus, finally on track to fulfill its long-unrealized potential. After seven turbulent years readjusting to a civilian democratic regime, by 1992, with the arrival of Fernando Henrique Cardoso to the Ministry

of Finance, the country switched gears, emerging as an international player with unpredictable celerity. Its economy has shifted a pauperized society into a consumer one. With less than three percent of the world population, Brazil accounts for over five percent of the global GDP.

This cannot be attributed solely to the country's astounding natural endowments; Brazil is not a petro-state. Its industry expanded by over ten percent in 2010, in the midst of the financial crisis. The features of Brazil's rise are widely recognized: expanded exports, recent oil discoveries, a tamed inflation, financial confidence, social assistance focused on the needy, and growing foreign and domestic investment.

Brazil is becoming a pioneer in biofuels in an effort to secure its energy supplies and partake in the innovative search for alternate energies; its specialization in the manufacturing of heavy-duty equipment like submarines and aircraft illustrates Brazil's polyvalence in domains that demarcate hegemony from the rest. Its top tier space program is just another exhibit of Brazil's compelling emergence. The country's growth, with many goals still to attain, has been formidably even, thanks to good governance and sound macroeconomic policies.

A key global player?

Aside from its economic success, Brazil's ascendancy also should be understood as a product of an effective domestic and foreign policy. Brazil's foreign policy framework is predicated on the aegis of multilateralism

and diplomacy. Brazil has become a key actor in multilateral forums on AIDS, poverty, environmental and climactic issues, energy security and other issues of global importance. While Brazil used to be a debtor nation from the IMF, its growing economic leverage over the last twenty years has been remarkable.

Newly elected President Rousseff decided Brazil will donate approximately 10 billion dollars to the IMF, a policy deemed less risky than buying EU treasury bonds, to assist Europe in getting out of its debt crisis. This shows Brazil's desire to nurture a global reputation and prestige in part through assistance as well as through major international events such as the FIFA World Cup in 2014 or the 2016 Summer Olympics. In addition, Brazil contributes important sums to the World Bank, UN peacekeeping operations, the G20, food security, and reconstruction funds and programs. Brazil's leadership seems to have a reinvigorating effect for the global south and particularly growing powers such as China, India, and Russia.

Brazil also took the initiative with Turkey to negotiate a deal with Iran to resolve the nuclear imbroglio. The U.S did not take the deal seriously and marginalized the Brazilian-Turkish axis internationally and diplomatically. Nonetheless, Brazil has demonstrated that it is ready to play a vital global role, beyond regional hegemony. Brazil's attempt to get a UN Security Council Seat, unendorsed by the U.S, was emblematic of the country's position and vision as a global economic power.

Nationalist populism of a defensive kind is also taking root, and that might mean that Brazil will not be as deferential to Washington as in the past. Brazil wants to be taken seriously, as her vocalizations in the Iranian nuclear negotiations, to the detriment of U.S policy, demonstrated. The U.S should embrace the rising Brazilian giant; it should increase trade and investment, scientific exchange and cooperation, on the basis of mutual respect and strategic goals. Brazil seems to offer

a palatable partner for other global giants; it seems less diplomatically inflexible than either China or Russia (as their unwavering support for Syria shows).

Nonetheless, if the U.S wants to protect its hemispheric interests, it will have to welcome a Brazil that will be able to be a viable leader in the Southern Cone; one that can be trusted and one that can guarantee unity, openness in markets, and as little cross-border conflict or narcotics spills as possible. That will be the first test to one of the most underestimated BRICs and one of the most stunning examples of geopolitical emergences of this century.

“Brazil is becoming a pioneer in biofuels in an effort to secure its energy supplies and partake in the innovative search for alternate energies; its specialization in the manufacturing of heavy-duty equipment like submarines and aircraft illustrates Brazil’s polyvalence in domains that demarcate hegemony from the rest. Its top tier space program is just another exhibit of Brazil’s compelling emergence”.

This is not to say that the U.S is declining as a superpower. The U.S is still the world's sole superpower in a unipolar order for years to come. However, its ability to exercise its influence is not the same as in the 1990s. What that means is that a more assertive Brazil, a Brazil cognizant of its own successes and determined to see a world order more reflective of the recent power transmutations in favour of the East, and thus less predicated on post World-War II distributions, will be a challenge to U.S hegemony in its traditional sphere of influence. This is especially true as Chinese

interest in Latin America increases. Latin America's raw materials and agricultural exports have been imported into China at an increasing rate. Chinese diplomacy wants to use trade and investment to strengthen its ties with the region; particularly with Brazil, as China seems to present itself to Latin America as an attractive strategic alternative to U.S hegemony.

Two Reflections on this Rise:

Skeptical View

Some believe, however, that the BRICS may not yet be capable of becoming world powers, mainly because of the West's military and diplomatic muscle. Despite their impressive economic and regional expansion recently, the extent to which this has been translated effectively

into political weight is still questionable. For example, Brazil – even if it is now the sixth largest economy in the world – could not have projected its own military power to intervene in Libyan theatre, compared to the British or French or any other NATO power, or even have much of a say in the geostrategically vital Middle East. The Western hemisphere is still under the U.S hegemonic umbrella at least for a while, and there are simply limits to Brazilian geopolitical rise for the time being. Nevertheless, it is clear Brazil will be a strong pole to be regarded highly by other hegemonic powers.

Yet one of the problems, not limited to Brazil alone, is the recent deindustrialization which has led to protectionist measures. Undermining the idea of a customs union (Mercosur), Brazil has imposed trade tariffs. Intra-Latin American trade is relatively low compared to intraregional trade elsewhere. Brazil should send a different economic message to its own neighbors – that it is committed to economic modernization, before projecting its power any further. Also, according to The Economist, Brazil is in the red zone with regards to its monetary maneuverability and fiscal flexibility. The “wobble-room index” offers a rough ranking of which economies are best placed to withstand another global downturn, and Brazil’s indicators are concerning in that respect.

Optimistic View

Brazil’s emergence has been impressive because of its pragmatic, equilibrated nature. Its growing leverage has been much less controversial, and thus, more appealing than has the growth of any other BRIC nation: India with its unresolved status in Kashmir and very uneven growth is still lagging behind; China’s spectacular growth has been

met with suspicion in and outside Asia with regards to its single-party dictatorship and the nature of its regional ambitions; Russia has become increasingly unstable and authoritarian.

Brazil presents an enviable alternative to global power configurations. Regionally the country has been a model to all its neighbors, regardless of the recent South American division between pro and anti-American camps. Through front-running the peacekeeping mission in Haiti in 2004 and the movement against the Honduran coup of Manuel Zelaya, as well as mediating between Colombia and its neighbors when sparks have flared, Brazil has been a viable mediator and regional anchor. However, its breadth is not limited to the region, as this article has shown.

Those who regard this ascendance with skepticism will ask what is Brazil really hoping to attain with its geopolitical rise? This question is a shortsighted question. One could reply by saying that perhaps what Brazil wants to earn is nothing more than a global reputation reflective of its growth and success. A distinct form of non-predatory leadership is bound to emerge. While much work is still to be done and many domestic and social issues remain pending, Brazil’s sound policies and effective management will continue to pay dividends. Whatever the case, it’s not over yet. Brazil’s political and economic “Jogo Bonito” is here to stay. In the meanwhile, let the samba continue!





NECESSARY EVIL

By Brendan Storer

Death and taxes are two implacable pillars of certainty, Australia lives with them as much as any other nation. The Healthcare industry is working on the former but what of the latter? Taxes are certainly unpopular. Nobody likes to give up their hard-earned money, particularly into the eternally hungry jaws of the Leviathan that are public finances. But could we ever give them up? Are taxes a nuisance or a necessity?

Governments like taxes. Why wouldn't they? They get to spend the money on whatever they want so why wouldn't they want more? They certainly need the taxes, not only to fund the welfare apparatus but to keep the affairs of state moving, plus not to mention their policies and the cost involved. The trick then is to convince the public that taxes are therefore good which is a hard sell.

It has gotten to the point where it has become the habit of governments to get around the word "tax" itself, so onerous has its connotations become. Taxes to fund Medicare and the repairs of Queensland's flood damage

are labelled levies. These have a technical meaning differing from a tax but in reality they just pay for something that there are no taxes to pay for and really that does not differentiate them from the regular system of tax.

Stephen Harper the Prime Minister of Canada remarked in 2005 that all taxes are bad. His opinion is derived much from the tradition of conservative parties to decry taxes as a way for governments to creep into people's lives and deprive them of their income for undesired purposes. This has its roots in the valid position that people are better at choosing what they want to spend their money on than the government is. Milton Friedman outlined it well when he said:

"When a man spends his own money to buy something for himself, he is very careful about how much he spends and how he spends it. When a man spends his own money to buy something for someone else, he is still very careful about how much he spends, but somewhat less what

he spends it on. When a man spends someone else's money to buy something for himself, he is very careful about what he buys, but doesn't care at all how much he spends. And when a man spends someone else's money on someone else, he doesn't care how much he spends or what he spends it on. And that's government for you."

The problem with this logic lies in the realities of government and the duties it has, particularly economic ones. Firstly, not everything a government buys with its tax revenue is used on things people like. Many people do not like the idea of wars or funding them and yet not liking something does not stop them from, indirectly, paying for them. Even when a large portion or even a majority of the taxpayers agree to pay for something there will be other tax payers who abhor what their money is being spent on. For an exaggerated and slightly humorous example, it is doubtful that many Liberals want to keep paying Labor MP's salaries and vice versa.

While it is constantly argued that people know what they want to spend and should be allowed to as much as possible, this ignores the aggregates and abstract statistics that are a reality of the government's economic policy. When a government is debating whether to lower taxes or give out rebates it is remembered that people don't actually spend as much as the government would like most of the time.

This is especially evident during periods of economic uncertainty. When given a tax break the people don't spend the money of the tax break as is habitually desired. There is a tendency to save the money or pay down debt in economic downturns. With the unreliable response of taxpayers when not taxed as much it is little wonder that the government is partial to retaining its revenue to spend it on national projects rather than let the untrustworthy masses not spend it at all. (It must be noted that, for reasons too long to explain here, this spending is a large part of the continued operation of market economies like Australia)

Oliver Wendell Holmes Jr., Associate Justice of the United States Supreme court, once wrote that, "Taxes are the price we pay for civilisation". If so then the countries of Scandinavia must be the heart of civilisation as they have certainly bought enough with their tax system. It is no secret, in fact it is a quasi- source of pride, that Sweden, Norway, Denmark and Finland have a highly sophisticated

socialist apparatus operating in their system. The tax rates that fuel these welfare state experiments are equally astounding. Sweden rakes in fully half of its GDP in taxation. The results speak for themselves; low crime, high standard of education, good gender equality, low poverty etc. etc. The Rest of the OECD sits below this at an average of about 30% tax (Although at some levels Belgium takes the cake with 60%).

However, this is hardly a call to arms to embrace the socialist lifestyle. Though there is an emphasis on equality to border on zealotry prevalent in the North, it does not remove the burdensomeness of taxes. Similarly, while the Scandinavians enjoy the benefits of their system they are slowly stagnating their development.

Growth rates of an economy have been inversely correlated with tax rates, that is as tax rates climb higher growth rates fall. The safety net constructed by the

Nordic system of taxation has another negative effect, that of reduced savings. As above with the government wanting you to spend your money there is an economic benefit to savings which foster growth themselves.

China grows at such rapid paces because it is necessary to have personal

savings because there is an insufficient government safety net to catch those who slip through. Sweden and its neighbours' safety nets halt the need for personal savings.

The high taxes had led to high government employment rates with high job security which, in turn, has reduced the need for innovative production in the workplace. In the 30 year period between 1970 and 2000, Denmark, Sweden and Finland fell from the tops of productivity statistics. They had become the worst performing economies in Europe before the GFC when the PIIGS overtook that title.

It seems that taxes are an unavoidable reality we cannot live without them, contrary to what anarchist may believe. However, taxing us more than we can take and we will be drowning in the red and black ink of it all. The taxes that you pay keep the system running and inform the capacities and policies of the government but like them or not there is little escaping when the tax-man cometh.

MULTILATERAL VS. BILATERAL TIES

By Todd Soulas

Is “Australia’s multilateralism fetish” healthy? That was the question discussed in a recent debate on the Lowy Institute’s *The Interpreter* website. In the debate over which foreign policy approach best suits Australia Michael Wesley argues against the proposition, and quoting his own book *There Goes the Neighbourhood*, argued that multilateralism is “the band aid of Australian diplomacy”, characterising multilateralism as the “copper wire” technology of twenty-first century international relations.

Wesley is not alone in his opinion that the increased emphasis on multilateralism in Australia since the election of the Australian Labor Party in 2007 should be re-examined. Going further, Kanishka Jayasuriya suggested that multilateralism is not a universally applicable diplomatic technique, but rather a form of diplomacy that was enabled by a certain set of historical circumstances, and therefore will become inapplicable as those circumstances pass into history.

These calls have certainly been buttressed by the failure to reach an international agreement on climate change to supersede the Kyoto Protocol at Copenhagen and latterly, Cancun. Both meetings have been highlighted as prime examples of multilateralism’s inability to solve global problems. Notwithstanding, critics of the emphasis placed on multilateralism in Australian foreign policy have seemingly disregarded the reality of Australia’s place in the international community, the true relationship of bilateralism and unilateralism, essentially within multilateralism, and the future trajectory of international relations, particularly in our region, in coming to their conclusions. Whilst some criticisms of multilateralism are legitimate, I would argue that Australia should continue to place a greater emphasis on multilateral diplomacy, and also seek to re-imagine bilateral diplomacy in the context of a multilateral world.

Multilateralism will be defined as the conduct that is founded on universal principles; the equal participation of states in collective mechanisms, and no discrimination

when putting principles into action. Unilateralism on the other hand has no concrete definition but is generally regarded as analogous to multilateralism with the exception of two elements, participation and, consequently, discrimination. Participation is not equal in the sense that is deliberately restricted to the states of a region and coalition. Discrimination ensues in as much as the group of the states of a unilateral agreement adopts practices that discriminate other states. Bilateralism on the other hand is the exclusive communication between two states, or international actors to come to an agreement. As the global system undergoes changes, it is increasingly obvious that bilateralism, as with unilateralism can no longer be the main driver of solutions to the problems that states and the global community faces but rather a small part of the ultimate solution.

Australian foreign policy since the end of World War II (WWII) has been characterised by a general commitment to multilateral diplomacy, although this commitment has certainly been more pronounced under Labor governments. The commitment to multilateralism is as much a conscious choice by our governments as a result of the reality our material capacity as a nation. As a “middle power” with limited material capacity, relative to larger states, bilateral agreements, in relation to trade in particular, are generally undesirable, as the negotiations would reflect the asymmetric power relationship between the two parties, a factor evident in Australia-US Free Trade Agreement negotiations. Indeed the idea that there is a choice for Australia between multilateralism and bilateralism is ignorant, by virtue of our economic reality, Australia is and will always be an active participant in multilateral trade due to the fact that Australia’s import and export trade relies on foreign investors. This fundamental reality as to Australia’s position in the global economy requires a commitment to and an investment in, multilateralism.

