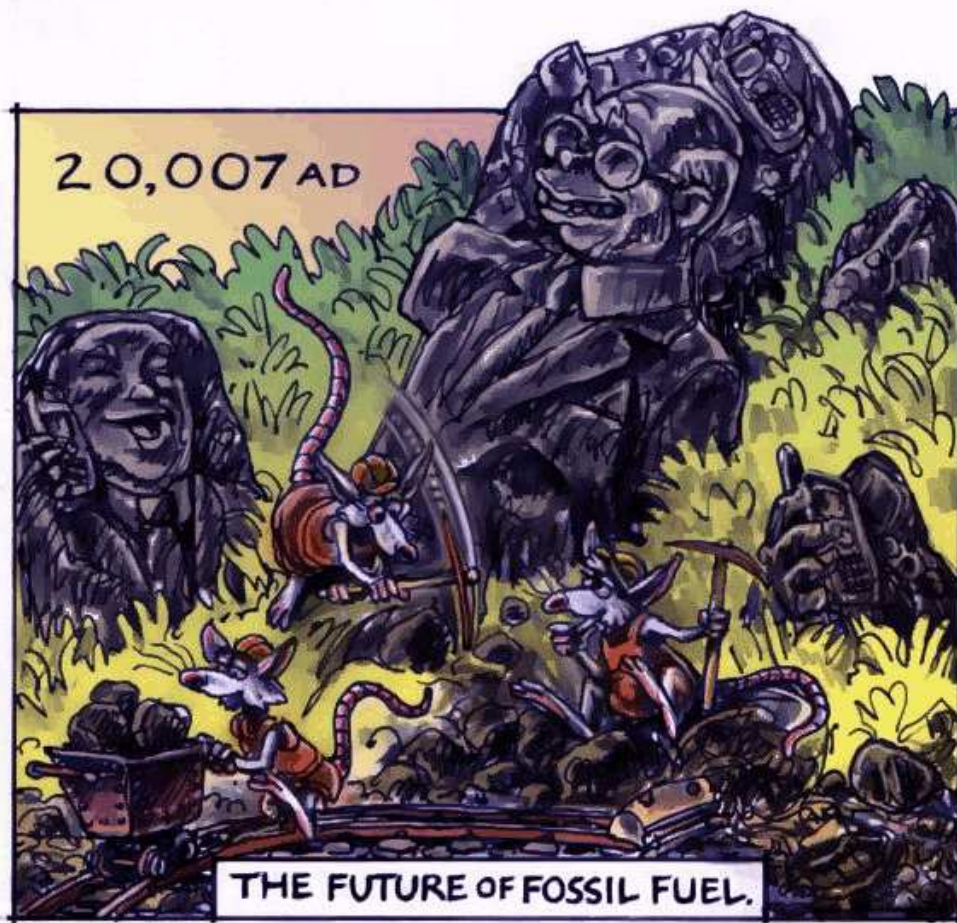


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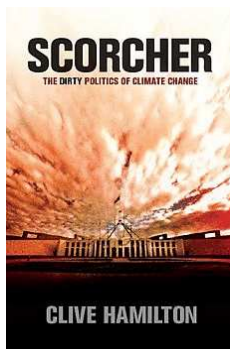
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Greenhouse mafia's scorching approach to climate change

ENVIRONMENT

John Button

***Scorcher: The dirty politics of climate change*, by Clive Hamilton. Black Inc., Australia, 2007. ISBN 9780977594900. RRP \$29.95.**



Once I had a discussion about the future with a Minister in the Irish Government. He told me not to worry about it too much. 'Posterity,' he said, 'has never done anything for us.' Climate change is about the future; but a future which creeps up on us every day. It threatens living standards, lifestyles, quality of life, all the aspirational clichés of human existence. It's not comfortable to think about.

No wonder people hope for arguments which suggest it will go away. The discussion about climate change has become increasingly feverish, polemical and downright dishonest. So, I should state my own position right at the beginning.

I'm a lay person who believes that the overwhelming consensus of international scientists is correct. Climate change is happening, it is substantially contributed to by human activity and particularly the burning of fossil fuels. If we can, we should do something about it. I think we owe something to posterity.

Clive Hamilton, the author of *Scorcher*, has been pretty consistent on environmental issues over the years and about climate change. In 1999 the Australia Institute, of which he is the Director, published a damning report which alleged that Australia had the highest level of Greenhouse gas emissions per person of any industrialised country in the world.

In *Scorcher*, he follows up the issues worldwide, from the international negotiations leading to the signing of the Kyoto agreement to the various strategies adopted by countries in response to growing awareness of the implications of global warming.

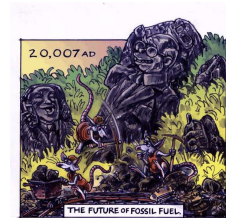
The big question is why Australia, an apparently enthusiastic signatory of the Kyoto agreement (subject to special conditions) not only failed to ratify Kyoto but actively sought to undermine its influence. In the Australian context, the sub-title of Hamilton's book *The dirty politics of climate change* tells us something of the answers to this question.

In fact, this is very much a book about the pollution of Australian democratic processes by a combination of self-interested corporations, an ignorant and apathetic media (with some exceptions) and a spineless government manipulated by a prime minister who failed to comprehend important issues which fell outside the narrow confines of his political imagination.

If Clive Hamilton were only half right, and I believe this well documented book is a lot more than half right, then it is a shameful story.

It is a story of government bureaucrats reacting to the apparent influence of environmentalists and of the formation of a self-styled 'greenhouse mafia' (formed principally from executives of the mining, coal, aluminium and energy sectors), which became enormously influential in government decision making.

In its period of greatest influence this group sometimes had direct access to cabinet papers, held secret meetings with the prime minister and a few of his close colleagues, and on one occasion in 2003 had a cabinet decision (supported by all government agencies other than Finance) reversed after two members of the 'greenhouse mafia' (Rio Tinto and Alcoa) lobbied the Prime Minister.



A lot of things happened because of the cosy relationship between the 'greenhouse mafia' and the prime minister. Australian delegations to international negotiations on climate change were largely comprised of representatives from the major polluting companies. The renewable energy industry (solar, wind power, etc) became the enemy, to be discouraged as a potential alternative to the fossil fuel industry.

The government showed itself willing to accept flawed modelling from the Australian Bureau of Agricultural and Resource Economics so long as it agreed with the government's position. It even used material from this source to try to frighten developing countries about aspects of the Kyoto agreement.

The CSIRO suffered a different fate, with pressure being exerted on scientists not to talk about climate change and one, Dr Graeme Pearman, being effectively sacked. This was all part of government attempts to manipulate public opinion, a task which included the appointment of a tame Chief Scientist who happened to also be Chief Technologist at Rio Tinto.

Hamilton describes the government's strategy on climate change as 'do nothing at home and work hard to prevent others taking action'. So there was encouragement of apathy here because of a loathing of environmentalism and 'feverish activity abroad' to protect the interests of the coal export industry.

In the Australian context, Hamilton writes, 'the government was ... enamoured of green consumerism'; green energy, hybrid cars, all that sort of stuff, which laudable

though it may be 'contributes to the progressive privatisation of responsibility for environmental degradation'. The more individuals are made to feel responsible for the problem the less the onus on the government, which should be providing leadership and policy direction on such a significant issue.

For a long time the public was relatively apathetic about global warming: neither alert nor particularly alarmed. The tide turned during 2006, probably as a result of a long drought, very hot summers and the Al Gore film, *An Inconvenient Truth*. Now, suddenly it's an election issue, a frantic struggle for credibility. In the meantime, Australia has lost ten years and our political system has been guided into further disrepute. It's this part of the story which makes me particularly angry: the evidence of a government sinking to new lows in honesty and openness in its administration.

Clive Hamilton tells it well and his book should be widely read by people concerned about Australian democracy.

Boots on the ground cannot replace faces in a community

AUSTRALIA

Jack Waterford



More than 30 years ago a task force was commissioned by the Commonwealth to tackle a national disaster among Aborigines, which, particularly in remote areas such as the Northern Territory, was robbing young Aborigines of their childhoods and scarring them for life.

It was no mean expedition. Before it was over it had visited more than 600 Aboriginal communities and country towns in all parts of rural Australia, and seen over 110,000 people, including 60,000 Aborigines, at least once. Task force teams drove about 100,000 km. Each had had a substantial medical examination. From the results of the initial examination, about a fifth were given an more intensive specialist examination by some of Australia's most skilled doctors. Nearly 2000 people received surgical operations, a good number in special army hospitals in the middle of the Australian desert, and another 6000 mostly older people were given glasses.

Around 30,000 people in the Northern Territory, South Australia and Western Australia were involved in the month-long mass-treatment programs.

There had been no expedition on this scale before, and there has been none since. The model of its organisation, and its practical findings, were widely admired, and the model and the experience was later used overseas.

The task force approach was the National Trachoma and Eye Program, led by Professor Fred Hollows. It was focused on blinding eye disease, but neither the conditions it encountered nor the instincts of Fred Hollows limited it only to looking at eyeballs. Every person the program saw was given a general health examination, and, in particular areas visited, the program made extensive additional studies of particular problems being encountered, including the incidence of sexually transmitted disease, respiratory disease, skin infections and infestations, middle ear conditions, and diabetes.

The program was the genius of Gordon Briscoe, now Australia's most senior Aboriginal historian, who had earlier played a key role both in establishing the Redfern Aboriginal Medical Service and in recruiting the wild and irascible Fred

Hollows to be its foundation medical director. Its establishment was also funded by a challenge that a bright doctor-come-politician, Peter Baume, threw at the various Australian medical specialist colleges — that, if they really were about the public interest rather than their self-interest, they ought to prove it by getting involved in improving Aboriginal health.

The College of Ophthalmologists took up the challenge, and not only with a tight salaried task force, but with the additional and unpaid assistance of hundreds of ophthalmologists who volunteered. Many of these are still involved in providing ongoing services to Aboriginal communities.



The program cost the Commonwealth about \$4 million in 1979 dollars. At various stages, when, for one reason or another funding was in the balance, government was given to understand that, if needs be, the program could carry on by bulk-billing the Commonwealth a GP fee for each examination, and a specialist fee for each specialist examination, as well as surgical fees for all procedures. Had we operated on that basis, the cost to the Commonwealth would have been at least \$8 million.

My wife and I worked several years with the program. I first became involved, as a reporter, during funding negotiations in 1975, and, once the program began operating spent a month reporting (and pitching in) with task force teams the next year, inter alia recording Fred Hollows' memorable phrase that 'if the health services around here were organised for animals rather than Aborigines, the RSPCA would prosecute'.

I was so bowled away by the disaster of Aboriginal health that I obtained a two-year leave of absence from the *Canberra Times* and went to work with an Aboriginal medical service in Central Australia, helping to set up new services. Then I went to work directly for Fred as an organiser, dogsbody and report writer. My wife, Susan, whom I met on the program, organised surgery programs in the wake of the main teams' progress, and mass treatment programs.

Trachoma is still around, but neither with the intensity and severity of old: in 1976 virtually every Aboriginal child in three quarters of geographical Australia had the infectious, conjunctivitis, stage of the disease, and about one in four old people (people aged 60 or more) were blind from trachoma, corneal eye disease or cataract. There is still too much Aboriginal blindness, but the likelihood of old-aged blindness among the middle-aged remote Aborigines of today (who were kids or young adults then) will be but a fraction of what it once was.

As now, the root of trachoma, and almost all the other illness we saw, was living conditions. Poor and over-crowded housing, if it could be called housing at all, inadequate water supplies, an inability to separate garbage and sewerage from the

living environment, and poor diet. Inadequate or non-existent medical services made virtually every Aboriginal the host of what Dr Peter Moodie called 'a wardful of diseases in each body'. Treatment helped, but exposure did not create resistance, and those 'cured' were quickly sick again.

There were times when, in describing what we saw, we used phrases such as 'national disaster' and compared the national mobilisation to help the 1974 Darwin cyclone victims with the resources going into Aboriginal affairs. We made use of the army too, and had high praise for its style of operation. But the army's help, and what was needed, had very little in common with the impatient 'boots on the ground' approach and coercive methods which seem to be favoured by Mal Brough, the former soldier turned instant expert on Aboriginal affairs. Indeed it was as much the failure of Brough-style authoritarianism as the lack of investment which had created the mess with which we were dealing.

What made us different? We consulted, liaised, talked, reported back, and, so far as we could, we delivered too. Even in 1976 we found Aborigines weary of 'yet another survey' and 'yet another lot coming through, making promises, never to be seen again'.

The program employed Aboriginal liaison officers who went into communities, long before the teams arrived, to explain what we were doing and why, and to negotiate assistance. Local liaison officers were appointed to help organise the actual visits. We did not wait for people to come to clinics, but went out and looked for them in the camps. In one community, which had been the subject of regular visits by an eye doctor, (of his own initiative, free, but based on people presented by a clinic sister) the doctor told us that, because of his regular visits, there were no blind people here. We saw 30, from the camps, in one afternoon.

Some of the meetings we initiated metamorphosed into standing groups, not least the Pitjantjatjarra Council, which was first convened, from Pitjantjatjarra groups in South Australia, Western Australia and the Northern Territory, in response to our request to discuss what people could do about our findings.

We worked hard, in short, to make the people partners in our program, and to give individuals, families and groups a strong sense of ownership. Most of the time, of course, we were heavily self-critical, thinking that we could have, or should have, done it better, but that we were doing it better than it had been done before we were always pretty confident.

I wish I could be as confident about the task forces starting out — first with cops, then with army officers, then some doctors not yet consulted or organised, with alienated state infrastructure and no sense of engagement with the service providers on the ground, let alone the objects of the attention. Complete with abuse by the

minister of the people whose cooperation he needs, and the general implication that anyone who stands in his way, or doubts his good intentions, is an apologist for child molesters.

The pulsating cut and thrust of international Scrabble

COLUMNS

By the way

Brian Matthews



What with the Ashes being a let down, the One Day Internationals more interminable than ever and Federer just too bloody good, the serious student of TV sport has been shamefully sabotaged this summer. There was beach cricket, of course, but don't start me on that. Then suddenly, bereft, contemplating alcoholic comfort, and idly browsing, I came across a flyer for the National Scrabble Masters Tournament.

Interested as always in the arcane, I sought out the Tournament organiser, a woman who, according to the website, was called Ann Smith, but who told me when we met that she'd changed her name to Ann Xafz [giving her a basic score of 23 but a blinding 69 on a triple word spot in those games where you're allowed to use your surname]. I naturally deferred to this adjustment and thereafter endangered the wellbeing of my larynx by twisting it round the labyrinthine corners posed by the words 'Ms Xafz'.

'Well, Ms Xafz,' I began, 'tell me about the tournament. Do you have Scrabble enthusiasts coming here from all over the world?'

'Oh, indubitably,' [24 with triple word score on the 'b'] she said, 'And just while we're on that, I'd like to point out that there are 109 two-letter words in the English language. Twenty-seven of these are familiar, like 'it', 'in' and 'to', but among the eighty-two others are incantations, (Om), mathematical symbols, (Pi), and various contractions that can be highly controversial if deployed [basic score of fifteen but go for triple letter score on the 'y'] in competition.'