The relatively recent experience of Copenhagen for proponents of Australian multilateral diplomacy must have been disheartening, and was met by fierce criticism

of the multilateral system as a whole with Greg Sheridan arguing that the “failure” of Copenhagen was evidence that the multilateral system had broken down definitively. Commentators such as Wesley argue that the failure at Copenhagen was inevitable because of an inherent inability of multilateralism to enable cooperation. This argument is flawed for primarily one reason, being that the logic of the argument is incorrectly based upon the principles in *The Logic of Collective Action*, where Mancur Olson argues, “the larger the group, the farther it will fall short of providing an optimal amount of a collective good.” Broadly,

Olson provides three reasons for his conflation of size and the likelihood that a group will be unable to provide a collective good: that the fraction of the group benefit received by any one individual declines as the group size increase; larger groups are less likely to exhibit small-group strategic interaction that could help in collective good provision; and organisation costs increase with an increase in group size. This argument seems to be echoed in popular neoliberal criticisms of multilateralism, and has supplanted any real analysis of the practical mechanisms and realities of multilateral diplomacy.

However, as Russell Hardin noted, the second and third assertions by Olson are largely discredited by empirical verification. Therefore, the primary criticism of multilateralism rests on the assertion that the collective good provided by the group to members will decrease as membership increases. Whilst, this is certainly true for goods characterised by crowding, the collective goods provided by international regimes are not of this type and therefore the criticism does not stand. This situation is certainly true for the majority of pertinent issues that currently face the global community such as climate change, the exact topic of discussion at Copenhagen. Because of this I am more inclined to agree with Peter Gallagher that the main source of the recent failures was not the multilateral system itself but rather a temporary misalignment between nations that reflects profound differences of outlook in the global economy and society.

Indeed, poor returns have generally not characterised Australia’s experience from multilateralism. Multilateral diplomacy has enabled Australia to exert its influence through associations, such as the “Cairns Group” in the

Uruguay Round of World Trade Organisation negotiations and the “Coastal States Group” in the Law of the Sea negotiations whereas Australia’s scope for exerting bilateral leverage is limited by its material capacity. A superficial argument in support of bilateral agreements is that countries agree on measures much faster than in the multilateral regime, one that is arguably redundant given the lengthy negotiations of Australia’s proposed FTA with China.

It is important to note that there is evidence that bilateral agreements, given the right context, can be beneficial to Australia, even though their applicability is limited, and increasingly so. For instance, on 1st January 2005 the Australia-Thailand Free Trade Agreement (TAFTA) entered into force. Under that agreement trade has expanded much more rapidly than under the Australia-US Free Trade Agreement (AUSFTA): there was an increase of Australian exports from US \$1.3 billion to \$2.2 billion, an increase of 70.1 percent. Conversely, Thai exports rose by 28.5 percent from US \$1.8 billion to 2.3 billion. Without analysing TAFTA in greater detail it is clear that in some situations bilateral trade liberalisation can contribute to an increase in trade volumes, and be beneficial for Australia.

It is also true that in the past bilateralism served Australia well in matters of security. However, it is no longer the case that our largest security threats can be mitigated by solely bilateral agreements with “great and powerful friends” such as the US following WWII, and previously the UK. With the rise of international terrorism, multilateral agreements will become more applicable to security concerns than bilateral agreements, and this will be exacerbated with the decline of US power and a shift to a multi-polar system. Arguably, besides the general undesirability of bilateral agreements the most problematic issue with bilateral agreements is the burden of negotiation and administration, and the questionable sustainability of the “hub and spokes” policy followed by the US.

Bilateralism will not disappear however, the role of bilateralism will change in Australian foreign policy; it will become more of a tool to achieving particular goals rather than the means by which to achieve them. For example, at a bilateral level, the EU-China Partnership on Climate Change highlighted the unsuitability of bilateralism in resolving new challenges that Australia, and the

“It is important to note that there is evidence that bilateral agreements, given the right context, can be beneficial to Australia, even though their applicability is limited, and increasingly so.”



global community are facing but also acknowledged that bilateral agreements can encourage cooperation at the multilateral level, although this is certainly not guaranteed.

This is the model that Australia would do best to emulate, to negotiate bilateral agreements, where needed, with the intention of increasing global cooperation on specific issues. This will be particularly important in encouraging emerging nations to contribute to global climate action, and to enhance security cooperation in the Asia region. In fact, some Asian states such as Japan have been reluctant to commit to multilateral diplomacy, instead pursuing bilateral, and more recently minilateral, agreements. Japan's shift in diplomacy presents ability for Australia to draw Japan further into the multilateral system. Ideally, this could enable Australia to encourage Japan to rethink their position on "scientific whaling" as they become more globally aware in their outlook, however this is rather idealistic.

Australia's future is undoubtedly in Asia, it is therefore increasingly important that our foreign policy is determined with regard to the diplomatic trajectory of Asian states. As our largest and fourth largest trading partners respectively, China and India's increasing engagement in multilateral forums is an important consideration in Australia's foreign policy strategy. Importantly, by engaging in multilateral institutions, like India, Australia can be an effective partner in the socialisation of the Chinese power elite.

The socialisation of the Chinese power elite is an important element in ensuring the continued peaceful rise of China, and mitigating the possibility of internal political upheaval, which would be devastating for the region and arguably, the global community. If Australia can successfully engage with China multilaterally, the risk associated with Hugh White's prediction that Australia would have to make a binary choice between Washington and Beijing would be minimised. This in itself presents a determining reason for Australia to commit to multilateralism, for the most part Australia's relative skills in multilateral diplomacy would enable Australia to exert more power than presently able.

Engagement with China and India through multilateral institutions also promises to help institutionalise and improve mutual trust and understanding between Australia and Asia. It is important to do this, as Sino-Indian relations will have a profound effect on regional and global development, as well as on the global security architecture. This factual situation means that multilateral engagement with Asia, particularly China and India is not only desirable but also necessary.

On a broader level, Australia also has an interest in committing to engagement through multilateral institutions, and ensuring the stability of the Asian region. The threat of bilateral relations between India and China deteriorating is not fanciful despite their relative and growing interdependence.

Sino-Indian engagement within a multilateral framework

has so far been successful in improving bilateral relations and sustaining mutual peace between these emerging global actors. Due to our geographic and economic reality it would be in Australia's interest to facilitate and encourage increased engagement through multilateral institutions in order to manage peacefully a relationship that is fundamentally competitive, and ensure that the arena of competition remains political rather than military conflict.

Multilateral engagement with Asia is a means to ensuring stability, and the multilateral commitment of India and China are evidence of this. Even if China's multilateral integration is transitional and a cover for Beijing's power-driven vision of a multi polar world, in contrast to India's non-aligned multilateral commitment, an engaged China is more desirable than an isolated China. The effectiveness of engaging with China through the multilateral system holds more hope than bilateral engagement, as the negotiations for the Australia-China Free Trade Agreement have shown.

Whilst it is clear that Australia should emphasise multilateral ties in its foreign policy, it is also important to address the legitimate concerns about the existing multilateral institutions. Following the arguable success of the global response to the first part of the global financial crisis Moises Naim has suggested that resources should now be directed towards minilateral institutions such as the G20 in order to deal with global problems that multilateralism has been particularly ineffective at combating such as climate change, and future global events analogous to the global financial crisis.

There has been a growing interest in minilateral arrangements (particularly, in the areas of trade and climate change negotiations) has primarily been driven by the perceived effectiveness either as an alternative or as a complement to bilateral regional and multilateral arrangements.

Importantly, minilateralism has the potential to eliminate the free rider problem in multilateral negotiations, and even establish more favorable conditions for multilateral agreements.

However, as Gordon Brown noted there has been a degree of complacency following the G20's action

during the global financial crisis and the entirety of the purported benefits of minilateralism that Naim outlined have not come to fruition. It is now clear that whilst minilateralism addresses some of the common criticisms of multilateralism it could not entirely supplant multilateralism as an effective system for dealing with global issues.

This is particularly the case because of additional issues that are inherent to minilateralism such as legitimacy issues and the realisation that the temporary misalignment would not be solved by a change in system. However, minilateralism provides a contextual remedy to certain situations, specifically issues on which the large powers can agree such as global financial action.

Despite this limited role as a determinative institution, minilateralism will play an important role in global governance in the face of the hegemonic decline of the US and the emergence of an increasingly multi-polar world, it is increasingly likely that minilateral cooperation may successfully supplant the role of a single hegemonic power. However, Australia, as well as engaging in minilateral institutions should work to ensure that potentially powerful minilateral organisations such as the G20 operate as "Steering Groups" across a network of countries and international institutions rather than imposing a new inflexible hierarchy on the world as was indicative of the G7.

The development of a multi-polar world will require not just a commitment to multilateralism but an acceptance of the fact that there is a danger of addressing the changing world through the prism of "Old Multilateralism." For Australia, ensuring that there is not a retreat to Old Multilateralism is not a matter of charity or solidarity for developing countries, but a matter of self-interest.

Developing countries are now sources of growth for the world economy and as a middle power Australia would do well to develop relationships with emerging powers at the multilateral level and to ensure that they are recognised in the global landscape. Australia should seek to encourage the same "modernisation" that has occurred at the WTO. The increase in shares and therefore votes for the developing world has now been adjusted to reflect the global reality, that most growth will come from developing economies and that they now

“Whilst it is clear that Australia should emphasize multilateral ties in its foreign policy, it is also important to address the legitimate concerns about the existing multilateral institutions.”

account for 40% of the global economy.

Australia should also be wary of constructing artificial dichotomies in foreign policy choices. In reality a mix of bilateral and multilateral elements characterise international cooperation, and to classify regimes such as the GATT as exclusively multilateral and tax cooperation as purely bilateral is misleading. Keeping this in mind, Australian foreign policy should ensure that the appropriate mechanism or, a mix of mechanisms are utilised to ensure the attainment of the particular end sought. In addition, an emphasis on multilateralism should be paired with a commitment to good international citizenship and recognised as a pillar of our national interests.

Australian foreign policy has remained relatively constant since the end of WWII; a commitment to multilateralism has been a common thread throughout this period and has, arguably, been to Australia's benefit. This situation has arisen more from the reality of Australia's position as a middle power, and the relative diplomatic capabilities that it was able to employ.

This presented an overwhelming bias toward engaging in multilateral institutions where influence was not as constrained as in the bilateral sphere. I would agree with Wesley to some extent that the multilateral system does need to be re-examined, but only in the sense that it can be improved, not that our commitment to it lessened. Perhaps the most important modernisation that can

occur to multilateralism is the increased democratisation of the institutions to ensure that the developing world has a voice proportionate to their new places in the global environment.

As shown above, bilateralism and unilateralism, whilst with their own benefits cannot supplant the existing multilateral system as an effective process to deal with the global issues of today and tomorrow. It is more likely that bilateralism, and to a greater extent, unilateralism will be employed within the multilateral system where international cooperation has failed. Specifically, Australia should look to use bilateral agreements to encourage states to engage in the multilateral system, particularly in the Asia region. Further, whilst it is true that multilateralism has its issues, it is also true that global problems will need global solutions and it is unlikely that bilateralism could hope to achieve this.

Australia's economic and geographic reality means that foreign policy must, to be effective, take into account the geopolitical changes that are occurring. The decline in US hegemonic power and China's vision for a multipolar world will increase the emphasis on multilateral institutions as determinative bodies. This factor alone warrants attention from Australian policy makers, and points decidedly to the realisation that without a commitment to multilateralism, the global environment will become a harsher reality. It is for these reasons that I would argue Australia's multilateralism fetish is healthy and should be encouraged.



TINKER TAILOR SOLDIER SPY



Directed by Tomas Alfredson
Starring Gary Oldman
Working Title/StudioCanal

On DVD 17/5/12

By Myles Parish

The British intelligence services have rarely enjoyed the fantastic, bombastic reputation they are afforded on the silver screen. Numerous scandals have rocked the system to its very core; perhaps the most notable one began in the Second World War, dragging on until 1979, when it was finally put to bed.

The Cambridge Five were a group of British university students and later diplomats (from, you guessed it, Cambridge), who were recruited by Soviet intelligence to spy on the British. The names of four men are known – Kim Philby, Guy Burgess, Donald Maclean and Anthony Blunt – and there is general consensus that the chief suspect for number five is John Cairncross, as identified by Soviet-British master double agent Oleg Gordievsky (libel lawsuit avoided!). All five were contemporaries at Cambridge, with Blunt being an older ‘talent scout’ (more on him later).

All these men worked to varying degrees in the wartime intelligence services, and most would go on to promotion in the post-war services MI5 (the Security Service) and MI6 (Special Intelligence Service), where they were privy to much information that they then passed on to the Soviet NKVD and its successor, the KGB.

After the war, when Philby was working for MI6 and posted to the British Embassy in Washington DC, he learned there was a mole-hunt going on, and that Maclean was a suspect. Burgess was also on the embassy staff, rooming with Philby, and so, when Burgess was sent back to the UK for ‘bad behaviour’ – the circumstances are interesting if you want to check them out; J. Edgar Hoover was not a fan – Philby instructed him to warn Maclean.

In 1951, Burgess and Maclean vanished off the face of

the earth, making headlines. To those in the know, it was clear they had been tipped off, and all evidence pointed to Philby. Fortunately that killed his reputation, as it is speculated he could have risen even higher in MI6.

Through incompetence, and suspected dodgy paperwork, Philby was cleared by then Foreign Minister Harold Macmillan, but nevertheless he was forced out of MI6, finding work as a journalist in the Middle East, only to be re-employed by MI6 to provide information from the region. In 1961, he was sought out for questioning by an old friend and colleague, to whom he confessed. Fearing he would be abducted and returned to England, he finally defected to the USSR under cover of darkness aboard a freight ship. He died in Moscow in 1988, although he’d been assassinated on-screen by Pierce Brosnan in 1984’s *The Fourth Protocol* (which is another exciting film – you should see it).

Anthony Blunt did not get to escape, though through some bizarre luck, he managed to overcome British suspicions again and again and again and, just for good measure, again. It is speculated that everyone knew, unofficially, what he was doing, but that being the case; he was allowed to plough on for rather a long time. He was unmasked in 1964, but in return for his confession, it was agreed that the British Government would keep his betrayal an official secret for 15 years. Our hero at this point is Margaret Thatcher, who unveiled the twisted network of treachery and deceit in the House of Commons on the 15th November, 1979, followed by even more detail on the 21st. Blunt’s knighthood was revoked, and his prominence in the British civil service was swiftly undercut.

So why this brief but waffly history lesson?

Another spy film released late last year, Tomas Alfredson's production of John le Carré's seminal novel *Tinker Tailor Soldier Spy*, is anything but bombastic (excluding the groovy French pop song that plays over the denouement). We see Gary Oldman, free of moustaches, beards, crazed prisoner hair and whatever else the seasoned character actor has donned in pursuit of his career, starring as George Smiley, an aging veteran of an aging British intelligence system.

John Hurt (who has been particularly active recently, considering an alien burst out of his chest in 1979) plays "Control", head of the Circus (British Intelligence). He sends agent Jim Prideaux (Mark Strong, who seems to have lost a lot of hair since he was the villain in the first *Sherlock Holmes*) to Hungary in search of information about a suspected mole inside the Circus. Prideaux's mission goes disastrously wrong, and in the diplomatic incident that follows, both Control and George Smiley are forced out of the Circus, to be replaced by a younger generation. The new leadership consists of Scottish Sir Percy Alleline (Toby Jones), Bill Haydon (a marvellously slimy and yet well dressed Colin Firth), and Toby Esterhase (Swedish actor David Dencik).

Smiley is then recruited by Oliver Lacon, Permanent Secretary responsible for the Circus, who tasks Smiley with the formation of a small, rock solid team to root out a mole. Smiley selects the reputable Circus agent Peter Guillam (Benedict Cumberbatch, who seems to be getting a slew of sleuthy roles), and a Mr Mendel (Roger Lloyd-Pack, who you may recognise as "that dude with the odd voice and moustache from *Harry Potter 4*, and *The Vicar of Dibley*"), whose role seems to be the Compulsory Cockney [Former] Policeman. Together, they sneak files in and out of the Circus HQ, make cunning deductions, and protect an agent returned from Eastern Europe who uncovered far more than he bargained for.

The team, after playing the new High Command off against each other, manage to track down the mole, who is then arrested but plans to escape to the Soviet Union – seeing any similarities between the history lesson and the film yet?

I must confess I was excited about this film for two reasons – the first was that I am always interested in rollicking political thrillers. Secondly, I noticed in the trailer that they seemed to have paid much attention to making the film's setting look really and properly in the 1970s. Not that I know much about the '70s aesthetics, mind you, but it just looks fantastic. Well, in point of fact, it looks horrible, but that is where the goodness is. The production design is just top-notch, the costuming is fantastic – it is touch

ironic (and I suspect intentional) that, after purchasing new, more fashionable, thick rimmed 70s glasses, Smiley looked much more aged than when wearing his 'old' glasses. Colin Firth has just the right amount of smarm for his character – you never know quite what to think of him – is he a well-dressed fop, is he a villain? We just don't know.

Many people have noted the similarities between the story of *Tinker Tailor Soldier Spy* and the tale of the Cambridge Five, especially the Philby saga. Not having read the book, I cannot comment on just how similar the film is to it, but towards the end of the film, when the mole speaks about his new life in the USSR after being exchanged, he says that he will, "miss the cricket," in his new home. Philby, in his autobiography, wrote that he read the Times (supplied especially), listened to the BBC World Service, and avidly followed the cricket. It's widely acknowledged that *Tinker Tailor Soldier Spy* is full of references to the Cambridge Five debacle, so it is only natural that parallels would be drawn between at least one character and Philby, and possibly even Blunt.

Tinker Tailor Soldier Spy is one of those espionage films that is at great pains to remind us that the world of intelligence is not at all similar to the way it's portrayed in glamorous, sparkly films like *James Bond*. Come to think of it, these days the only films that portray the job of spying as anything but hard edged, immoral, and without smiles and charm are the *James Bond* films, and even they are heading in the direction of dark, washed out colour tones.

This emphasis on the gritty underworld of spying comes out especially in the final scenes. There is no epic gunfight, no Evil Bald Man revealing grand plans for world domination. It is all a bit of a talk-fest. However, as one reviewer in *Quadrant* suggested, "...perhaps that's what Le Carré meant it to be, because that's pretty much how it panned out with Kim Philby." The guys get caught, and there are no car chases; just a bland interview room and hushed tones.

You do have to wonder, though, whether this film is as applicable now as its source novel and its television predecessor were. The Cold War is long over, and with it that intense, 24/7 concern about World War Three. The Cambridge Five allusions still resonated in 1974 when the book was written; but how many people still know and care about it now? It is not as though we have a dearth of films reminding us that the intelligence community is a bit of a nasty place to work – one can only hope that this film stands out, and I believe it does, as a great film amongst many good ones.

THE NEED FOR FEDERAL REFORM

By Meg Keyes

A federal system of government is one with two separate and autonomous levels of government. Australia, like Canada and the United States is a federal system. Since Federation in 1901, the states have controlled the majority of government action, with areas of power including health, education and law enforcement; and only specific powers under the authority of the Commonwealth. However the power and autonomy of the states has been eroded over the course of the twentieth century and into the twenty-first.

The High Court has contributed to this by interpreting the Constitution to favour the Commonwealth government. In reality, Australia no longer has two autonomous levels of government but one financially powerful level of government and another level which is purportedly independent but is, in reality, reliant on the Commonwealth government. The imbalance of power between Commonwealth and state governments has ceased to operate efficiently.

Historical Background

The six British colonies that federated to form Australia in 1901 were each very different. With varying populations and economies, most colonies had only recently gained self-government from Britain and were reluctant to give up their independence. The Commonwealth Constitution was intended to keep the states autonomous and powerful, with the federal government limited in its jurisdiction to certain specific powers such as the currency and a defence force. During World War II the states agreed to transfer their ability to raise revenue through income tax to the federal government to help the war effort.

This power was maintained by the federal government after the war, with the Commonwealth agreeing to give the money back to the states in the form of grants. The High Court has contributed to the shift of power towards

the Commonwealth, interpreting the Constitutional head of power over telegraph lines to include new forms of communications including phone lines and the internet and in the Tasmanian Dams case, where the High Court of Australia liberally interpreted the external affairs power in favour of the Commonwealth. On top of increased Commonwealth power, the state governments are financially dependent on the Commonwealth.

Vertical Fiscal Imbalance

The Australian Commonwealth and state governments are in vertical fiscal imbalance, with the federal government raising roughly 80 per cent of revenue and the states collectively amounting for 50 per cent of total expenditure. Since 1933, Australia has had a policy of horizontal fiscal equalisation, whereby the Commonwealth Grants Commission and the Commonwealth Treasury distribute cash payments to the states to make up the difference between state revenue and expenditure.

These cash payments are made under section 96 of the Commonwealth Constitution, which grants the Commonwealth government power to make grants to states "on such terms as the Parliament thinks fit". Whilst the Commonwealth government does not tend to exercise its right to attach terms and conditions to its grants it retains the power to do so. A re-distribution of the division of powers between the Commonwealth and the states may go some way towards decreasing vertical fiscal imbalance and states' dependence on the Commonwealth, but at the expense of the already weakened states.

Case Study: Education

Each state has its own primary and secondary education system. A national curriculum has been supported by education experts for a number of years. With improvements in technology and advances in transport,

Australians are moving interstate in ever-increasing numbers. Students moving back and forth between different school systems are adversely affected by the changes. Most states have different age cut-offs different compulsory start years and different divides between primary and secondary schools.

Students in Victoria and New South Wales begin secondary school in year seven, whereas Queensland and Western Australian students don't begin secondary school until year eight. In New South Wales responsibility for pre-schools lies with the Department of Community Services, in contrast to Victoria where it lies with the Department for Education and Early Childhood Development.

Pre-school education is not compulsory, but will become so in Western Australia and Queensland from 2014. A national curriculum as a collaborative effort between the states and the Commonwealth government is (still) in its draft stages, and the program has been hindered by differences between school systems. Children in the first year of compulsory schooling are of different ages and have had different years of pre-school education. National literacy and numeracy assessments identify disparities between different states but fail to take these distinctions into account. If the Commonwealth government persists with programs such as the My School website perhaps there needs to be some consistency across the board.

Possible Reforms

Once the argument for reform to Australia's federal structure has been established, the obvious question is what reforms should take place? The Abolish the States Collective suggests that Australia remain a federal system with a Commonwealth government and up to sixty smaller, regional and autonomous governments catering to their constituents. However one of the more

obvious criticisms is such a reduction in size of such governments would inevitably mean a reduction in power and autonomy; it would be impractical, not to mention expensive, for Australia to contain up to sixty public transport systems, hospital systems and law enforcement forces. Any such system would in practice be little more than glorified local councils, without the political clout to maintain large scale and stable governance.

Another possible option is not the abolition of the states as we know them, but reform of their powers and revenue raising abilities. Whilst this would mean that the states' autonomy would be reduced, it may allow for the more efficient distribution of funds and decrease in repetition and contradiction in government services. Whether citizens of less populous and more isolated states such as Western Australia and Tasmania would agree to such reform is another matter.

Even if the structural reform of Australian government were to gain momentum, it is likely to run into the same difficulty which has plagued supporters of the Republican movement. Despite polls indicating that in excess of fifty percent of Australians support the idea of a Republic, referendums to change the Commonwealth Constitution to implement fail because Australians cannot agree on a model.

Reform to Australia's federal system, no matter how badly needed, must be done in compliance with s 128 of the Commonwealth Constitution which requires a "double majority"; a majority of all votes and a majority of votes in a majority of states. Successful referendums are notoriously rare; since Federation in 1901 there have been forty-four referendums but only eight have been successful.



DOROTHY DIX IS DEAD. HER LEGACY SHOULD BE LAID TO REST WITH HER

By Emma Bagg

Questions from government backbenchers to their Ministerial colleagues during question time have been a consistent feature of Australia's Parliamentary Democracy since Parliament first sat back in 1902. Initially, they were a mechanism through which the government could disperse their message to a wide audience as media coverage of the Parliament, as it does now, centred on question time. Their relevance now, however, is questionable. In an age of mass media where most people have access to Ministerial statements, press conferences, even tweets, what place does the "Dorothy Dixer" have, especially if by removing the tradition we would see a more accountable, participatory Parliament? First, a bit of history.

The "Dorothy Dixer" has been so named since the 1950s. The name comes from a popular American advice columnist, Dorothy Dix, who reportedly invented some of the questions she answered in her column in order to make it more interesting and appeal to a wider audience. In the days before we lived with the mass media and political news, commentary and analysis was readily available question time was a vital means of communication for the government. As there was so little space in the media and competition for such so fierce, question time with its innate theatricality and dramatic flourish provided an avenue for the government to enter mainstream media and deliver their message to the masses.

It is undeniable that Dorothy Dixers in question time once performed a crucial role in allowing citizens to gain a greater knowledge and understanding of government. No longer is this the case. I can download the latest media releases of every Minister in State and Federal politics at the click of a button. I can read analysis of government policies by a variety of people, with a variety of opinions, also with the same button. I can even directly contact any Member of Parliament for clarification on any issue, with the same button. I no longer need the media to pick out issues based on what is discussed in question time

because our democracy has moved on, become more transparent and yes, participatory.

So what should be done? A simple amendment to the standing orders stating that no member from the government is able to ask a question would suffice; but this would need the support of the government to pass and it would be a miracle if any government rallied behind this motion. The government argues the importance of Dorothy Dixers lies in the ability of backbenchers to have their 30 seconds in the spotlight and make an impression on the leadership team as future candidates for positions, as well as (theoretically) voice their concerns to Parliament and demand answers in this forum.

The first argument is unreasonable and the latter simply ridiculous- the idea that governments give their backbenchers the ability to think, and advocate, for themselves is freely contested by people both within and observing the body politic. It simply doesn't work that way. If a member has concerns they voice them in the caucus and that is generally the end of the matter, if only for the outward stability of the party. Dorothy Dixers serve a purpose to the government merely in allowing them to avoid scrutiny through filibustering, a concept not welcomed in the fast paced contemporary Parliamentary environment. There is therefore no credible reason why Dorothy Dixers should not be removed.

What would this achieve? Australian democracy is founded on three main principles: representation, participation and accountability. Parliament should fulfil its role as the mechanism through which we can participate through elections that leave us with representatives who make up the government and hold that same government to responsible for its actions. Question time is one of the few occasions when the opposition has the opportunity to scrutinise the government and force them to explain their actions with good media coverage, for the same theatricality and dramatic flourish mentioned above. The government traditionally commands more attention than the opposition and while this is justified in terms of policy advocacy, the opposition should be given enough exposure to be able to adequately hold the government to account. Being able to allocate more time to questions from the opposition and cross-benchers would allow for more, and better, scrutiny of the government.

This is a Parliamentary change that will never happen, purely and simply because governments relish any opportunity they have to drown out the voice of the opposition with their own, but it is a change that if the Australian Parliament is going to keep pace with the modernising world and changing values needs to be achieved.



Kingdom of Denmark	Includes Denmark, Greenland and the Faroe Islands
Government Type:	Constitutional Monarchy
Head of State:	Queen Margrethe II
Head of Government:	Prime Minister Helle Thorning-Schidt
Population:	5.5 million
Capital:	Copenhagen (1.1 million inhabitants)
GDP (PPP), per capita:	US\$37,585
Currency:	Danish krone (DKK) 1 DKK=5.8AUD=5.6CAD
Drives on the:	Right
Number of cyclists on Nørrebrogade:	37,000 per day
Major trading partners:	Germany, Sweden, UK
Famous for:	The Little Mermaid, Lego, Carlsberg, COP15, Wind Turbines, Shipping, Dairy, Bicycles, Noma, Hamlet's Castle, Vikings, AQUA, The Mohammed Cartoon, handball, architecture/design
Famous people:	Hans Christian Andersen (author), Helena Christensen (model), René Redzepi (chef), Anders Fogh Rasmussen (Prime Minister, Secretary General NATO), Crown Princess Mary (royal)

Flying into Copenhagen airport, one is under no illusion that they are entering the Kingdom of Denmark. From the landing over the Øresund (the strait between Denmark and Sweden), stereotypes of this small northern European nation are reinforced.

A mere glance out of the right side of the airplane reveals the stunning imagery of the progressiveness of Danish environmentalism: a long strand of wind turbines snaking up the coast.

While on the ground, the 15-20 minute transit to the city centre on the efficient and clean metro reminds one of efficient state-provided services.

Young, hip and well-dressed Danes will hop on, and off, the metro. If you ask one as to which station to alight at, they will reply politely with polished English that would put most mother-tongues to shame. Danish education - free at all stages - appears to produce smart attractive youngsters.

Exiting the metro onto the kitsch cobbled streets of Copenhagen, you will likely marvel at the stylish Danes cycling in the streets. The hyggelit (the Danish word for

the concept of cosiness) cafés, design shops and canals will evoke memories of photos from travel guides.

Denmark seems exactly like one imagined - beauty, brains and bicycles - a perfect example of a society fitting the model of a Scandinavian theory of political economy?

A Scandinavian theory of political economy

I propose a basic Scandinavian theory of political economy with four major concepts; a social welfare state, efficient state services, environmentalism and minimal social problems. It is this Scandinavian model, which is heralded, and actively promoted, by many leftists in the Anglophone-West, as a viable alternative to their current political economy.

A social welfare state is one in which the state provides all basic services to citizens free of charge: education and health. Further, that the state should ensure that all citizens are provided with a good standard of living. If citizens are not able to provide for themselves, the state will do so.

Within the concept of a social welfare state, there is a philosophy that the state can provide **efficient state**

services as it has a high level of economic efficiency in the delivery of community goods, for example - public transport or the postal service. And, that no gain would be achieved through the privatisation of these services.

Environmentalism is reflective of the view that being at the forefront of environmental challenges is the best method of staying ahead in a globalized, and increasingly sustainability-focused, marketplace.

Minimal social problems is a product of the cooperative nature of the welfare state; that there should not be any marginalised elements of society or poverty because the state provides a good standard of living to those in need. This Scandinavian theory of political economy proposes envisages a society that is economically efficient through cooperation and admirable social welfare, and as a result is devoid of the social problems present in major capitalistic nations.

Denmark: trouble lurking beneath the surface

In my introductory remarks, I presented the view that Denmark was, at least on the surface, a model example of the aforementioned Scandinavian theory of political economy. But as one digs deeper, cracks in the Danish society reveal social dislocation and undesired by-products of an attempt to follow this model. Cultural conflicts have arisen in increasing severity. State institutions have not met expectations. And, the growing failure of Danish governments to stay at the cutting edge of progressiveness leads to the observation that Denmark may, in fact, be social welfare road kill.