'I suppose,' I probed, 'that for an audience, Scrabble is a bit like Chess — long periods of silent concentration, the drama of waiting.'

'Well, I don't think Scrabblers see much drama in waiting,' she speculated. 'The best players tend to be aggressive about slow opponents. If time wasting is suspected, what is known as the Rintoul-Bollock manoeuvre is sometimes employed in tense finals competition.' 'The Rintoul-Bollock manoeuvre being ...!'

Ms Xazf gave me a pitying look. It appears that a player named Thelonius Rintoul-Bollock, the Republic of Vultava's sole international standard Scrabblor, was in sight of victory in the 1968 Scrabble Scramble at Scunthorpe, when his opponent attempted to run a word across Rintoul-Bollock's 'zizmathoid' [48 with double-word scores on the first 'z' and the 'd'].



This bloke apparently hesitated for long minutes until Thelonius initiated the ploy that bears his name, which was to lean across the board and belt him on the nose. The board became sanguineous [36 on triple word spot], but Rintoul-Bollock was disqualified anyway because of a dispute about the authenticity of the word ...æzizmathoid... . He maintained that it was a medical condition in which the sufferer imagined he or she had turned into a musical instrument — usually a zither. The judges disagreed. 'Would you say Scrabble is ordinarily a contact sport?' 'Rintoul-Bollock', she retorted doggedly, 'also contributed to the game's development, pointing out that the suffix '-oid' is a particularly useful and productive tool. For example — '

'You mean, as in, 'Oid prefer to read a book'', I suggested, relieved to be able to make a contribution. ' — humanoid, mucinoid, actinoid, petaloid, factoid, plasmoid', intoned Ms Xazf, her suddenly glazed and popping eyes proclaiming perhaps a malfunctioning thyroid. 'Haemorrhoid?' I suggested, pleased to be in the spirit of things, but Ms Smarty-69-triple-word-score came over all genteel on me, objecting to obscene or 'doubtful' words in competition. 'There must be some great anecdotes to emerge from the clashes of Scrabblers at the elite level?' I adumbrated.

An expression of intense boredom suffused her features which, I had already noticed, had a sort of chiselled, focused cast to them, honed no doubt by hours poised over the board with a head full of alphabet and mathematics — letters to make mettlesome words, mathematics to calculate complicated triples and doubles and to check on your opponent's almost certainly faulty powers of addition and multiplication. But in answer to my musing [unobtrusive but a useful 15 with a triple on the 'm'], she simply proclaimed, 'What is much more interesting is the fact that there are many other productive and classic suffixes, such as '-mata''. 'As in 'tomata', I ventured, reasoning that Scrabble should not be without its moments of humour and flightiness. 'Stigmata, traumata, dogmata, miasmata, zygomata', enunciated Ms Xazf. She was, I concluded, agreeing with me in a merry way. Though possibly not — these Scrabblites play their tiles pretty close to the chest except when employing the Rintoul-Bollock strategy.

All in all, I felt that my flawed interviewing technique had somehow caused me to miss the visceral, controversial and heart-stopping cut-and-thrust of international Scrabble. I wished Ms Xazf all the best and set off to find a calming ale [meagre basic

score of 3, but a marvellous little connector].

Oz politics through the eyes of Tolkien

POLITICS

Vivienne Kelly



Tim Costello (who is nobody's fool) was recently asked whether he thought his brother would ever be Prime Minister. He gave a wry and elegant answer that played with the notion of the difficulty of relinquishing power in the saga of the Lord of the Rings.

As we know, one of Tolkien's central themes is the addictive quality of power. Even the good and gentle Frodo is vulnerable to its poison; and Gollum is transformed absolutely, becoming a slave to the power behind the Ring and losing both his integrity and his physical self in the process.

It was a playful answer, but (in the way of good playful answers) a suggestive one as well. Middle Earth is not a democracy, but the metaphor is oddly evocative: the notion of power as addictive resonates strongly in our present political climate. John Howard clearly finds it so. Never did cornered rat fight so desperately as Howard is fighting, now that he sees that the Ring must be passed on, and perhaps soon.

Even those of us who believe Howard's stewardship of our country has diminished its character and quality admit that he is a good fighter. Yet there has been a manic element in his fighting of late — especially over those mid-September days when he so nearly lost the leadership — that's not quite the same as before. He seems urgent and so frantic. There's a new red light in his eyes. It's so — well, so Gollum-like. He can't give up his Precious. It's his Precious, yess it iss, and he's not giving it up to anybody, not yet. Not to Rudd, not to Costello. Not to anybody.

And that's the thing about Tolkien: he reveals power not simply as addictive but as corrupting and deadly. Of course this is no news to anyone. But Tolkien shows its gradual acid erosion, its unexpected toxins and scarcely-perceptible inroads, the way it creeps into your bones, thins your blood and blurs your vision. We might ask ourselves whether the 'Ring' oughtn't to have been yanked off our Prime Minister's finger some time ago, so that someone else might be allowed to put a new perspective on things.

Let us imagine that a Ring was placed on Howard's finger when he became Prime

Minister. What harm might it have done over the past eleven years? What promises might it have caused to be broken? What characters might it have twisted? What judgments might it have corroded and what vision smeared?

Could it have explained the non-core promises, the quarter-truths, the evasions, the multiplicity of duplicities? On seeing these things and others we might have understood more profoundly the long and damaging process of decay in the Prime Minister's heart. And by removing the Ring from his grasp, perhaps we could have neutralised some of the damage.



Here is Tolkien on the Ring of the Dark Lord: 'The gold looked very fair and pure, and Frodo thought how rich and beautiful was its colour, how perfect was its roundness. It was an admirable thing and altogether precious. When he took it out he had intended to fling it from him into the very hottest part of the fire. But he found now that he could not do so ...!'

This is at the very start of Frodo's adventure, before the Ring has worked its way into his soul, but even at this point it has started to exercise its mastery over him. When, three volumes later, he must release the Ring altogether by casting it into the Crack of Doom, he cannot do so unaided. For the longer the Ring has remained in Frodo's possession, the greater has become its authority over him.

Of course there is no Ring, no miraculous phials, no Mithril armour. But if there were, one can imagine the Treasurer, during Cabinet meetings, in Parliament, in private discussions, eyeing it, coveting its beauty and richness, even, from time to time, reaching a hand out for it. Almost involuntarily. Imagine the icy grip the Ring might have taken on Peter Costello's heart and ambition.

Imagine the battle for the House on the Hill — as bloody a battle as the battle at Isengard, (although Ents will probably not attend). And at its end, if the 'true believer Hobbits' do finally get to put their hairy feet up in the castle's banqueting hall while they down a few butter beers and admire the sullen glint of the One Ring on their leader's hand, perhaps there'll still be a small, lost, bespectacled figure roaming the corridors, muttering to himself, 'Gollum, Gollum.'

Upgrading ourselves towards obsolescence

TECHNOLOGY

James Massola



'Modern consumer society is structured so that we are constantly unhappy with what we have. Advertisers make us feel dissatisfied so we keep buying new things, which is good for the economy but bad for the environment. Consumers collaborate in this wastefulness by being fooled into thinking that they can fill the inner void by consuming.' - Clive Hamilton

About a month ago I got a new mobile phone. I like to imagine that I am not a 'phone person' — I won't answer a phone when in the middle of a conversation, I relish putting it on silent, and I occasionally still leave the house without it. However like most people these days, I'm fairly beholden to it.

This new phone had all the bells, whistles, and things I-never-knew-I-needed-but-now-would-find-changed-my-life. To wit, an address book big enough to hold the population of Panama (3.19million according to the [CIA](#)), colour screen the size of the Jumbotron, 6 air bags, 8 cup holders, flux capacitor... |you get the idea.