At the outset, what may come as a surprise to many, in the West outside of Europe, is that for the largest part of the last decade Denmark has been governed by the centre-right on a mandate of privatisation, centralisation and free market neo-liberal economic ideologies. It must be reminded that such mandates, and the characterisation of the governing coalition as "centre-right", are all relative. The policies of the major centre-right party, Venstre, could hardly be characterised in the same vein as the modern centre-right parties in the Anglophone world. Ironically, "Venstre" translated from Danish to English means "left". Everything is relative.

Even after 10 years of "centre-right" government, Denmark still looks like a social welfare state. Perhaps,

the centre-right government stopped a further increase in social welfare. But there was no significant decrease: the tax burden as a percentage of GDP decreased by just over 3 percent in the period 1999-2011 (50.3 percent to 46.9 percent). All the fundamentals of a social welfare state have remained intact.

It was not until late last year that the centre-left coalition gained power, thrusting Denmark's first female prime minister - Helle Thorning-Schmidt - into the spotlight. Daunting challenges lie ahead. There are serious issues that must be addressed, and quickly. Not least the role of Denmark within the EU, especially given the rise of EU skepticism and support for the populist, ultra-nationalist, Danish People's Party (Dansk Folkeparti).

But on the home front, the new Danish government must combat the issue of the failing of the Scandinavian theory of political economy in Denmark. Below the kitsch surface of downtown Copenhagen, there are problems bubbling (and at times steaming) away. I will address three clear departures from the Scandinavian theory

“And, the growing failure of Danish governments to stay at the cutting edge of progressiveness leads to the observation that Denmark may, in fact, be social welfare road kill”

of political economy in this article in the areas of education, economic policy and - the largely avoided topic in Denmark - the culture clash. All framed by the troubling question facing contemporary Denmark: is the theory of this society fundamentally flawed, or is it merely an

erring in its implementation?

Brains

Education is free for Danes. From primary to tertiary education. Universities to vocational training apparatuses. Further, there are very generous social welfare allowances for people undertaking study. None as famous as Danish SU, a student allowance scheme providing DKK 5662 per month to all Danish tertiary students regardless of their social standing. All elements of classic social welfare, the basic notion being that free education provides the building blocks for society and that education should be available regardless of an individual's personal circumstances. The founding father of modern economics, Adam Smith, emphasised the need for (publically) educating the masses in order to best combat tyranny and abuse of power by the elite. Clearly, better education makes a freer society.

However, free education - coupled with a high level of student support - has led to two issues.



Firstly, the slow completion of degrees; Danish students are renowned for studying at the slowest rate possible and graduating in their late 20s. There are course requirements and limitations on SU, but these are mostly lax enough to not provide an incentive to complete studies in a timely fashion and enter the “real world”.

Secondly, the push for efficiency dividends and austerity measures to keep the general budget balanced, coupled with an aim to decrease (or at least steady) the size of government in Denmark, requires either; a) a reduction in education expenditure, or b) an increase in income to the sector. Given that education is free, only a) is available to education administrators. Danish news, both popular and university based, has continually criticised the reductions in funding – most observed in the reduction of contact hours students are allowed to undertake for each course.

A solution to this dilemma, from a social welfare perspective, may be to merely raise taxation. But in doing so, one must also acknowledge the effect of raising taxes and exacerbating the brain drain hitting Denmark. High tax rates, and a worsening education system, have caused the best and brightest Danish students to flee in droves. Although it is admitted that the education from leading Copenhagen tertiary institutions, the University of Copenhagen (Københavns Universitet) and Copenhagen Business School, is still world class – even Danish students attending these institutions evidence an insistence to migrate to the low taxing nations of the European Union, the European Economic Area or overseas. Thus, increasing the burden for those who stay and work in Denmark to support the social welfare system.

Bicycles

Copenhagen is undoubtedly the cycling capital of the world. It is home to the world’s busiest bicycle lane, Nørrebrogade, which this author can attest to being similar to a Los Angeles freeway in rush hour – but with pedal power. The cycling is a sight to see, but even better to experience. A clean, environmentally friendly, efficient and healthy mode of transport for people of all ages.

The biggest enemy to the cyclist, even in a bike-friendly city like Copenhagen, is the car. Not just for safety, but logistics. Bike lanes can only be expanded if motor vehicle lanes are reduced, which in turn requires a reduction in the ever-increasing traffic in Copenhagen.

One suggested remedy to this traffic congestion was to place a toll on motorists entering the Copenhagen city area. Similar schemes operate, successfully, in London and Singapore. By charging motorists to enter the city area, this would result in a reduction in traffic as some motorists would switch to public transport instead. This is an economically efficient, and progressive, way of reducing traffic and encouraging substitution towards more environmentally friendly public transport. The Danish application: residents would ride the train, with their bicycles, into the centre of Copenhagen and then cycle around to their desired locations.

Such an idea was knocked back on political grounds early this year. There was no political will to make the hard decision: the boundary line of where the congestion charge begins. Stunningly, in a move that was surely a coincidence – but a horrible piece of public relations – the Danish Government concurrently announced that the fines for cyclists breaking road rules would, almost,

double. Some local news sources began to ask if the Danish state hated cyclists and loved polluting motorists.

But that conjecture is a stretch. Even for tabloid news. The Danish Government hates motorists as well, just not in an economically efficient way. One oft-lauded example is the Danish car tax. An example best illustrates its extent.

Mr. Christiansen buys a new car for a base price of DKK 200,000. On that, he must pay 25% value added tax. The car is now DKK 250,000. On that, Mr. Christiansen must further pay car tax of 105% for every kroner under 74,600 and 180% on every kroner over 74,600. And yes, Mr. Christiansen must pay the car tax on the after-VAT amount. Tax on tax.

Car price before tax:	DKK200,000
VAT (25%):	DKK50,000
Car price including VAT:	DKK250,000
Car tax, value under 74,600 (105%):	DKK80,220
Car tax, value over 74,600 (180%):	DKK315,720
Total price of car, after tax:	DKK645,940

I take issue with such taxation not because cars are taxed nor because of the exorbitant rates at which they are taxed, but with the method of taxation. It is

blunt and economically inefficient. From a neoclassical microeconomics perspective, taxation should be directed towards rectifying a market failure. In the instance of motor vehicles, multiple market failures requiring taxation might be identified: the use of a public good (roads), or the externality created by using a good (environmental pollution) are two such market failures. It should be noted that, in a strict sense, the public good example could also, more accurately, be viewed as an absence of a price mechanism because of a government failure to charge for road usage. In any sense, the taxation of vehicles should not be dependent on the value of the motor vehicle, but rather on the amount of public good that is used (road) or the amount of environmental damage that is created.

One way of doing this is to create road pricing; toll roads or city congestion charges (as explained above). The notion of a city toll/congestion charge recognises that the value of using inner city roads is higher than that of local country roads because of the fact that city roads have a higher demand. Another way, addressing the externality issue, is a taxation of either gasoline or taxation dependent upon a cars' fuel efficiency. In regards to externality rectification, taxation of gasoline is more favourable as it not only discriminates based upon a car's fuel efficiency, but also upon how much pollution the car actually emits based on its usage.

Instead of implanting any of the above mechanisms, the Danish state taxes car owners based on the value of their car. Not whether they drive their massive gas guzzler



everyday in the middle of Copenhagen, or their small fuel efficient car once a month in the outlying rural areas of Jutland.

Although on the surface, the Copenhagen bicycle culture is an absolutely astounding representation of the Scandinavian theory of political economy, the crucial economic issues of road pricing and car taxation are so far off the mark. Admittedly, the very high tax does create a cycle culture for, especially young, people in the city centre. But, for families which live in the suburbs or rural Denmark, who require a car the taxation system creates a distortion of monstrous proportion. A move to environmentally friendly car use? No. Rather, the importation of cheap, energy inefficient second hand vehicles from Germany.

Beauty

At an orientation for incoming exchange students at the University of Copenhagen, The University Post (the University's student newspaper) asked foreign exchange students for their stereotypes of Danes. Unsurprisingly, one of the top rating answers was the beauty of the Danes; viking descendants, hip, well dressed, stylish with the unforgettable blonde hair and blue eyes.

But there are two problems with this beauty stereotype. One medical. One cultural.

First, the medical. What happens when that stunningly beautiful Danish girl is playing soccer and tears her ACL, or falls of her bike? Of course I will administer first aid skills straight away, but she will need to go to the hospital. And when she goes to hospital, she will get placed on a waiting list.

It is true that medical care is free. It is true that it is generally of a high standard. However, one of the increasing failures of health care in Denmark (though this issue is not apparent across the border in Sweden) has been that the increased administration burden on public hospitals has created waiting lists a mile long, comparable, and even worse, than the issues of waiting lists in public hospitals in Australia and the UK. Citizens lament at the so-called Djøf-isation (Djøf is the very strong, and vocal, union for lawyers and economists in Denmark) of the public service that has led to increases in bureaucracy as safeguards against litigious actions in what continues to evolve as an increasingly complex public administration system. Doctors tell anecdotes of picking up the pen more than the scalpel, and Danes bear the consequences. Beautiful people, with a hospital system stretched to its limits?

Second, the cultural. The reality of modern Denmark is

quite the opposite of the stereotype of Danes as a blonde haired and blue eyed super-race. Rather, the society is a racially heterogeneous melting pot of different cultures. When one thinks of Denmark as a social welfare state, it also enlivens the views that Denmark is a willing acceptor of foreign persons into its society. Denmark's active acceptance of refugees in the decades preceding the 2000s, led to the immigration of many migrants from the Middle-East and Africa. A striking symbol of the caring Danish society.

But integration has not gone so well. There are clear "zones" in Copenhagen. Immigrant areas (predominantly Nørrebro, known colloquially as the Nørre-bronx) are culturally homogenous - even when there are first, or even second, generation immigrants nowadays. Integration never really occurred. The Danes are, and I am making a broad generalization, nationalistic. Not intolerant of other cultures, but wary of losing the special "Danishness" that they have at present. They like Denmark, to be Danish. They like their society to be ordered, conservative and traditional.

The Danes wrangled special exceptions in their agreement as a member of the EU, including the right to prevent non-Danish EU citizens from purchasing Danish summer houses. All whilst the Danes are prolific purchasers of summer houses in the rest of Europe. A lecturer of mine once joked; "We don't want our summer houses bought by the Germans. They'll put up German flags next to all the bunkers they left us!"

And although Danes will happily speak to you in English, you will never really be able to get really close to them unless you can speak their intensely difficult language.

Frankly, and this is not an original observation, cracking the shell of the Danes is not an easy task.

The problem that therefore arises is that there is a conflict between this Danish-ness and the Scandinavian model of political economy above. Instead of the cooperative and tolerant nature of the society leading to a reduction in social problems, the opposite has occurred. Social problems with drugs and alcohol in immigrant areas, especially within the youth, have been on the increase because of the failure of the education system, and the wider society, to fully support pupils of foreign origin and allow them to integrate. The situation is an endless cycle of unemployment, crime and reliance on the state. Such reliance on the state spawns contempt from those who pay taxes, and the cycle thus continues.

To be frank, the society has failed to integrate (from both sides; immigrants and Danes) to create a new,

contemporary, Danish society. There is too much clamoring for the old ways of Denmark and a failure to modernise and adapt to a changing multicultural environment. There is a reluctance by Danes to reconcile their desire to be world leaders in international humanitarian policy, with what is a deep veined nationalism. It has created dual societies, living side by side with fundamental cultural conflict. The cultures should not merely live side by side, but transform into one modern Denmark.

To the future...

After all the critique above, it is important to take stock and note that Denmark is still a world leader in terms of safety, social services, education and general live-ability. In fact, as recent as this year it was named the world's most livable country. But such a reputation will soon begin to suffer from the problems above - none of which are unfixable.

The question posed at the beginning of this article, was whether these problems were a factor of a failure of the theory, or a failure of the implementation. In reality, a mix of both is to blame.

On bicycles, the theory merely needs to be implemented - efficient and progressive economic policy! Accurate road pricing and more incentive based taxation of motor vehicles are the best ways to solve the issue of public goods in roads and pollution externalities.

On brains, introducing student paid fees through a deferred fee loan mechanism from the state (such as the HECS program in Australia) would provide crucial funding universities. Tightening the SU eligibility would also provide more incentive to complete degrees quicker. This is not a move to complete privatisation, but a readjustment of the social welfare view that takes into account the private benefits of university attendance. That education is not only a way of improving society, but also has a fundamental private benefit to the individual by way of future wealth creation.

Further, a general decrease in the tax burden would decrease the brain drain. In this respect, an acknowledgement of a changing global society in which movement of people means that governments must stay

competitive. This is not to say that the tax burden in Denmark must be the same as that in Qatar, for example, to stay competitive. Clearly, there are non-pecuniary factors enticing Danes to stay in Denmark that allows for tax burdens higher than in an overseas territory. But, the level of tax on citizens is a factor that will influence whether Danes stay or go.

However, on the issue of beauty, a simple solution is not easily found. Danes are nationalist kinds of creatures. Caring creatures, but nationalist nevertheless. The only solution too much of the problem is time - to allow young

“...one of the increasing failures of health care in Denmark has been that the increased administration burden on public hospitals has created waiting lists a mile long, comparable, and even worse, than the issues of waiting lists in public hospitals in Australia and the UK”.

people from ethnically diverse backgrounds to grow up together as equals and form bonds from a young age across divisions. Because of that, it is true to say that the youth are the future. When a child is 3 years old, it doesn't matter if their playmate is black or white. Most of the time, it won't even matter if they cannot speak the same language.

Attitudes are the key here.

And it is not something that can be blamed on a failure of the Scandinavian model of political economy, or a failure of implementation of that model. It is not a product of government policy, though policy may make conditions amenable to improving the situation in the future.

Attitudes can be changed. And in Denmark, they need to be. Unfortunately, attitudes are the only thing that can't be solved overnight by better public policy.

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AUSTRALIA'S HOMOPHOBIA PARADOX

By Grace Ritter

A few weeks ago, I received a thought-provoking telephone call from a young friend of mine. This kid, a fifteen-year-old with a heart of gold, was distraught.

What the cause of this young man's distress, you might ask? Like 25 per cent of all Australian high school students, he was being bullied at school.

But it was how his tormentors had got to him that stuck with me. My young friend, who is, by no means overly-sensitive, sobbed down the phone about how some of his peers had been humiliating him for the past couple of weeks. By publicly (and incorrectly) proclaiming him to be homosexual in the schoolyard.

It astounds and terrifies me that in the twenty-first century, in a country as developed and progressive as Australia claims to be, that children can use homosexuality as a weapon; condemnable, repulsive, humiliating.

And is it not that just a quaint reflection of what we, as Australians, are teaching our youth? That being gay is abnormal, and wrong.

Sure, we have come a long way from where we were even a few decades ago. The unrelenting political activism of our LGBT groups has Australians more and more reluctant to express traditionally anti-gay sentiments. One only needs to look at the spray that Bob Katter copped this March to see that we do live in a country where homophobia is now seen to be politically incorrect.

But what is political incorrectness, really? Whatever our lawmakers and pop culture icons do or do not say, one simple fact remains: homophobia still exists, simply not as overtly as it has done in the past. Disapproved of though it may be, homophobic ideas are heartily encouraged by our politicians, our media, and our statutes.