I was amazed at all of these features. A call to Clive Hamilton at the [Australia Institute](#) revealed I was not the only person wondering 'why all the techno-wizardry?'

As Mr Hamilton put it, 'Until companies start thinking in terms of what might be a more environmentally sound approach to building new products, I fear we will be stuck with this interminable 'upgrade or be obsolete' mentality.'

When it came time to charge the phone, I discovered my old charger did not fit my new phone. Imagine my surprise. Both were made by Nokia, one was two years older than the other. Thankfully there was a new charger in the box.

I examined the point of the new charger. It was around one-one-millionth of a percent smaller than the old charger, thus utterly unusable. Why?

I'm not trying to single out Nokia. The phone could have been a Sony Ericsson, a Motorola or a Samsung. Mobile phone makers have taken a lot of heat in recent

years from consumer groups and governments about being environmentally responsible.

A call to Nokia, followed by some browsing on the homepage, revealed a plethora of 'corporate responsibility' type statements, environmental reports, information on how to recycle one's old phone and the like. But what about my charger? In one fell swoop, the ten chargers I had accumulated, inherited, and purchased over the years were rendered useless lumps of plastic.

This got me thinking about other technology companies. Apple is the darling of our new media age. Its iPod, music store, 'digital lifestyle solutions' and computers are the *sine qua non* of chic designers, pedantic publishers and posing pussies everywhere. But are they enviro-friendly?



After a series of phone calls, I received an email from John Marx, a public relations executive at Apple, in response to my questions about recycling older computers, long-term disposal of discontinued products, and how Apple could justify releasing products that were not 'backwards compatible.'

His reply, in part;

'On a global basis Apple has a strong environmental track record and has led the industry in restricting and banning toxic substances such as mercury, cadmium and hexavalent chromium, as well as many BFRs (brominated flame retardants). We have also completely eliminated CRT monitors, which contain lead, from our product line. Apple desktops, notebooks and displays each score best-in-class in the new EPA ranking system EPEAT, which uses international standards set by IEEE. Further details on EPEAT and Apple offerings can be found [here](#).'

This did not really answer my questions. While John, and Apple were making the right noises, I felt they were sidestepping. A follow up email elicited no response. Behind the terminology and the policies John had not told me much. The absence of comment on the 'upgrade cycle', or forced obsolescence by another name, bothered me in particular

When Apple released its fifth generation iPod, it switched the 'plug-in bit' from the top to the bottom. By doing this, just about every aftermarket accessory made for older iPods was pushed into obsolescence.

According to the well-known technology website, CNET.com.au, \$1.05billion was spent on accessories for the iPod last year — and that excludes internet sales. One-man-and-dog operations have grown exponentially on the back of this expansion. Accessories are big business. By changing the design, Apple delivered an instant cash cow to the third party manufacturers who support it.

So how is one to break the cycle of forced obsolescence if the financial benefits are so strong for manufactures and retailers? Consumer goods and electronics are no longer made to last. For manufacturers, the ideal consumer is the individual who must have the 'latest-and-greatest' every year or two (or perhaps even sooner). But what if we resist?

If you can, step outside the 'upgrade cycle', think about what you are purchasing, and if you really need it. We as a society need to stop and think about all the landfills and waste dumps which are soon to hold our broken-down electronic paraphernalia.

Politicians should not put people in jail

POLITICS

Brian Toohey



Politicians should not put people in jail. Nor should they override a court decision to grant bail. If police or prosecutors inadvertently make a terrible blunder, due incompetence or zealotry, they should correct it at the first available opportunity. These would seem fairly uncontroversial propositions. But not, it seems, once someone is tainted by a whiff of any alleged connection to terrorism.

Despite the fact that crucial information provided to a court has since proved false, the Immigration Minister, Kevin Andrews, says he has no intention of reviewing his decision to incarcerate Dr Mohamed Haneef in an immigration detention centre. His decision was taken one hour after a magistrate granted Haneef bail on a charge of recklessly (but not knowingly) assisting a terrorist group by giving a used SIM card from a mobile phone in mid-2006 to one of his second cousins in the UK. Haneef, who was employed on a work visa at a Gold Coast hospital, told police he was leaving the UK and his cousin wanted the unused credit on the card.

The Australian Federal Police (AFP) now admits that, contrary to the claim the prosecution put to the court, the SIM card was not in a jeep used in a failed attack on Glasgow airport on 30 June this year. An official transcript clearly contradicts other purported facts in an AFP statement tendered to the court about what Haneef told police when interviewed after his arrest. But the AFP refuses to say if it will inform the court about these errors, or reveal when it first knew that the information about the SIM card was false.

A spokesperson for Andrews says there is no need for him to review his decision to lock Haneef up, because he acted on advice from the AFP which contained other information. It is understood that a classified annex contains information from the British police about their reasons for suspecting that two of Haneef's cousins in the UK may be involved in terrorist activities, or at least have knowledge of such activities. Apparently, the annex does not contain any new material clearly incriminating Haneef in the provision of assistance to a terrorist group. However, all

the law requires [Andrews to decide](#) is that Haneef is of bad character because he has associated with people reasonably suspected of criminal behavior.

The only reason the young Indian doctor is currently incarcerated in an immigration centre, perhaps for several years until his trial is completed, is that he opted to stay in a Queensland jail rather than post the relatively low \$10,000 for bail set by a Brisbane magistrate.

The use of this extraordinary ministerial prerogative is not unique to the Haneef case. But it is normally exercised after someone has been convicted, not when a trial has just begun. Astonishingly, John Howard was still insisting as recently as Monday that his government had no role in the whole affair, despite the fact that a member of his cabinet had clearly overturned a court ruling on bail.



The ministerial prerogative exercised by Andrews should not exist. If we are to pay more than lip service to principles that can be traced back 800 years to the *Magna Carta*, executive governments must not exercise judicial powers. Only courts should be allowed to imprison people for more than few days.

The law should be changed so ministers can't jail people. A possible exception is if someone spends a night in a detention centre before being deported. Even so, the decision to deport should be taken by an independent tribunal, not a politician who can be construed as having a political motive to appear tough on terrorism.

Changing this law may be easier than ridding sections of the AFP, the prosecuting authorities and the Attorney Generals department of a dangerous mix of incompetence and zealotry whenever the slightest prospect arises of nailing a terrorist. The ability to reason from established facts, to follow the rules of elementary logic, and to accept innocent explanations for perfectly normal behaviour, seems to vanish when the word 'terrorism' is uttered.

There is no excuse for the errors now revealed in the police statement to the court, or in the prosecutor's false claim that Haneef's SIM card was present at the scene of terrorist act. In each case, it was easy to check where the truth lay.

These initial mistakes were compounded by a report in the latest edition of Brisbane's *Sunday Mail* that police now suspect that Haneef was part of a plot to blow up the largest building on the Gold Coast and symbolically leave Australia on September 11. Initially, the AFP refused to confirm or deny this report. After the Queensland premier, Peter Beattie angrily demand an explanation in view of the assurances he had been given in briefings that there was no threat anyone on the Gold Coast, the AFP Commissioner, Mick Keelty, said the report was wrong. He also that

the AFP was not the source. If so, the source would appear to be someone else at an official level who was happy to release false information designed to damage Haneef and alarm Queenslanders. As far as is known, there is no investigation underway to identify the source.

Shortly after Haneef was charged on 14 July, Keelty, held a media conference where he assured the public that the investigation, “has been driven by the evidence and driven by the facts”. Although hundreds of police were assigned to the investigation, this claim is demonstrably hollow. But no one in the federal government, or opposition, has expressed any concern that the over-eager behaviour of the police, prosecutors and ministers risks further radicalising Islamic youth.

Terrorism involves the ancient crime of murder. Haneef is not charged with murdering anyone, attempting to murder anyone, failing to tell the police about a planned murder, or knowingly assisting anyone to commit murder. If ministers and officials don’t want to encourage the recruitment of more terrorists, they should take far more care to ensure that a charge of unknowingly assisting a terrorist group is only laid on the basis of clearly established facts.

What to do about Mugabe

INTERNATIONAL

Peter Roebuck



Towering rage is the only legitimate reaction to the latest outrage in the benighted, despoiled, corrupted, starving, bankrupt nation known as Zimbabwe. The cold blooded killing of an opposition activist, in Highfields, a high density suburb in Harare, and the shooting of mourners at his wake was merely the latest excess of an evil dictatorship.

A similar tale is told by the arrest and bashing to the point of death of opposition leaders at a prayer meeting organised by the Save Zimbabwe Coalition, a group of patriots committed to old fashioned causes such as justice, democracy and the rule of law. Meanwhile, the half-witted talk about such sops as cricket boycotts, and the puffy-chested pursue democracy by landing bombs upon civilians.

Matters came to a head in Zimbabwe on Sunday. Alas, Mugabe and his Mercedes-driving apologists have more heads than hydra. Political gatherings have long since been banned by the dictatorship. Mugabe's crazed isolation has become more marked in recent weeks as doctors and teachers downed tools to protest about low pay. Inflation had passed 1,000% and rifts were reported in Zanu PF, a party consisting of lame ducks whose strength nowadays lies in the rural areas where elections are easier to fix. To retain power and live longer, Mugabe has transformed his supposedly beloved country into a peasant society ruled by a rich elite. Sales of luxury cars are booming even as the economy collapses.

Despite the dictator's control of the airwaves, newspapers, courts and food distribution, and the best efforts of the dreaded, ubiquitous and brutal secret police (CIO), the struggle for democracy has continued unabated. Although the opposition party split into two factions over the issue of taking part in rigged senate elections, the desire to be rid of the tyrant has not wavered. Human rights lawyers, civil action groups, church leaders, and women's groups have carried on the fight. It has not been easy. Mugabe and his soldiers will stop at nothing to retain power. The snouts are deep in the trough.

Accordingly, the Save Zimbabwe Coalition decided to hold not a political meeting

but a prayer meeting in Highfields. Zimbabwe is a religious country full of churches and outstanding schools. Even some Zanu PF leaders feign allegiance to christian ideals. Mugabe has managed to secure the appointment of some tame and bribeable Bishops. Nevertheless, the Catholic Church especially has joined the women and labour unions in their defiance. Indeed the opposition has much in common with Solidarity in Poland, except that it lacks a focal point and a charismatic leader.

Of course the State was not prepared at this dangerous hour to allow a meeting of any sort to take place, least of all a gathering to be attended by struggle luminaries such as the leaders of the two MDC factions, Morgan Tsvangiri, Arthur Mutambara, and the Chairperson of the NCA, Dr. Lovemore Madhuku. Therefore they broke up the meeting with bullets and beatings, killing Gift Tandari, arresting 30-40 activists, hauling them off to various police stations and torture chambers, thrashing them till they could scarcely breathe and then denying them access to doctors or lawyers.

Meanwhile a democratically elected South African government supposedly concerned about the lot of the common man continues to twiddle its thumbs. Meanwhile, food supplied by charities is used as a political tool, with sacks of rice sent to Zanu PF areas and the rest left to fend for themselves. Meanwhile the population dwindles as the desperate seek opportunities elsewhere, many taking the risk of crossing the Limpopo River that forms the border with South Africa, a stretch of water infested with crocodiles and ruthlessly guarded by soldiers. Meanwhile Mugabe's cricketing representatives stay in posh hotels in the Caribbean, paying their young players a pittance and shamelessly taking care of themselves.



Of course the West had it coming. Hardly a harsh word has heard in the mid 1980's when Mugabe's fifth brigade crushed an imagined uprising in Matabeleland, slaughtering tens of thousands of mostly Ndebeles, stuffing their corpses down disused gold mines. At around the same time the Sinhalese were murdering the Tamils in Colombo as the government turned a blind eye. No-one said much about that either.

Zimbabwe is a wonderful country blessed with a multitude of outstanding people. The same can be said of other African countries. What can be done? Mugabe has been hailed a hero and draws attention away from his infamy with anti-colonial sloganeering. Moreover he has been close with Gaddafi, whose influence on the continent President Mbeki feared above all else.

Ultimately Africa must take care of its own. What else has worked? Mbeki must stop backing a wicked regime (but he also faces losing votes at home, and leaving the ANC in the hands of populists) Everyone must pray for Mugabe's death (but his mother reached three figures). At present the best response is to help those seeking

justice and to assist those promoting education, thereby sustaining hope for a better tomorrow.

Along with a few friends, I have formed a charity called the [LBW Trust](#) which gives needy and deserving youngsters a chance to pursue tertiary studies. Already we are paying college fees for thirty impoverished Zimbabweans and we plan to uplift Sudanese, Somali and other settlers in Melbourne and elsewhere. Everyone deserves a chance. The warLords must not be allowed to cripple the young. Educate the child and the adult will take care of himself.

Flying with disability in Second Life

GAMING

Margaret Cassidy



The virtual world [Second Life](#) has had a lot of bad press recently in Australia that has focused on the narcissistic and unprincipled behaviour of some of its inhabitants. Nearly six million people have joined Linden Lab's Second Life since it went public in 2003 and there are currently 1.75 million 'active' members who have logged on in the last two months.

As a 3D virtual world, everything that exists in this virtual world — objects, buildings, clothes, land — has been created by the residents. Amid all the bad press, it is sometimes overlooked that Second Life also offers a very positive experience to people, especially with regard to understanding disabilities and offering opportunities to those with disabilities.

As a student Niels Schuddeboom travelled to Australia and was a reporter in Sydney for the 2000 Paralympic Games. Based in the university city of Utrecht in the Netherlands, he is confined to a wheelchair and was forced to drop out of his media course due to an uncompromising academic regime that was unable to work around his physical disabilities.

Known as Niles Sopor in Second Life, Niels has found an opportunity to forget his disability and experience walking life through his avatar. 'Perhaps the most profound difference I have experienced is that people have treated me differently' he said. 'In real life, due to my wheelchair and lack of physical coordination, people often regard me as intellectually as well as physically disabled.'

In the Netherlands it is unusual for people with physical disabilities to have jobs and there is a culture of protecting them from many aspects of life. Second Life has offered Niels the opportunity to break the mould. He runs his own company as a consultant on communications and new media.

Some companies are now using Second Life to experiment with alternative marketing campaigns. As well as offering commercial opportunities, Second Life has also provided Niels with the tools to express himself in artistic ways denied him in real life. He has, for example, been able to hold a camera in Second Life and take

photos and make short movies.

Australian David Wallace, a quadriplegic who works as an IT coordinator at the South Australian Disability Information and Resource Centre in Adelaide has also found an outlet for his artistic side in Second Life. He recently held an exhibition of his Second Life art at the [building](#) that Illinois-based Bradley University have established on Information Island. Unlike Niels, David wanted to buy a wheelchair when he first entered Second Life and couldn't find one! He has tried to build one in Second Life but has only had [limited success](#).



David has found people to be very inclusive in Second Life, commenting on his blog, 'You've got all sorts of weird looking people in there, but everyone I've met seems to get along and be accepting.' British Second Lifer and cerebral palsy sufferer Simon Stevens (aka Simon Walsh in SL) has also kept his wheelchair, carrying it when [he dances](#) in Wheelies, the nightclub he operates in Second Life.