And this has led Australians to have a bizarre and paradoxical view when it comes to being gay. We think it is bad for you to be homosexual, but we think it is equally as unacceptable for people to tell you so.

So what does this mean for the queer folk of the Great Southern Land? Essentially, it means they are perpetually discriminated against. Legally, it means they are second-class citizens. And this is a discrimination that is rarely acknowledged by those in power, for fear of offence or controversy.

One often-cited example of this is the issue of marriage. There has, of course, been much discussion about same-sex marriage in recent years, to which I am sure all readers are familiar. Religious leaders have debated ferociously with marriage equality support groups. Activists have organized petitions. The ALP has approved a conscience vote on the issue, and private members bills have been introduced into our Houses of Parliament.

In the political to-and-fro of the debate, however, Australians seem to be missing the point.

Ultimately, gay marriage is not about political agendas or



party policies. Nor is it just about weddings and financial security. To those of us that support it, it symbolises so much more. The legalisation of same-sex marriages would be an enormous gesture on behalf of our country in recognition of the fact that there is nothing wrong with the way that gays and lesbians live their lives.

While gay marriage is the most hotly debated issue at present, there are of course other examples. Same-sex adoption, for instance, is currently only allowed in five of Australia's states and territories. The absence of gay sex education in high school curriculums is a further indication that gays remain isolated and under-represented in this country.

Indisputably, our gays and lesbians do not have the same rights as our heterosexual citizens. Giving them these rights would bring them one step closer to being an equally valued and recognized community.

And so, it is time for our elected representatives in Canberra to step up. As our lawmakers, they have the responsibility to protect the physical and psychological wellbeing of Australians, and to set an example that can be followed by their voters. The gay rights movement shouldn't be presented as a partisan scuffle, or as coming down the personal preferences of Gillard and Abbott - it is not about that. It is about the lives and freedoms of real people.

By being silent or non-committal in areas of gay rights, our politicians are not - as they seem to believe - remaining

neutral. On the contrary, the reluctance of nearly all MPs to speak out in favour of gay rights is an explicitly anti-gay sentiment. It is saying that they don't care enough. That keeping mum to maintain the status quo takes priority over stating their honest opinions - whatever that opinion might be.

It is time to end the vagueness, the conscience voting, the feeble political correctness. Australians, ask yourselves this; do you really want to live in a country where - to your leaders - polls are more important than people?

Our politicians have the power to make a difference in the lives of so many in our country. Australians need to learn that one's moral character is not determined by how politically correct they can be. Rather, it is based upon the respect and integrity that they afford their fellow human beings - whether in public or in private, in actions or in words.

While the law still discriminates against the LGBT community, it will continue to encourage - and even justify - quiet homophobia.

And while we allow for homophobia, all those kids across Australia that are accused of being gay by their classmates will continue to cry quietly - humiliated and alone - in the corners of schoolyards.

UWA ARTS UNION MOCK PARLIAMENT

By Gabrielle Maynard

The 2012 University of Western Australia mock parliament caused loud and contentious debate on campus last month, as over 80 young, budding politicians took part in the Arts Union organised event.

Parties represented included the Liberal, Labor, Greens and Australian Sex Parties, while new movements including the Sustainable Development Party and the Free Trade Party were heard.

Issues introduced into the parliament included a call to nationalise the Australian child care industry, mandatory drug testing for welfare recipients, the removal of all forms of economic protectionism, the removal of administrative control of any department at Catholic hospitals to do with maternity, abortions or contraception and the introduction of dental treatment in Medicare to make it part of the public health program.

Despite the vigorous debate that was to be heard, possibly the biggest shock of the evening came half way through the proceedings, as the Greens prepared to present their motion to the parliament.

UWA Liberal Club President Gemma Whiting moved that it was time to bring the session to a close because of the late hour.

The Labor Party, Sex Party, Greens, Sustainable Development and the Free Trade Party members all condemned Miss Whiting and the Liberals for this move, voting against the motion.

Despite the motion being resolved in the positive, Miss Whiting continued to argue with the Chair, after being named on numerous occasions for un-parliamentary and disruptive behaviour.

Labor front bencher Amy Blitvich asked she be removed from the chamber, with all opposing members agreeing with Miss Blitvich.

Miss Whiting responded to the motion, and was asked to walk out the chamber, which she did.

At this point, more than half of the Liberal members stood and followed Miss Whiting out of the parliament, despite the session not being officially finished.

Speaking before these disruptions, State Labor Member and Shadow Planning, Housing and Local Jobs Minister Peter Tinley opened the event, telling the student 'politicians' to avoid acting the way state parliamentarians do.

"I would counsel them to not do what we do...avoid the politics of the personal because they become so distracting."

Mr Tinley said youth events were important in encouraging intellectual independence in students.

"[Youth events] contribute to a sense of identity and encourage intellectual independence... in a world full of messages and marketing, where your ideas are given to you, [its crucial] to stand alone intellectually and form your own opinion."

He said the young members of their respective parties should not toe the party line.

"The youth arm of the respective movements is deliberately established on the basis that it does allow that wide shift in views...[youth] are still manoeuvring through their thought processes...it's essential to allow youth of the political parties to explore their views," he said.

"The enemy of the youth arm is the turgid, morass of conservatism of each of those sides of politics.

"Silly old buggers like me get entrenched sometimes...we need to be poked and prodded by the youth."

Although Tinley said youth shouldn't follow party lines, there were many who stayed on message.

The first motion of the evening, introduced by Labor speaker Amy Blitvich aimed to nationalise the Australian



child care industry, to ensure a higher national standard of child care education, and gender equality in the work place.

“Labor is about workers...a fair go for childcare workers to ensure the pay and respect they deserve,” she said.

“We need clear, achievable standards.

“This bill is good for working families and good for women.”

Labor front bencher Ellie Whiteaker echoed these sentiments, claiming there needed to be a focus on attraction and retention of good child care workers, and to make the industry highly skilled.

“This must be a priority with national focus...it is a key social and economic reform,” she said.

Liberal speaker Josh Dolgoy dismissed these claims, saying Labor’s motion eliminates individual choice for families.

“We must ensure individual choice...whether you send your child to childcare A or childcare B,” Mr Dolgoy said.

“Every person’s choice is removed...it is an absurd and backward policy, which back belongs in the 19th century with Karl Marx.”

The Liberals also raised the question as to why nationalising the scheme was the only option, claiming there was no need to buy the entire industry.

UWA Labor Vice-President Mitchell Goff attacked the Liberals on the motion, claiming they ‘hate families, poor people and children’.

“[Childcare] is the biggest obstacle for women going back to work,” he said.

“Labor is merging nationalisation and family values to benefit the women of Australia.”

The motion was resolved in the positive, giving the Labor Government their first win of the night.

The next motion, introduced by the Liberal Opposition, moved to implement mandatory drug testing for welfare recipients.

Liberal front bencher Myles Parish claimed the current welfare system favoured those who engage in crime.

“Free money means free drugs,” he stated.

“Welfare is to help people get through, not to fund crime.

“I’m a law abiding citizen and I expect the same from those who claim benefits from tax payers money...welfare needs to be fair, not criminal.”

Fellow Liberal speaker Rebecca Anderton backed Mr Parish, saying the welfare testing is an incentive for recipients to stop using drugs.

“Don’t take drugs, get welfare,” she said simply.

“Why should tax payers fund the lifestyle choices of drug users?”

UWA Labor President and Leader of the Government Tom Antoniazzi refuted the motion, labelling it ‘destructive’ and vilifying for low socio-economic individuals.

“People should not have to prove their innocence to Centrelink...aged pensioners, single mothers...this motion is saying all poor people take drugs,” he said.

“20 US states tried to implement this and not one could because it was unconstitutional.

“What about corporate welfare? Do we ask CEOs to pee in a cup when banks bail them out? [The Liberals] should feel ashamed for vilifying the most disadvantaged and vulnerable members of society.”

Labor also raised the issue of practicality, saying 7 million people received Centrelink, a system already buckling under pressure, and managing this new motion would be impossible.

Independent speaker, and ex Young Liberal Dylan Caporn sided with Labor on the motion, claiming too few welfare recipients use drugs for the motion to be worthwhile.

"In the US where this was trialled, 96 per cent of those tested, tested negative," he said.

"2 per cent used drugs, only 2 per cent...this is the exact populist crap we can expect from the Liberals...an abhorrent motion."

The Sex Party also refuted the motion, claiming it was too difficult for people to break the welfare cycle.

"The policy simply does not work as you will just spend more money looking for people," speaker Daniel Kirkby said.

"Nobody chooses welfare, it's never a choice...nobody opts into unemployment, and this motion is punishing people for something they didn't choose.

"You will spend more money looking for people and simply create a black market for the sale of urine...you are undermining your own policy."

The Liberals claimed welfare was a privilege provided by tax payers, not a birth right.

The motion was resolved in the negative, giving the Government its second win for the evening.

The Australian Sex Party introduced one of the more controversial bills of the evening, calling for the removal of administrative control of any department at Catholic hospitals to do with maternity, abortion or contraception.

Speaker Molly Dale said the government needed to force Catholic hospitals to relinquish control of services as they were harmful to both patients and doctors.

"We need to ensure freedom of religion, however there are limits," she said.

"These hospitals are actively causing physical and psychological harm to women by not treating them appropriately, and the house has to do something...not only psychological harm to women, but to health care workers as well."

Liberal speaker Bodie D'Orazio refuted the motion, claiming it was unconstitutional and too impractical to implement.

"This motion is forcing doctors to go against their conscience," he said.

"The cost of maternity will increase 20% in Australia... Catholic hospitals account for 15% of all beds. The Sex Party obviously doesn't understand government and money...this is social engineering."

Labor speaker Max Riley refuted the motion, saying doctors took a Hippocratic Oath to put their patients before their religion.

"We need to analyse what this motion involves... geographically not everyone has access to a secular hospital," he said.

"Catholic doctors need to care for their patients, not for religious dogma."

Despite the Sex Parties emotional plea, the motion was resolved in the negative.

Following Miss Whiting's exit, Liberal front bencher Stephen Puttick took her position in absence so the



Greens could put their motion to the parliament, and the final speakers, including Liberal members, could be heard.

Greens Leader Michael Morrissey moved that the mock parliament introduce dental treatment in Medicare and make it part of the public health program.

Mr Morrissey said dental illness has a major effect on health and well-being, but is not recognised by the government.

“The mouth is not treated as part of the body,” he said.

“Each year, 60 000 hospital visits are due to dental problems and 10% of GP visits to homes...there needs to be a greater priority on teeth.”

Labor speaker William Pritchard backed the Greens motion, saying preventative health care was essential to a well-functioning health system.

“We need to push towards equality in health care,” he said.

“This is an essential health care right of all Australians... it should be a universal right, not just for those who can afford it.”

Following only a brief debate, the motion was resolved in the positive.

At this point, temporary Liberal Leader Stephen Puttick moved any final members be heard, and the parliaments conclude for another year.

Following the evening’s events, UWA Labor President Tom Antoniazzi told State Magazine exclusively he was disappointed in the Liberals performance.

“Labor itself chose to participate fully and passionately for the entirety of the event, because it’s important that politically-engaged young people debate issues such as child care and health care,” he said.

“It’s disappointing that most of the Liberals chose to abandon the event before we debated a very important motion on the inclusion of dental care in Medicare.

“I note that other groups chose to stay and debate the Liberal motion that was proposed, even though many regarded it as offensive to people from low socio-economic backgrounds.”

Liberal Leader Gemma Whiting was not available for comment.





ROBIN HOOD DOWN UNDER?

By Rhys Zajitz

Treasurer Wayne Swan's essay in *The Monthly Magazine* in March has been subject to plenty of discussion in all forms of media from television to editorials; from radio chats to social media forums. It seems he has become this sort of modern-day folk hero who will steal from the rich to give to the poor. I must say during my lifetime I have never seen a politician so viciously attack successful individuals in the way that he did. So is he this courageous hero that social media has made him out to be? The answer is simple: No. This is merely a cheap stunt played by him, designed to inflame class warfare amongst Australian society in a fragile economic climate hoping to increase Labor's dismal and stagnant popularity rating.

Mr Swan's article has a lot of referencing to the American situation on income inequality and the top 1 per cent. This is an underlying theme in the article; incessant referencing to America. In his article, he often cites the problems of American equal opportunity and the economic struggles which they will inevitably face in their near future. One must ask how is this synonymous with Australia? Australia is a country with 22 million people as compared to America with 310 million. Now, I am no maths major but even I could be able to recognise that there is

a big difference in these figures. America for years has dominated entrepreneurship and innovation, it is (the late) Steve Jobs we have to thank for all our Apple iPods, iPhones and iTouches (anything with "i" in it really). All of which have taken the world by storm on an apocalyptic scale. It is William Gates and Paul Allen we must thank for creating the company Microsoft, a company that employs more than 92,000 people. It is Henry Ford who we must thank for the birth of the modern-day motor car and assembly line.

It is John Pemberton and later Asa Griggs Candler for the development of the most valuable brand in consumer history: Coca-Cola and it is Ray Kroc, Dick and Van MacDonald all who played a part in bringing us MacDonald's which in turn employs more than 400,000 people worldwide. Mr Swan seemingly forgets that it is thanks to American innovators that the world is able to have many (...not all) of the gadgets and gizmos, food outlets and software that we do. For every idea, there is a person who thought of it, to have managed it and put in the long hard yards for it to become a reality. Many of these companies started out in their creator's garages, and have gone on to change the world as we know it. As a consequence of the success of the idea, the creators

themselves have become wealthy, now this seems to be the very essence of the American idea of working hard and becoming successful- Now is that wrong? Mr Swan thinks that becoming wealthy slowly chips away at democracy; he seems to forget that democracy allows people to work hard and make money. After all what they do with that money is still regulated (they cannot evade taxes, like the rest of us etc.).

Mr Swan has made no hesitation in 'naming and shaming' select prominent mining individuals accusing them of hoarding up wealth and refusing to share it with the rest of us. Gina Rinehart was slammed for having bought a stake in Fairfax Media. Why? How does a 10 per cent stake erode democracy as we know it? The answer is... it does not. Media ownership in Australia, unlike other countries, is heavily regulated. Gina Rinehart's stake in media companies is capped; anyone's stake in a multiple media companies is, so a complete buy-out is impossible.

Mr Swan should not be keeping himself busy slamming Ms Rinehart for a minor stake in a company, instead focus on the government's promise to bring the budget back to surplus and pay off the enormous debt that the Labor government will so kindly leave with us to pay off.

Andrew Forrest was another person "named and shamed" in this 'hate' article. Andrew Forrest over the years has donated more than \$90 million to his own charity; he does this under no obligation. He along with fellow other billionaires Kerry Stokes (Channel Seven) and James Packer (Crown Casinos) plans to embark on a nationwide project called 'GenerationOne' which aims to employ more than 50, 000 Aboriginals. This will increase employment levels amongst the Indigenous population and result in helping to bridge the gap between their life expectancy and raise their standard of living. Advertising and marketing for this ambitious project was all privately funded by these three figures, with no assistance from the then Rudd Government; the same government that wanted to tax Andrew Forrest because he was a 'greedy mining boss'.