Able-bodied FEZ Rutherford has created the blog [2ndisability](#) to record his work on developing applications for use in Second Life that replicate for the user the sensory experience of a first life physical disability. For example, he has developed applications that replicate various symptoms of different forms of blindness and cerebral palsy.



Not all visitors to his blog or people who meet him in Second Life understand that Fez is trying to comprehend how it might feel to be disabled. He has described this need to find out firsthand how others experience the world.

'Where I come from students sometimes do social projects at school. One kind of project is that they go to town in wheelchairs (although not disabled) and try to realise what kind of problems persons bound to a wheelchair face every day.' Now other visitors to Second Life have been able to share these experiences.

Rowella James was the first visitor to try out the blindness application and she found, 'The blindness was very disorientating to say the least. The weird thing was that for me the speech bubbles were gone too, so I could only see what was being said when I had the history window open. Of course moving around in that state is not advisable as there is no way of guiding yourself by audio or touch. The stuttering caused a bit of confusion at first for the person I was talking to, but once they understood what was going on they didn't have any problems with it.'

Others imagine that virtual reality will begin to play an important role in banishing the loneliness, isolation and depression that is all too often part of ageing as

well as playing a big role for people either living with diseases that make them housebound or with permanent disabilities.

Hip-pocket implications of real jobs in remote communities

COLUMNS

The Meddling Priest

Frank Brennan

The Commonwealth Parliament has now passed five bills described as the national emergency response to child sexual abuse on Aboriginal communities in the Northern Territory. It was law making at Canberra's worst. The 600 page bills were introduced and passed through the House of Representatives in less than a day.



They were subject to just a one-day committee review process in the Senate. When government does not have recourse to an elected Aboriginal consultative body, when the government controls the Senate, and when there is an election in the air with an Opposition that refuses to be wedged on non-economic policy issues, there is little prospect of close parliamentary scrutiny of bold new policy proposals for Aboriginal well-being emanating from Canberra.

A central plank of the original proposal was to ensure ... compulsory health checks for all Aboriginal children to identify and treat health problems and any effects of abuse.... The initial announcement of the government initiative was so rushed that it took only the most rudimentary consultation with the medical profession to highlight how unethical, unworkable and harmful compulsory health checks would be.

The government claimed to be acting urgently, without consultation with the NT government and NT Aboriginal leaders, in response to the NT report 'Little Children are Sacred'. And yet the authors of that report had said, ... In the first recommendation, we have specifically referred to the critical importance of governments committing to genuine consultation with Aboriginal people in designing initiatives for Aboriginal communities. ... The authors of the report were not invited to give evidence to the Senate committee even though they travelled to Canberra and were in Parliament House.

Those concerned for the well-being of abused children, but not prepared to take the Commonwealth government's intervention on trust, asked for credible explanations why it was necessary for the Commonwealth to acquire land leases over

Aboriginal community lands for five years. Everyone knew that compulsory acquisition of Aboriginal land without reason and without consultation would engender mistrust in those local Aboriginal leaders whose cooperation would be essential if any Canberra initiative were to succeed.

Minister Mal Brough told Parliament, ...œWe cannot allow the improvements that have to occur to the physical state of these places to be delayed through red tape and vested interests in this emergency period. Under normal circumstances in remote communities, just providing for the clean-up and repair of houses on the scale that we are confronted with could well take years if not decades. The children cannot wait that long....

We are now entering a new phase in Aboriginal policy. It is not just about protecting the children. Canberra has decided to try a new way of involving Aborigines in remote communities in the real economy, and a new way of delivering health, education and law and order services. The real policy work for this new era will commence in earnest in 2008, no matter which party is in power in Canberra.



Before the 1960s, Aborigines participated in the north Australian economy without land rights, without self-determination, and without equal wages. The second phase of participation was built upon equal wages with welfare taking up the shortfall, and land rights, with remote communities and outstations being established without a real economy or access to the usual government services.

With the Community Development Employment Program (CDEP), 8,000 Aborigines on these NT communities have been paid the equivalent of the dole for working a few days a week. In this new third phase, 2,000 of these people will be paid real wages for real work. And the rest? They will have to seek employment and job training like other Australians. Where? How? There will be two classes of Aborigines in remote Australia — those with jobs and those with no prospect of employment or training in their home communities.

In the last 20 years, the Aboriginal population in NT remote communities has grown by approximately 40 per cent. 72 per cent of the Territory's Aboriginal population lives on Aboriginal land outside major towns. 54 per cent of these communities do not have a local health clinic and 94 per cent are without preschools.

Here now is the problem which has been escalating since land rights were first granted and recognised. No matter what the politicians say at a time of emergency, it is not cost effective to deliver the full panoply of human services to small remote communities. The acute problem now is that the children in such communities cannot be guaranteed protection from sexual predators by either the state or by their own community members.

Once the dust settles on the present political flurry, there will have to be a negotiated process for determining the viability of outstations and small remote communities. Taxpayers will not stand for delivering the full panoply of services to every community, no matter how small. There will be a need for detailed government cooperation with groups like the Coalition of Aboriginal Organisations.

Public servants can be sent to remote communities to deliver services; police can be sent to enforce the law; but there will be no long-term satisfaction for anyone in commissioning outsiders to live in communities simply to monitor family obligations before quarantining welfare payments. This third phase will cost big money and will entail significant relocation of the Aboriginal population in northern Australia. Real jobs and real services don't come cheap in remote Australia, regardless of the community's racial identity.

Children's publishing fuelled by nostalgia?

LITERATURE

Hilary Rogers

A strange and rare thing happened the other day: a real live child was seen in the offices of a children's publisher. Little Louis wasn't there for an editorial meeting or to discuss the cover design for our latest series. Actually he spent the whole time wriggling around and trying to ingest staples. But his presence did start me thinking about the adult-filled world that is children's publishing.



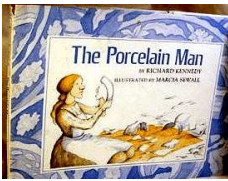
If kids were running our publishing house, lift-the-flap books wouldn't be about finding the fat controller, they'd be about finding the hidden chocolates; Miffy would hand out free ice-creams instead of playing peek-a-boo; and Zac Power would take you on his thrilling missions and then give you his iPod to keep.

Kids can't make all the decisions, not least because every day would be spent at the zoo or on the computer, each meal would begin with hot chips, and bedtime would never, ever come.

There's nothing radical about an industry run by one group for another; children's publishing isn't unique in this way. Pet food is not made by or marketed to our furry friends—although a feline-run factory (powered entirely by the underclass that is the canine species, of course) would be very clean. The managers would spend the day dozing in the sun and hissing when anyone came into the office.

Of course kids' books need to be made by adults. But this inevitably gives rise to a certain generational tension. We were all kids once, and most of us like to think that it wasn't such a long time ago. More to the point, most of us like to think that kids today are just like we were—only with better computer skills and worse table manners.

It's understandable, then, that children's publishing is often fuelled by nostalgia. There's something very reassuring about the idea that what we loved to read will still appeal to kids now. Choosing a brand of food for our pets is less fraught—if any of us were dogs in past lives, most of us can't recall it—and we are going to make a more or less rational decision based on price, ingredients and the cuteness of the ad.



Does it really matter that I was a kid before googling was a daily addiction, when terrorism was what the boys did in class when the teacher wasn't looking, and a treat was a carob-coated muesli bar? If I loved the adventures of Enid Blyton and the poems of AA Milne, why shouldn't my child also exclaim *raa-ther* at opportune moments and giggle at the idea that James James Morrison Morrison took great care of his mother, though he was only three?

When I was little my favourite picture book was *The Porcelain Man*. I recently bought a tatty copy on oldandrarebooks.com. When the parcel arrived I felt like a kid again — and in my excitement managed to overlook the lack of brown paper and string. I hadn't seen the book for more than 20 years, and was surprised to remember that it was illustrated entirely in pale blues and browns. (The commissioning editor in me did the sums on a two-colour hardback—hmmm, nice costing.)

Now that I work in children's publishing, what could be more tempting than to make books just like the ones I used to read and love? Have things really changed so much since my milk-moustached, flares-without-irony days?

I want nothing more than to read *The Porcelain Manto* to my son, and have him love it as I did. But when I was growing up in the UK, I only knew one girl who mysteriously didn't have a father, and all the kids in my class were white. It might not have been so long ago, but it's worlds away from what most kids are experiencing now. I can't presume to know what will be going on in my son's head when he trots off to school, where there are as many kids with African backgrounds as British, and where some of his friends have two mums.

But this is the challenge of children's publishing. Our own childhoods are a good start, but that's all they are. No Brothers Grimm ever tackled multiculturalism, and Dr Seuss never had to find something to rhyme with blended family. Nostalgia cannot shape a publishing program that will really resonate with kids, although it's a relief that there are more charmed, timeless exceptions than I could name (witches still have blue spit, it's worth checking the back of any wardrobe for secret passages, and green eggs and ham will always be off the menu).



Ultimately, we need to listen, not just remember. Books have to compete with Foxtel and Playstation in a way that they used to compete with roller-skating and Dynasty re-runs for me. I'd love to think the books we are making now might one day belong in that charmed, timeless exceptions section, but first I'd like to make books that kids love now. I won't put chocolate under those flaps, but it's tempting.

No place for truth in citizenship training school?

POLITICS

Erasmus



It's an ordinary day at the Citizenship Traditional School...

Mr Chips: You have done admirably well, Ranesh, on the rivers, the animals, the flowers and the Prime Minister. Now turn to the next question. What do we call the heads of state governments?

Ranesh: Dickheads, sir, at least that's what all my mates at work call them.

Mr Chips: Nothing your mates might say surprises me, Ranesh. But the correct title is premiers. Remember it. Next, tell me where did the first European settlers to Australia come from?

Ranesh: Well, I suppose most of them came from England. But can we be sure that some of them did not really come from Ireland?

Mr Chips: You are always splitting hairs, Ranesh. They came from England. Where did they come from? England. Remember the answer. Next question: which is the most popular sport in Australia — cricket, table tennis, water polo or ice hockey.

Ranesh: It's got to be out of table tennis and cricket, Sir. In my brother's school everybody plays table tennis and hardly anybody plays cricket. Same with my friends. So table tennis must be the most popular.

Mr Chips: Nonsense, Ranesh. Only nerds play table tennis. Popular means what sponsors pay big money for on television. The correct answer is cricket.

Ranesh: But is that what popular really means, Sir? If this is a test for citizenship, shouldn't they encourage us to use English accurately?

Mr Chips: Don't be insolent, Ranesh. Your previous schools have made you think too much. This is a traditional school and insists that you give right answers, not ask questions. Now concentrate on the next questions about values. Tell me which of these are Australian values? Men and women are equal, a fair go, mateship, or all of them?

Ranesh: I don't think a fair go can be an Australian value, Sir. They dumped my Uncle Vinu on Nauru. And Workchoices certainly isn't fair. And in the streets people seem scared of one another — they only behave like mates when they're drunk. So

mateship can't be an Australian value. So the Australian value must be that men and women are equal. But ... |

Mr Chips: Ranesh, I told you to concentrate, not to think. They are all Australian values. The Government has said so, and that's that.

Ranesh: But isn't truth an Australian value? Our granny told us never to give untrue answers to Australian officials. And can they really be Australian values if the Government doesn't pay any attention to them ... | OK, sorry sir, I'll try not to think any more.

Mr Chips: Good man, Ranesh, you're learning our Australian ways. Last question, then. What are Australia's values based on: the Koran, the Judaeo-Christian tradition, Catholicism or Secularism? Quick!

Ranesh: We studied a lot about values at my school, Sir. But it's not easy to answer the question. I don't think any of the answers are accurate. Greek philosophers like Plato, Roman law and Roman speakers like Cicero have all helped shape our values. And none of the answers include them. So whichever answer I give will be untrue.



Mr Chips: Don't be difficult. It's the Judaeo-Christian tradition, and traditions can include anything you like to put in them. Those chaps you mentioned were honorary Christians.

Now Ranesh I've told you before, and I'll say it for the last time, these citizenship questions are about Australian values. They're not about truth or being accurate or wondering. Our business at the Citizenship Traditional school is to help you pass the traditional Government tests in literacy and numeracy. Numeracy means that you must answer half the questions to pass, and literacy means you need to remember what the right answer to each question is. Now take the questions home and memorise the right answers.

Ranesh: If you say so, Sir.

A key role for Australia in Burma's democratisation

INTERNATIONAL

Tony Kevin



Following dramatic street protests that came frustratingly close to creating enough public momentum to potentially topple the military-authoritarian regime, Burma seems to have returned to the cruel status quo ante of a cowed population suffering ruthless repression. But is the democracy genie truly back in the bottle? Have the oppressed Burmese people nothing to look forward to but more of the same police-state monitoring and intimidation?

There is one hopeful sign of possible change. Last week, all 15 UN Security Council members agreed a non-binding UNSC presidential statement on Myanmar. The text 'strongly deplores the use of violence against peaceful demonstrators in Myanmar' and calls on Myanmar's military regime and all other parties concerned 'to work together toward a de-escalation of the situation and a peaceful solution'.

This statement is an important benchmark. First, because of its strength and clarity. Second, because it is the first time the UNSC has taken a formal position on Burma; China and Burma having hitherto argued successfully that it is an internal matter outside the council's mandate. Third, because China, the Burmese regime's strongest international protector, endorsed this statement after weeks of negotiating to soften earlier harsher Western drafts.

What persuaded China to support such strong criticism of its client regime? The ferocity of the repression, the victimisation of Buddhist monks, the sharp international distress at events, the forthcoming leadership transitions in China, and next year's Olympic Games in Beijing — all may have played a part in inducing China to ease its hitherto implacable position.

Now, there can be no going back from the new UNSC benchmark. From now on, the UN will have enhanced leverage to press for dialogue between Aung San Suu Kyi and the military leadership, and for more protection of the human rights of peaceful protesters. Out of this, democratisation can begin to take root in Burma.

In some ways, Burma today reminds me of that key moment in Polish history in the mid-1980s, after a bloody suppression of Solidarity strikes in the Gdansk

shipyards. Under pressure from a horrified West, the regime agreed to enter into a structured dialogue with Solidarity. Poland moved from iron-fist repression to a softer, more subtle repressive style. Ten years later, an ascendant Solidarity, backed by the Church, negotiated a peaceful transfer of power from a morally bankrupt communist regime.

That kind of future is foreseeable in Burma, but it will require years of determined but sensitive diplomacy, not only by the UNSC but also by China and other interested states — most importantly, the ASEANs and other regional countries like Japan, India and, oddly enough, Australia.

It seems unlikely the US will have a part to play. China is in no mood to tolerate lectures in democracy from its rival for hegemony and from a power that regularly violates human rights norms in the Middle East. In China's eyes, the US simply does not have moral standing in Burma.

The task for regional countries and Australia would be to dialogue with China from a different starting point; one that accepts the major strategic importance of Burma to China. For Burma is a glacis protecting China's vulnerable southern flank. It is also a trade access area to the Indian Ocean (including possible future oil transshipments from friendly Middle Eastern countries, if passage through the Straits of Malacca were ever threatened by a hostile US). And it is a resources-rich hinterland.