Why should wealthy individuals be shunned and shamed in an article for 'deviously not sharing their wealth' with us? They have worked hard to generate that wealth, why should they have to share it around? Mining wealth is inevitably (whether mining magnates like it or not) shared with us through state royalties and other forms of taxation. We are slamming these people who have

developed companies that have kept Western Australia and Australia out of recession and have catapulted WA to becoming the economic powerhouse of the Australian economy.

Individual financial success at many times benefits the rest of us too. The Roy Hill and Hope Downs development may soon double Ms Rinehart's wealth, catapulting her into the top-end of the Forbes Richest People group, joining the likes of Ingvar Kamprad (Ikea) and Warren Buffet (Berkshire Hathaway). What would her increased wealth do for us? It increases royalties and through the Royalties for Regions programme (enacted by WA's state Liberal-National Government) funnels the funds to provide for badly needed infrastructure, road, health and education funding to the remote and regional communities. It would also increase employment (people need to work in the mine), stimulate spending (people working in the mine spend their money) and in doing so will boost the local, state and national economies (I wonder if this has crossed

Swanny's mind??).

“The ill-informed voters are the most preyed upon individuals in politics. These are Mr Swan’s target”.

It almost seems, according to Mr Swan, that being rich is some sort of criminal offence. His article certainly

would ignite this opinion in many hard-core Marxists and socialists that have infiltrated our predominantly stable democratic society. I do not know if anyone remembers two guys with surnames called Lenin and Stalin; they both tried communism out for a good 40 years, needless to say, for those that did the Russian Revolution and Cold War history in Year Twelve, it did not exactly work out as they would have hoped for; the USSR subsequently fell from grace in the 1990's because it could not compete financially with the US (the predominant global capitalist power). It goes to show that the pursuit of 'equal wealth and destruction of capitalism' does not work; it's just some hogwash in some fantasy book entitled 'The Communist Manifesto' (it could very well become the next big box-office franchise like Harry Potter and The Hunger Games with the way fantasy books are going).

Humans are naturally envious creatures. We want more, and we feel we deserve more. This attitude drives innovation and hard work, however it can also create an attitude that opportunities will just be handed to us on a silver platter. Life is not fair, nor is it easy. No one is going to provide us with an opportunity designed specifically for you or for me; you must go out and search for it yourself. It is not a crime to be rich as many people who are, have had to work hard for it. Nor is it a crime to want to be rich, it should be a crime however to expect those to share their hard-earned wealth with the rest of us who

sit idly by watching the world pass and believe in some utopian-egalitarian fertiliser that Mr Swan seemingly pulls out of thin air.

The member for Lilley discusses Australia's egalitarian spirit; you know all that blah about us having a fair go. A fair go is being able to get a job and work hard, to earn, save and invest like the rest of us have to do. We all have that opportunity. Over the years, the baby boomers have established a strong middle-class that over time have endorsed the formula that hard work equals success. They endeavour to buy their own home and invest in superannuation to further consolidate their financial independence and weaken their dependence on the state to provide in their old age. They wish to pursue career advancement and put their children through a good school to ensure they have good opportunities when they are older. Australians, thanks to the likes of Mr Swan are slowly turning this brilliant country into an 'entitlement state', where the prevailing attitude is "how much can I get from the government and when can I start getting it". It reminds me of the old 'Gimme Yogo' ads- 'Gimme Centrelink!'

Mr Swan also mentions 2012 Republican presidential aspirant Mitt Romney, a SELF-MADE multimillionaire venture capitalist who is believed to be worth around \$190-250 million dollars. He makes no hesitation to point out Romney's wealth as compared to many other "hard-working Americans". Now America is in \$15 trillion worth of debt; a rather large amount of money I would say. So, would you not want a man who knows how to work hard and make money? 'Yes We Can' Obama says, well 'No You Can't'. Instead of someone who won a Nobel peace prize for increasing the number of American troops in Afghanistan, we need a man like Mitt Romney who is a successful businessman whose work will achieve real results, especially when the international financial system depends on American fiscal stability. An example of his sound fiscal skill (as compared to Obama's) can be seen when he was made the CEO of the 2002 Salt Lake Winter Olympics which prior to his appointment was in a dire financial situation. Through his leadership, lobbying and corporate savvy skills, the Olympics ran a profit of \$100 million. This consolidated his reputation as turnaround king. Mitt Romney has shown not just on one occasion, but on multiple occasions (look up Mitt Romney and his management of the Massachusetts budget) that knowing how to manage money because he has it is not such a bad thing after all.

Mr Swan needs to stop being so judgmental about wealthy politicians, as they have as much right to run for public office as you or I, and a democratic system allows for that to happen. He should look closer to home

at his old mate and former boss, the one he slammed on national television for his "dysfunctional decision making" and "deeply demeaning attitude", none other than Mr Kevin07 himself, whose wife and him have a combined personal net worth well over \$50 Million.

All this talk and encouragement of how life should be made fair and the rich are taking up all the opportunities instead of just giving them to the rest of us reeks on the growth of what I call 'The Entitlement State' or "Gimme Centrelink" state of mind. An 'entitlement state' encourages individuals and various social groups to neglect their responsibilities and only focus on what they feel they 'deserve' which in turn must be provided by the government and the rich. This is not a good attitude to instil in successive generations which already have elements of this 'self-entitlement' attitude, which if this mindset is further encouraged by Mr Swan, future generations will go on to further challenge the healthy structures and hard-working attitudes that already exist in today's society.

Mr Swan's comments smack off motivations to inflame a class warfare conflict in Australia. The ill-informed voters are the most preyed upon individuals in politics. These are Mr Swan's target. Like the Black Plague to a medieval European; this is what the manipulative Mr Swan is to an ill-informed voter's mind. This article also makes people less inclined to become successful for fear of being marginalised by society, for little or no reason simply because they have a nice house or money in the bank (which by the way Mr Swan wants; so if you have money in the bank, I suggest opening an account in Switzerland, as Mr Swan is looking everywhere for some. Hurry up, you have until May!).

What really gets me is how does a politician who is Deputy Prime Minister and Treasurer have all this time on his hands to write such a lengthy article? Let me give you some suggestions Mr Swan on perhaps what your next little 'pet project' could be instead of wasting time on your flawed socialist beliefs. Why don't you get back to fixing the debt of over \$100 billion, get on to delivering a surplus like your government promised (although I am not holding my breath, promises do not mean much to this government), fixing the unemployment rate of 5.2 per cent, stop frivolous spending on asylum seekers and dole bludgers, stop cuts to defence programmes, start divvying the GST up fairly and give WA, the economic powerhouse of this country it's long overdue share. Finally reverse the mining tax and carbon tax, which really are taxes on WA and QLD. After the leadership spill in February, all members from the Labor party have said that they need to get back to governing the country. Well Mr Swan, why don't you?



THOUGHTS ON FEES

By Matthew McKenzie

As always, the Guild has been doing a myriad of extremely exciting stuff; including attending meetings and writing papers about 'issues'. Lately, I have become concerned that the success of catering reform on campus is going to detract away from debate about the other big issues. The Guild's most important role is student representation.

So, I might just talk about a few things that are on my mind at the moment in terms of education and welfare. The first one is the Student Services and Amenities Fee (SSAF). I, in no way speak for the Guild, as Council has not approved a position yet; and I would not want to upset Yannis. However, I will tell you what I think personally.

I think there is a very simple way to frame the SSAF debate - how do we get the best results for students?

That is a subtle question. Having more revenue is

fantastic (frustratingly for me, it has already been locked into spending by the previous President) but how do you spend it? Once the capital works program is completed (is this even how it should be spent?), if the fee follows the "glide path" of increases that the previous Guild set, the Guild will have an extra \$4 million revenue. We will also have a few hundred thousand more from our catering department; assuming independent catering continues, and some tens of thousands from external sponsorship.

This is the first year in history when the Guild has spent more than \$100,000 on clubs and societies. This could increase further- I think we have room to spend \$100 000 on Faculty Societies alone (that would be roughly \$10 000 per faculty society). We could certainly expand our Student Assistance services. We could throw more events, and make the existing ones even better. But then, you still have millions in the bank. I can promise you, people will find ways to spend that money that you would

never even dream of.

One thing that will happen, and already has, is that the University will ask us for money to fund their programs. This means that they simply cut their Student Services budget, and spend that money somewhere else while the Guild foots the bill. This does not benefit you.

You will also get some visionary President who cares deeply about an issue and throws a hundred thousand dollars at it. Although they have the best intentions, chances are this would not help you. As much as I would like a mini golf course on campus, I will resist the temptation.

The only way you can ensure that your money will be spent in a way that benefits you is to have the choice to contribute or not.

You use the Guild's services. If you go to a club event, it's probably funded by us. In fact, we fund the club that has written this magazine. Echo isn't working? Believe me; I am trying hard to get that fixed.

But all of that is not to the value of \$198. And the UWA Guild is so strong, that it can, and has, done those things without a compulsory fee.

It is difficult being a student. The Youth Allowance system is a mess; textbooks are expensive. On top of that, the single biggest deterrent to students from a low-socioeconomic background attending University is debt. This is such an important issue that NUS have campaigned about it for years. (Bizarrely though, NUS still supported this compulsory fee going on your HECS). Under the new system, say you want to do a degree in Arts and then a JD. This fee will add an extra \$1200 to your student debt. The thought of that is going to deter your average public school student from Rivervale, who lives with his Grandmother and has no money. I distinctly remember being at UWA Open Day, or whatever it was called, at the end of year 12, comparing the debt levels from each degree.

Getting back to the initial question – how do you get the best results for students? I think making this fee optional is a win-win-win. Students get the choice of spending the money or not – and this means that the Guild will be forced to spend its resources wisely, lest students stop their membership. It means that if you cannot afford Guild membership, or do not use the services because you work full time and are never on campus, you will not have to pay. It also means you will not place another deterrent on students from lower socio-economic backgrounds

coming to university.

The real question here is why the University jumped at the opportunity to charge another fee. The answer is that Australian universities are underfunded.

The solution is that we need to have a good look at the structure of fees. At the moment, the only way that the University can increase its revenue is by increasing the number of places – and you then gets overcrowded tutorials, less time with lecturers, etc. The government could increase its funding for universities; but then, amongst other issues, you have got the problem that the government is paying for the education of people who will, by and large, be earning significantly more than everybody else in society. That is inequitable.

I believe the solution is Fee Deregulation, and I would be willing to bet a good portion of our SSAF revenue that the Commonwealth Government will think about this in the coming decade.

This reform brings competition to the Higher Education sector. People would be able to achieve degrees online from Universities like ECU quite inexpensively, opening up higher education to everyone. Universities need to start differentiating their degrees to ensure that higher education is accessible to all.

One model is from New Zealand, where students who achieved higher ATARs (they were not called ATARs in New Zealand) would receive more funding towards their degree than those who did not.

This does not have to make it more difficult for those students who are struggling either. You would have the opportunity to give greater financial assistance to that student from Rivervale who is not making it. In fact, a quick back of the envelope calculation, based on figures I have from the university, tells me they could offer a significant scholarship program that might cover thousands of students.

This is sure to ignite significant debate, and I know I'll come under attack. I want to get the conversation started, not just at UWA, but nationally. It's time for us to bring practical reform to higher education and not just focus on ideology.

"WE WILL NOT GO QUIETLY INTO THE NIGHT!"

By George Brown and Alyce Haast

These defiant words from President Whitmore in the movie *Independence Day* seem to perfectly exemplify the current attitude of the United States of America towards their inexorable decline on the global stage.

For decades following World War II, the USA has enjoyed an unchallenged hegemony over the international system, especially with the USSR refusing to engage with a supposedly corrupt capitalist system prior to their internal collapse in 1991. With the USA's economic troubles (excessive sovereign debt and an unresolved banking crisis), it was altogether possible that the international system could simply resolve itself into a more multilateral system after the US either became more insular or collapsed.

The USA might have even been (somewhat) content to settle for this situation. However, China's particularly rapid rise to prominence has been the catalyst for a massive paradigm shift. China's rise has essentially transformed the nation into the clear successor to America's current position within the current near-unilateral system, and as such is now very much a potential threat to its future security.

One of the major points of contrast between USA's and China's respective outlooks, is that while western academia often characterises China as a "rising power", China considers itself to instead be a 'returning power' reclaiming its rightful place as the economic, political and cultural powerhouse of the world; a position it held for the vast majority of the past two millennia or more. The last 150 years, on the other hand, saw a largely insular and isolationist China, stricken by civil wars and general internal instability being exploited by the imperial powers of Western Europe (and later Japan), followed by technological and economic stagnation or regression under Mao's leadership.

Much like a child hiding behind a tree and being left

behind at the playground by the school bus; the world mostly moved on and China lost its importance as the world shifted to more of a domination-by-trade-superiority regime. This century is largely known as "the century of shame" to the Chinese and is essentially thought of as their equivalent of the European Dark Ages; however, China has made immense progress since abandoning its isolationism in the late 1970s and 1980s under Deng Xiaoping and his successors. One can only wonder how much earlier they might have been able to become a major world power if they had done this sooner. In any case, the situation now is that neither USA nor China is willing to back down, as to do so would be to cede supremacy to the other for at least the next several decades. That being said, it is not simply a matter of looking at the capabilities of a country when it comes to dominating the world stage.

It is important to take into account the views of the domestic American electorate. While this is probably a massive over-generalisation, the fact of the matter is that many are either too stupid or too disinterested to face the reality that is on the global stage; that the US is on the decline. The problem that now arises is two-fold. First, practically any suggestion that the US cannot simply act unilaterally and without regard for the international system is seemingly unacceptable to the average American voter. For example, look at the 2003 invasion of Iraq (which was done totally without United Nations approval) or the mission-creep in the Libya "no-fly zone" intervention.

The only way that the US would be able to maintain their current place in the global order would be to implement extremely comprehensive and radical reforms to the US economy. However, the second issue here is that these reforms, especially for those people covered by the welfare safety net, is that welfare would be one of those major areas that would require extremely substantial reform, and voters often refuse to see the bigger picture that explains why unpopular measures are sometimes

necessary. Health care would be another example of this, but curtailing health expenditure is desperately needed anyway, considering it is the main reason why the USA's level of future unfunded liabilities is close to \$80 trillion – and that's on top of the over \$15 trillion of sovereign debt that has already accrued through decades of recurrent budget deficits.

On the other side of the Pacific, domestic considerations within China must also be taken into account. From the perspective of a high-level Chinese military official, it is entirely valid to see current US policy as being a direct threat to the future security interests of China. Looking at the world map from the perspective of a Chinese general, you can understand their nervousness – military bases and reciprocal defence treaties with countries all around China certainly seem to lead credence to an encirclement doctrine being part of US foreign policy, regardless of State Department protestations to the contrary. This is especially so given the USA's so-called 'pivot towards Asia', reinforced by the recent agreement to eventually deploy up to 2,500 US Marines in Darwin in Australia's Northern Territory.

The additional thing to think about is the historical precedent. When a great power shift occurs, there is always resistance from those who had had held the power and were desperately trying to keep their grip on it even as it slips through their fingers like water. Just look at the cyclical rises to prominence and subsequent declines of countless empires – the Carthaginians fell to the Romans; the Roman Empire itself eventually went into decline from internal decay and external threat; the Aztecs and the Incas fell to the Spanish and Portuguese invaders.

The modern world of international relations, however, seriously limits the ability for a country to pre-emptively respond to a threat without inciting world-wide condemnation. The British and French were the last great imperial powers, and they could not survive in such a system – their disastrous attempt to assert their power in the Suez Crisis of 1956 without the support of the broader international community effectively signalled the death knell to any influence they may have had independent of the USA.

Based purely on these precedents of imperial decline, the thought that hegemony in the international system could

pass from the USA to China entirely peacefully seems wishful thinking at best – fanciful at worst. In this case, the issue in question becomes what are the likely flashpoints for any conflagration between the USA and China? There are three main areas that could cause a minor regional conflict to blow up into something much bigger – the Taiwan Strait, Korean DMZ and the South China Sea. Taiwan Strait, forming the border between mainland China and Taiwan, is probably the most concerning of these three possibilities, as it is among the most heavily weaponised pieces of real estate on the planet.

The USA is required under by law to provide (defensive) weaponry to the Taiwanese government and to maintain a military capacity capable of resisting any actions “that would jeopardise the security, or the social or economic system, of the people on Taiwan” [s. 2(b) (6), Taiwan Relations Act 1979]. That said, the US has consistently been very careful to avoid explicitly saying that they would ever directly intervene militarily if China was to try attacking Taiwan directly, instead adopting a policy referred to as “strategic ambiguity” where they

also refuse to rule out this option of direct military intervention.

There is also the somewhat less serious potential flashpoint of North Korea (DPRK) – although there are over 36,000 US troops stationed permanently in South Korea, the DPRK

has had an historical tendency to act erratically, to say the least, which has resulted in a significant souring of relations between China and the DPRK, decreasing the likelihood that China would automatically and immediately side with them in any renewal of the Korean War. Similarly, the South China Sea has the potential to be a flashpoint that could drag the USA into a conflict, especially given the recent declaration that unrestricted shipping in the area is now considered to be in their strategic 'national interest'. However, it is highly unlikely that the US would unilaterally send military forces into the region to intervene in a conflict without significantly wider international support, especially considering that there are not any US military bases that would come under direct and immediate threat.

However, the situation may not be entirely without hope, as there is still a chance that a peaceful accord will be struck, similar to détente between the USA and USSR in the 1970s. This is because the existing structures of the international system would likely encourage or facilitate

“The only way that the US would be able to maintain their current place in the global order would be to implement extremely comprehensive and radical reforms to the US economy”.

a more peaceful transition. The reason for this is because the US was one of the main drivers behind setting this up, and they secured their position such that they would maintain a substantial degree of influence long after they stopped being the unchallengeable hegemon of the global system. The US might not be happy about losing their global hegemony, but the fact that they essentially moulded the current international system of the United Nations, IMF, World Bank and the like means that they would be at a significant structural advantage if they ever had to negotiate some sort of bilateral global leadership deal, even if they no longer had anything like the strength to enforce it.

This is much like the situation in the United Nations Security Council, where the five permanent members who hold veto rights include the UK and France, despite the fact that their ability to project power abroad is now essentially non-existent unless they have the support of the US. Similar to the USA's perspective, China probably would not be especially happy with this sort of arrangement, but their gradually greater level of immersion into the international system and acceptance of its established rules and norms means that they would be more likely to accept some sort of deal based on a bilateral or even multilateral agreement with the US.

A parallel to the China and USA power struggle can be seen when one compares the collapse of the USSR in 1991. The USSR was effectively bankrupted in an attempt to match American power in the arms race, but their economic isolation and insularity meant that this collapse had minimal flow-on impacts and helped ease their subsequent integration into the rest of the modern

international system. Compared with the USSR though, which deliberately cut itself off from what it saw as the corruption and decadence of the West; China is far more integrated into the world economic system.

Although it means that the example of the former Soviet bloc's peaceful absorption into the global economic order is no longer as applicable, the substantial degree of economic interdependence between China and the USA, not to mention the rest of the world economy does offer an alternative argument for why any Sino-American conflict is more unlikely. Essentially, any conflict between the two would be so catastrophic for global economic activity that it would be in direct opposition to their interests to become entangled in a full-on war with each other.

It also increases the likelihood, even if it was concerning the more serious regional flashpoints of Taiwan, North Korea or the South China Sea, that the two superpowers would be able to broker a peaceful compromise and stop it from becoming more than just a relatively small regional issue.

In the end though, the USA ultimately may not have a choice about having to give up its position as the global hegemon. It comes down to simple economics - without some extremely radical reforms, the US economy will collapse under the weight of its immense private and public debt levels or they will have to cut-back on their overseas military commitments, among other reforms, the effect of either of these being a dramatic shift in the world's balance of power.



ON A SLIPPERY SLOPE

By Aiden Depiazzi

Labor's move to control the House of Representatives by forcing the resignation of Speaker Harry Jenkins last November backfired with the self-suspension of incumbent Peter Slipper on 22 April. Amidst allegations of abusing travel entitlements and sexually harassing a male staffer, Slipper stepped aside from the top parliamentary post while criminal investigations were conducted.

Slipper was previously investigated by the Department of Finance for similar abuses and misuses of public funds, going back as early as 2003. Though Slipper later claimed that he had been cleared of all such charges, and that the alleged misuses were due to "legitimate differences in interpretation" of the rules, he paid back over \$14,000 of taxpayer-funded entitlements late in 2010. He spent \$6,000 on taxis in half a month in 2009, whilst parliament was in recess, and is also known to have misused public money for publications. This newspapers and periodicals entitlement is to be used, according to the Australian National Audit Office, for the purchase of the dailies, political journals, and other resources required by parliamentarians for professional purposes. Slipper notoriously spent nearly \$1,000 of this entitlement on leisure magazines, including Harper's Bazaar and Australian Aquarium Keeper.

Slipper isn't only known for spending public money in dubious ways. In 2009 as a Coalition backbencher, he was warned on a number of occasions for "unreliability" and "continued absences". His Coalition colleagues also described him as "reeking of alcohol" during caucus meetings and his drinking problem has surfaced as a causal factor in his controversial behavior throughout his parliamentary career. He was also caught out taking parliamentary leave to visit Paris, claiming that he had been personally invited by the Dalai Lama, only for his colleagues to later learn that His Holiness had been in a different part of the world at the time. Slipper's slip-ups

have made him one of the most infamous contemporary federal MPs.

Not a glamorous parliamentary career at all, and dwarfed in all respectable regards by the distinction showed by Harry Jenkins. And yet Labor sought to pull Jenkins back into the party room, and relieve the Liberal caucus of Pete and his paybacks. Why? We can be certain that the government's nomination of Slipper for the Speakership had very little to do with lifting the standards of that position. It might be a Liberal tradition to wear the gown, but bringing back the bar jacket and wing collar fooled nobody into believing that Slipper's appointment would benefit the parliament. Perhaps he got the idea from Harper's Bazaar?

Labor made no secret of being desperate for an additional (relative) two votes in the House. This has become even more important recently, with independent MP Andrew Wilkie on the verge of withdrawing his support altogether if he and Jenny Macklin cannot come to an agreement on the explicitness of their mandatory pre-commitment legislation. Wilkie has already professed his lack of faith in Julia Gillard, publicly indicating he would support a return by Kevin Rudd to the PM's office. Wilkie's threat of withdrawal was rendered ineffective by Jenkins' return to the Labor benches, but this almost certainly will not last.

If the latest allegations against Slipper evolve into something far nastier than in the past, and he is forced to resign altogether, the ALP will lose another vote with the expected appointment of Deputy (and Acting) Speaker Anna Burke. Though Gillard possessed the power to remove Slipper from his post prior to his temporary resignation, she refrained from doing so. And while Slipper took the hint, this does provide great insight into the Gillard Government's unwillingness to take parliamentarians' indiscretions a little too lightly.

Slipper's alleged wrongdoings have relit a fire in the belly of the Coalition beast. While the media vultures circle the dilapidated career of Peter Slipper, the Opposition has been reminded of the fact that Craig Thomson is still sitting merrily, unscrutinised and unpunished for his indiscretions. The Fair Work Australia investigation into Thomson's alleged misuse of funds during his term as Health Services Union boss has reached its three-year anniversary, and still almost all of its findings remain unpublished. On 5 April, Tony Abbott called for Gillard to use the Federal Police to hold FWA to account; their findings may contain grounds for a criminal investigation, but the government is keeping the vast majority of them undisclosed.

Labor is at risk of seriously damaging the Health Services



Union and its members. HSU National Secretary Kathy Jackson has urged the government to force FWA to accelerate its proceedings, and has stated that the length of the FWA investigation stands as evidence of the Labor government intervening to stall the disclosure of its findings. The Union's frustration became evident when Jackson released HSU documents to the New South Wales Police, which established Strike Force Carnarvon to investigate both Thomson and incumbent HSU President Michael Williamson for alleged misconduct.

Amidst the lethargy of FWA, the Australian Council of Trade Unions suspended the HSU as an affiliated union. It is certainly one of the most sensible decisions ever made by a union in Australia. If Labor continues to protect Craig Thomson because of its fear of losing yet another seat in the House to a potential by-election, the HSU and its members will suffer further. The party that once sought to champion and protect workers' rights is now stamping on them, encouraging abuse and misconduct at the highest echelons of union leadership.

This stands only as further evidence to the moral dilapidation of modern Labor. Julia Gillard has made it clear that she will cling to government, even an unstable one, through any means necessary. Already the ALP has forced out one of the most distinguished Speakers in parliamentary history and replaced him with a man who flagrantly abuses the power of his position. They misguidedly established FWA to restore the rights of workers in the post-WorkChoices era, and have allowed it to become an indolent and incompetent waste of time and money. They have permitted its abhorrence of transparency, using it as a storage unit for information

they want to keep from the public, and they continue to punish the HSU for its honest support of Strike Force Carnarvon by not holding Craig Thomson to account.

The reduction of Queensland Labor's caucus to the size of a netball team is evidence that the federal ALP is a highly contagious disease. The Australian people are waking to the fact that the Gillard Government cannot be trusted, and they are showing this in the state elections. Granted, each state or territory population swings according to endemic local issues, but it cannot be denied that Labor's image at the federal level is turning voters away. Every broken promise, every shady backroom deal, every betrayal of an independent lifts the veil from over the electorate's eyes.

The Australian people elected Rudd as a great reformer, as a panacea to their frustrations with 11 years of John Howard. When Labor knifed its own leader at the behest of the NSW Right and its affiliated interest groups, and replaced him with a practiced negotiator lacking in public appeal, the people began to grow wary. Labor didn't lose the election in 2010, but it certainly didn't win. And cling though Gillard may to government for now, there is no chance of her maintaining power at the next election.

Tony Abbott's Coalition is no miracle cure to the Labor disease, but at the very least it is a treatment, with a prognosis of minor improvement. What remains is for the Australian people to realize this, before the Gillard Government has the chance to permanently damage this country any further.

ARRRRR- RATED BOOTY

By Gillian Mahony

Almost every single person reading this article right now is a criminal. You. Yes, you. You've broken the law. I don't know how you sleep at night, you terrible, terrible person.

...How can I say this?

Because statistically, at some point in your life, you've broken intellectual property laws. Whether you've merely dabbled in the occasional file sharing with friends, or the popular torrent website 'The Pirate Bay' is your most used and abused bookmark, you're considered to have infringed on the criminal code. This carries very few real-life consequences for the average person, and so for this average person (let's call him Joe the Plumber, for old times' sake), free and instant access to TV shows, movies, and music - particularly from the US and Europe - is vastly preferable to waiting six months and then paying to access the same content.

The result of this is that for the Joe the Plumbers of the Internet savvy and morally dubious Gens Y and Z, intellectual property and copyright is a concept that means very little. Recent times have seen the advent of new methods of creating art - including DJ mixes which use only seconds of individual songs to create new ones (see DJ Earworm's United States of Pop), and fanfiction which allows budding writers to publish short stories set in the world of their favourite novel or film. This is indicative of a larger trend; artwork is becoming viewed as the communal property of society, and individuals are becoming more and more comfortable taking the artwork of others and improving, changing, and personalising it - with or without the consent of the author. And those authors are, justifiably, getting pissed off.

In the footsteps of the US and the downfall of SOPA and PIPA, on April 20th the Australian High Court overturned a case brought against Internet service provider iiNet by group of 34 international and Australian companies, including Warner Brothers, Disney and the Seven Network, accusing iiNet of failing to police the illegal downloads of

its users. In doing so, the High Court blocked an attempt by the holders of intellectual property to shift the burden of responsibility for Internet piracy onto the Internet service provider rather than on Joe the Plumber - which has left those determined to protect their copyrights with five options to deploy within Australia.

The first option, making digital files copy and pirate-proof, is easier said than done. The ability of hackers to out-smart the technological barriers placed in front of them is, at the current stage, largely unmatched, and so trying to improve the security of the files themselves or the transfer of those files appears to be a futile effort for those involved. Whether or not this will hold true in the future is uncertain - however, for now, owners of intellectual property who are being pirated should look elsewhere to gain compensation for their content.

Secondly, intellectual property holders have the option of pushing the burden of responsibility onto the websites who host illegal files and facilitate illegal file sharing, which has enjoyed limited success. File sharing websites such as Megaupload have been forced to close by US intervention, however, not all such sites have been successfully destroyed by the pressure. The Pirate Bay is a famous such example which has managed to successfully withhold pressure in the long term - including prison sentences for the main facilitators of the website and a fine of over \$6.6 million AUD - to remain one of the largest file sharing websites currently operating and host to over 4 million torrent files, even forming a political party in the process.

The third option available to copyright holders is pressuring the legislators to push the burden of responsibility for Internet piracy onto Joe the Plumber, and this option seems feasible - in theory. If the Joe the Plumber who breaks intellectual property laws is properly punished for his actions, then there would be a higher risk associated with downloading and sharing files (legal repercussions) and so he would be less inclined to take that risk.

Although being labelled an “internet pirate” by the government would initially seem like a step up in life (that is, provided eye patches and changing his Facebook language to ‘pirate’ were included), the actual, practical consequences that the label would carry would be tantamount to walking the plank – but only if these consequences had the ability to be properly implemented. This option, without the assistance of the internet service providers such as iiNet in order to identify the culprits of these crimes, carries little practical weight – and when the courts are already as clogged as they are, it hardly seems justifiable to begin adding cases against teenagers downloading Nicki Minaj songs to that burden.

However, there is one aspect of the issue which has yet to really be addressed in public debate – arrrrr we sure that Internet piracy is even a bad thing? On the one hand, opening up Internet piracy and intellectual property laws, or simply turning a blind eye to their implementation, could vastly decrease the quality and quantity of film that is produced in Australia and globally.

While many are happy and willing to produce novels, films and music for free, others are not. Less people actually purchasing the artwork and property made by the artists equates to less profit for the authors of that intellectual property.

If people begin to perceive that the opportunity cost of becoming a filmmaker, for instance, is greater than choosing a safe career and receiving steady income and compensation for their efforts, then they will generally go for that safer option, resulting in less filmmakers.

If there are less filmmakers or scriptwriters out there initiating film projects, then all jobs that are associated with those film productions – from the cameraman to the coffee-fetcher – suddenly become redundant, essentially collapsing an entire industry. And, granted, while Australia’s film industry is not the strongest to begin with, should enough consumers feel that making the trip to the movies and purchasing a ticket doesn’t outweigh the ability to see a slightly lower quality version on a smaller screen at home, then the result is that all hope of seeing another movie like “Red Dog” come out of Australia again is lost.

On the other hand, the choice of whether or not to illegally download a file off the Internet is not just a simple dichotomy between paying or not paying for the song,

movie or TV show. For most, there is a third alternative; not consuming the product at all. People value their money on the most part more than they value the ability to watch “The Descendants” on their computer. In this situation, practising internet piracy actually causes more overall benefit than it does harm.

How, I hear you ask? When Joe the Plumber downloads a movie off the Internet, the maker of the movie faces no additional downside. It doesn’t cost the director any more to direct for one more viewer, and it doesn’t cost screenwriter to write the script so that one extra person can watch the movie.

But for Joe the Plumber, there are a number of upsides. He is able to enjoy the artwork created by another, laugh weakly at the jokes, cry at appropriate times, and hide behind the couch if it gets too scary. He gains benefit and enjoyment from watching that movie, or from generally consuming the intellectual property of another. But it’s more than just that – if Joe the Plumber passes on his recommendation to a friend and spreads positive word of mouth reviews, then the author’s artwork is publicised at no additional cost to them.

Do the benefits outweigh the costs? Well, maybe. But it all depends on the balance of people downloading versus buying intellectual property. If too many

people begin to download rather than buy, then any additional publicity created by illegal downloads will just go straight into increasing that number of illegal downloads. Films, songs, and TV shows would definitely be well publicised – but they wouldn’t be turning a profit. The key to the issue is in herd behaviour – to maximise the happiness of everyone in the situation, those illegally downloading must be in the vast minority, rather than in the majority.

It is also necessary to take into account that internet pirates are essentially selfish – for them, it’s always “Aye, aye, aye.” Joe the Plumber would essentially be taking for free what another person has worked on, and, moreover, expects compensation for. Just as those public service announcements state, piracy is stealing.

This I why, even though I personally don’t have a (wooden) leg to stand on, I believe that the next time you have an urge to download Carly Rae Jepsen, click on iTunes instead of uTorrent – just so I can feel less guilty when I do the opposite.

“The ability of hackers to out-smart the technological barriers placed in front of them is, at the current stage, largely unmatched”.



WHY PEOPLE HATE POLITICIANS

By Kate O'Sullivan and Jeremy Cole

It seems as if everyone hates politics and politicians these days - in the USA, in Europe, Australia, it's inescapable. But why? What is it about politics and specifically politicians that people have such an issue with?

When we started to think about the reasons that the two of us resent politicians, the media's image of what a politician "is" came to mind. Big chunks of our daily newspapers are based around politics. But if this is so, then why don't we like them, given we have so much information?

Maybe it's because the information we are given seems so disjointed from what we really want to know. The media coverage of politicians often bears so little resemblance to their opinions that the public get confused. We can reasonably say that the point of political journalism is not to engage the public in the political process; indeed, it's the exact opposite. We see the spin, the "facade", the "Tony-Abbott-In-His-Speedos" or "John-Howard-In-His-Tracksuit" over and over again. The public begin to wonder, who is the man (or woman) behind the mask? And, should we even trust them?

A lot of the media coverage is about the most insignificant things. Tony Abbott referring to something that Germaine Greer said about Julia Gillard's fashion choices is not important political news. Neither are Obama's middle name or the balance of Mitt Romney's bank account. Yes, we are talking about our representatives on the world stage but really though? It's "shit-flinging" of the lowest calibre. And it brings the institutions and those involved

into disrepute.

A lot of people also take issue with the way politicians always seem to be on the campaign trail. They don't govern because everyone is focused on the polling booth. Controversial issues don't get dealt with, even if that is what the community care about, as it might split the constituency and turn some voters against them. A prime example is gay marriage. There has been outcry by the public to have gay marriage legalised throughout Parliaments across the globe, but as we have all seen in Australia, this issue stagnates on a regular basis. This is due to political party members at conferences and the like not wanting to choose as side on what is perceived as a contentious issue that could alter public opinion of them.

However, we believe that the real issue, the crux of the matter is that *drumroll please* the public just don't care! The average person lives an average life - and we are all far too busy with our own lives to care about politics every day of the week. With work, bills, family commitments and more, politics falls to the bottom of a very long "To-Do" list, past the study we don't do and the unwashed laundry in the corner.

Politicians ask us to care, be it through flyers in the post, billboards or someone heckling us from a stall or outside the booth when we've finally decided to pretend we care. Politicians get in the way of our carefully ordered lives and in the process can make even the most interested of us grow to resent them. We hear about it all so much, who even cares anymore.

THE SSAF; ONE SMALL STEP FOR MAN, ONE GIANT LEAP FOR STUDENTS

By Rajdeep Singh

This is exactly what the SSAF is. The arrival and implementation of the new Student Services and Amenities Fee (SSAF), was the passing of legislation and compulsory enactment by the Gillard government, providing tertiary institutions, their Guilds, and accompanying unions around Australia with a compulsory levy fee; with accompanying power to choose whether or not students should be made to pay this fee. It was a big move, surpassing a move set about 20 years earlier, during the Howard era, to provide a choice to opt out of these fees; the period of much revered voluntary good times for many.

The legislation reverses the Voluntary Student Unionism (VSU); which though provided students with an option to opt out, meant that overall, the ability for institutions to charge fees was diminished greatly, with many universities feeling the impact of this. Many non-academic services such as student unions, sporting, medical and arts programs, which further increased campus life and brought along welfare, health and social services were lost and their quality diminished. This is a road to counteract this, and while not a full reversal of the VSU, it will aim to increase access to and improve the quality of current services and introduce new ones, around all campuses in Australia.

And of course, to quote a Hollywood classic; 'with great power comes great responsibility', and this issue is no different. It is a big dice to play, with many possibilities and new ventures that can be maximized and generated from this; and so it is inherently obvious that if it is to be beneficial for students today, it should be taken advantage of and followed through, resulting in the power to provide students with a better and more enjoyable student life; a life which every student should fully experience, encompass and enjoy.

That said, this seemingly simple move has come under

fire and turned into a huge political debacle; with people and politicians trying to justify why their view is the best view, starting the political agenda we all know and love, sarcasm intended. The never ending debates, arguments, opinions, opinion polls, questions, voices, amendments, proposals, answers, left and right wing agendas and everything else between, come to cloud this new addition, and continue to take both stances, to justify their side to this legislation.

It is why, now is the best time to try and justify this legislation and gauge its true impact that it will have, both in the short and long term, and whether or not it actually adds to student contribution. So here I go to try and show why the implementation of the SSAF is indeed, 'One small step for man, One giant leap for students'.

Students need a foundation to help start and carry them throughout their university lives, whether it's for Hannah, a fresher, Cameron, a studious science student or Xiao, an international student. They need a strong and supporting university campus, with an array of services that they can uniquely call theirs, and this in turn providing them with an ever growing smörgåsbord of services and conveniences that can help make university life a much easier transition and bridge to cross, providing them an assortment of skills, activities and services throughout their time at university.

This is something that makes university life one of the most enjoyable experiences of one's life. Students of all walks of life go through a huge variety of experiences and with countless needs, needing support wherever these may be; from counseling services, to financial advice, to career assistance, or academic representation. This is something the Guild should cater for.

So that sounds like all pretty colours and rainbows, so what's the big problem about? The problem arises from

the actual implementation of the SSAF. We are asking students to contribute \$90 per semester, twice per year, for their SSAF. It is a compulsory legislation that has been further enacted by the university for every student. That sounds pretty straightforward too. But dear readers, nothing in this world is straight forward when there are thousands of opinions, political vices and good old dosh involved. The idea is that before the SSAF came through, students were given the choice to volunteer for this fee and its accompanying services; therefore those who wanted, could, and those who did not, didn't have to. Plus, we all know everyone loves the ability to choose.

However, now it is a compulsory contribution, and where the backlash starts. So let's address that backlash and settle the qualms that many students have had and show you why this is such an important step for the betterment of all students nationally.

A major centerfold of the argument against SSAF revolves around the idea that one should not have to pay the fee because they are off campus for a majority of the semester, or that they are not a full time student. This is a fair argument; a student should not have to pay if he or she is not in the capacity to benefit fully from the services. However, there seems to be a huge miscommunication here. The fees are indeed catered and automatically adjusted according to one's enrollment. A student who is part time, or off campus, pays less than one who is a full time on campus student. In fact, the exact prices for different enrollments is fully available to be accessed by anyone, and they reflect very effectively, the contribution that a student should have to make depending on his or her enrolment.

That said, even with these measures in place, there will always be the students who feel they are not receiving any tangible benefits from these fees; a consequence of the lack of public and student knowledge, awareness and appreciation and understanding of the Guild, what it actually does in the whole spectrum of things, and the arrangement of services it provides for everyday students is overlooked by many. And this overflows into the fact that these benefits don't just stop on campus, but such aspects as representation continues to infinity and beyond.

The basis of the Guild is to bring health, wellbeing and a vibrant campus culture, for the students by the students. Now that sounds pretty nifty and pretty when modelled

like that, but the barrier between your everyday student and the student Guild needs to be torn down. Until this occurs, students will question the need and validity of the Guild, and this is definitely one of the biggest downfalls of the Guild, and an area that needs much work for the years to come. The financial support that the implementation of the SSAF will provide aid for this cause, allowing the Guild to further enhance and broaden its services, and further cater for more and more students, and at the same time, increasing its footprint and allowing us to close the gap between students and the Guild.

Today, many students do not find themselves in a position where they may need financial, academic, or personal help, and that is great situation to be in; but the Guild caters for every student, however diverse, different and unique. This means that there will be a variety of situations and circumstances that need to be catered for, and indeed a forever increasing range of these. So the Guild should be able to provide this and aim for this,

“..robust and balanced solution that will not only help ensure the delivery of quality student services—it will also help, once and for all, to secure their future”.

- Peter Garret, Education Minister

as it has always aimed to do. Thus, many students who find themselves in the position of being exclusive from the Guild, become indifferent about the functioning and reasoning behind its existence, and of course, as a result the SSAF.

The cost of the SSAF is also quite a hot area of the ensuing debate. The fact that the fees are higher than that from last year, and previous years before that, means that many students are asking an explanation for this. The price of the fees is set at \$99 for each semester, or \$198 per annum. These are up from the previous, \$60 a semester, or \$120 per annum. So why doesn't the Guild keep it at this same price? Firstly, and foremost, the federal government mandates the SSAF and tertiary institutions do not have a choice whether or not to levy the fees. They are bound by a federal legislation and are here to stay. So that is not something the university or any institution has the power to change, though it does have the power whether or not to implement these fees. Though, no institution thus far, has decided to set this fee at zero. Surprise. It is much needed and welcomes financial support.

It also must be noted that the university senate levies and sets the fee, and not the Guild itself. It is the Guild's job to advise and assist how much the fee should be set at, to make sure the expected expenditure for the following year is satisfied.

The Guild in consultation with the university, decided that the fee would be set at this level, and to be honest, comparatively it is a modest fee at that. UWA has set one of the lowest fees throughout any tertiary institution throughout Australia and the lowest in the Group of Eight.

I think now is the best time to say that the UWA Student Guild, was during the period of VSU, the most strongest Guild in terms of student contribution, and so the reasoning behind it wanting charge the maximum statutory amount of \$263, would be definitely be satisfactory and acceptable. But it was decided against this, resulting in charging students less than what most other students across the nation are paying; definitely the best in terms of 'value for money'. Furthermore, it should be worth noting that this has always and will always been the case. The UWA Guild is here for the welfare of UWA students, and if they struggle to pay the fees, then the Guild is not doing its job; it has and will always act in the best interest of the students and this step certainly demonstrates this.

For now, it must be said and accepted, that the fees have been set, are here to stay, and must be paid. But new options have been generated to assist students with payment of the SSAF. Many students, both old and new, do not know that eligible students can pay or defer their fees through the HECS-HELP scheme, which is a much-welcomed option, and that their SSAF throughout their degree can be put on their HECS.

Of course, it can be argued, what about ineligible students such as international students? They are students who have the same rights as domestic students, yet they cannot use HECS to pay for their SSAF; but that's the beauty in the case that they are having financial difficulty paying these fees, because the Guild is here for them, to help them and provide financial support, which it will provide without hesitating.

It works as a cycle, by the students for the students, around and around. The SSAF allows and makes sure this cycle runs smoothly; additionally making sure it can help make the lives of every student run smoothly.

So a burning question for many students arises after the funds have been discussed; Where does this money go and who chooses where it goes? That is where the students come in. The money that directly comes in from the SSAF is divided into two segments; 70% for the UWA student Guild, and 30% for UWA Sports. These are used to provide educational and financial assistance, welfare and advice services, student representation and advocacy, on campus catering and aid for a range of student societies, sporting clubs and activities. The method of where these funds directly proceed to is through a formal annual

consultative process with the university, the students and the Guild. This is used identify areas that could benefit from funds, how the funds can be delivered more effectively, the creation of more efficient services and determine where these funds are distributed to. This allows the fairest procedure to propose a final allocation of these funds to relevant areas of the university. It is a consultative process, with students in mind, being the backbone of this process. The best thing is its fluidity. An annual consultation and review allows the Guild to best recognize where the allocation of revenue should go so that it is always relevant and maximising its benefits for students and their needs.

What I have said so far, I am sure, paints a picture of the SSAF being this perfect place with butterflies and rainbows, and even though it is pretty close to that, it is most definitely not a perfect system.

There are downfalls to the implementation of the legislation that do not allow it to provide maximum benefits and advantages to be gained, and that might work against what the SSAF is here for. The fact that there is no requirement for institutions to pass on the full proceeds of the SSAF to democratically elected student organizations, giving them the choice, is one of these. Yes, it could be said that this voluntary ability is good, in the sense that it still gives universities that power, and yes I agree; it gives that freedom which is an option that should be available, but at the same time, the SSAF is central to help the financial burden of many student organizations and without, many would not be able to sustain or flourish.

In conclusion, the UWA Senate and Executive are strongly supportive of the SSAF, as it supports the university's goal of achieving a strong, independent and financially secure Guild and the sports and recreation association. Even both the Vice Chancellor, Professor Paul Johnson, and Senior Deputy Vice Chancellor, Winthrop Professor Bill Loudon, both commend and appreciate the power of the SSAF. They believe it allows the ability for the university to offer the best of the best, in terms of services and activities for all students, provide a life-line to students to build strong social networks on campus, allow them to build strong social interaction, and do this in an environment which is full of opportunities and development; all in all allowing the student of the University of Western Australia to say proudly that they are part of a establishment that has a beautifully vibrant culture, and doors open to them that allow them to participate in every way in their student life. It is definitely nice to be part of a university, that is all colours, rainbows and butterflies for everyone.

Politic-LOL!



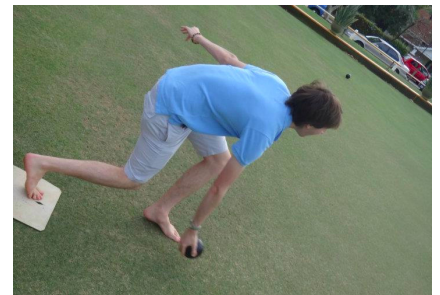
And the winner is.... Myles Parish with "Domo arigato, Monsieur Roboto."
Congratulations!



Next issue's Politic-LOL. Send your submissions to statemagazine.uwa@gmail.com!

Notes

Bowling for Ban Ki



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