So for China it is strategically vital that no anti-Chinese regime under US influence ever be established in Burma. Such an outcome is simply not negotiable.

What is achievable is a gradual softening of the harder edges of the regime — some dialogue on human rights with opposition elements, more freedom in IT applications, more scope for legal opposition politics, and the acceptance of greater foreign investment to raise employment opportunities and living standards.

One is struck by the diversity of China's relationship with bordering states or autonomous regions. These relationships include frankly tributary relationships, like North Korea, Hong Kong, Tibet and Laos. Yet each is very different in character. Then there are non-tributary relationships like Japan, South Korea, Mongolia, Russia, the former Soviet Central Asian republics, Pakistan, India, Nepal, Vietnam ... and the troubled relationship with Taiwan.

The point is, there is no single model, but many models Burma might aspire to, as a democratic contiguous state that accepts a degree of Chinese hegemony. The trick would be to persuade China that it can both have its cake and eat it in Burma.

Perhaps next year Kevin Rudd might help open up Chinese thinking on Burma? He has the expertise and standing to do so. It could be the first example in many years

(since the UNTAC settlement in Cambodia) of a successful Australian regional diplomacy involving Chinese interests.

Playwrights finger reality missed by politicians

BOOK REVIEW

Richard Flynn

Power Plays: Australian Theatre and the Public Agenda, Hilary Glow
Sydney: Currency Press, 2007, PB, RRP \$32.95 ISBN:
978-0-86819-815-6 [website](#)

'We don't want our artists to be lecturing us about what's wrong with the world. We want to be transported to another world' — Franklin, in Stephen Sewell's 2006 play, *It Just Stopped*.

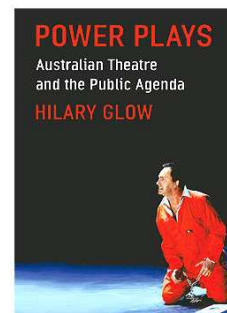
As Australians wait for a Federal election, Hilary Glow's book is timely evidence that what is wrong with the world is what politicians would have us believe. Controlling agendas is what they do — assisted by battalions of media advisers, 'in the wings' as it were, the doctors of dishonesty, the specialists of spin. But there are 'countervailing voices' out there that will not be so easily silenced.

Somewhere in the chatter, phrases such as 'core Australian values', 'a nation united', 'the stolen generation', 'children overboard', 'the Pacific solution', 'protecting our borders' and 'refugees' are bandied around. Not to mention 'the war on terror'.

Should we be afraid? Well, not so much of 'these people' (John Howard's dismissive term for asylum-seekers and refugees in general; also the title of Ben Ellis's play written in 2003) as of those who would argue we need protection. And they want to decide the degree. 'We're from the government and we're here to help.' But who, exactly?

In *Power Plays: Australian Theatre and the Public Agenda*, Hilary Glow examines contemporary writers whose work in the past decade or so has been staged by mainstream companies like Melbourne Theatre Company, State Theatre Company of South Australia, Sydney Theatre Company, Queensland Theatre Company, and Black Swan Theatre of West Australia. The writers are Andrew Bovell, Patricia Cornelius, Reg Cribb, Ben Ellis, Wesley Enoch, Hannie Rayson, Stephen Sewell and Katherine Thomson. But others, including film makers, find a place in the discussion as well.

While the plays are about power and its abuse, the book's particular focus is the



ends to which characters will go — on both sides of the argument — in wielding the power they have. As always, the stated purpose is rarely the real agenda. It will be no surprise then, for any lover of theatre, and even those who get their news (and too often their opinions) from TV and newspapers alone, that John Howard and his cohort cop most of the flak.

It's no accident that the last dozen or so years have seen Australian playwrights, both indigenous and white, re-emerging, no longer confined to theatre on the fringes, but now the mainstream. That development is significant.

Each writer wrestles with the issues seen as crucial to the notion of who we *really* are as Australians in the 21st century. This fast-tracks them to the firing line as never before. Their material is unpalatable to government, the 'big end of town', and many other citizens 'relaxed and comfortable' with the status quo. The plays hammer the issues that won't go away simply because 'nobody sees them as issues any more — just leftist beat-ups'.

But the playwrights do not have it all their own way. Attacks came from the likes of *Herald Sun* columnist, Andrew Bolt, who, in 2005, launched several tirades on *Two Brothers*, a play by Hannie Rayson, based on the sinking and huge loss of lives of the SIEV X. Bolt's reactions were triggered no doubt by the tone of the play, but he devoted his bile to an unconscionable *ad hominem* onslaught on Rayson herself, a recipient of grants from the public purse. But others in the media were kinder.

Chapter headings might suggest a dull read: 'Political Theatre', 'Indigenous Identities', 'The History Wars', 'The Politics of Place', 'Globalisation and Class', 'Fortress Australia' and 'The War on Terror'. But that would be wrong. This is a carefully researched, well written analysis. If you have been fortunate enough to see on stage any of the plays discussed (such as *Holy Day*, *Last Cab to Darwin*, *Falling Petals*, *Two Brothers*, *Myth*, *Propaganda and Disaster in Nazi Germany and Contemporary America*), you are twice blessed.

Hilary Glow interviewed the eight key playwrights and others besides. Of the process, she writes: 'Each discussed their own work and was asked to reflect on its engagement with contemporary public debates. The key and common feature of their self-definition is that they understand their work as explicitly "political" in the sense that they are engaged in the task of "challenging systems of power" ... | a commitment to bringing discovered truth to the people.'

This gives the book an authority and sense of immediacy not possible when dealing with writers of the past, although their contributions too are acknowledged.

Theatregoers in particular will enjoy this look at a slice of contemporary Australian theatre and its take on a range of issues; if you're John Howard (or Andrew Bolt)

however, you might be less than thrilled.

Wilberforce film points to task of modern abolitionists

FILM REVIEW

Tim Kroenert

Amazing Grace: 118 minutes. Rated: PG. Director: Michael Apted. Starring: Ioan Gruffudd, Albert Finney, Michael Gambon, Benedict Cumberbatch, [website](#)



This year marks the 200th anniversary of the abolition of slavery in Britain. It was a hard-won victory for the abolitionists, who, under the leadership of young politician William Wilberforce, endured 20 years of frustration in an unsympathetic parliament before a bill banning slavery was finally passed.

Wilberforce, an evangelical Christian and protégé of former slave trader turned pastor John Newton, was motivated in this quest by his deep religious faith. But Michael Apted, the director of the Wilberforce biopic *Amazing Grace*, insists that in telling this story he was more interested in politics than in preaching and prayer. 'To me, what's exciting about Wilberforce is that he was a man who had spiritual beliefs, and was very uncompromising about them, but nonetheless lived in the political world and had a lot of political acumen', says Apted. 'I didn't want to diminish the faith of Wilberforce; that's crucial to his character. But I wanted to make the centre of the film about politics, and then use whatever else we need of his life to illuminate who he is.'

Apted already has a brief but notable track record in the realm of biopics, having previously helmed 'true stories' such as *The Coalminer's Daughter* and *Gorillas in the Mist*. He admits that when it comes to condensing a person's life into a film, a degree of artistic licence is necessary. 'All you can do is honour the spirit of the character and the spirit of the times,... he says. ...œWhat helped us with Wilberforce is that we didn't treat it as a straight biopic. We messed around with time and put the political event in the middle of it.' 'I've been looking for years to do a film about politics', he continues. 'I can't stand that politics generally gets a bad rap, although I completely understand that position. I was looking for a story that threw a different light on political action; showed it in a valuable, heroic, light. It was a very hard to find anything.' 'And then this film about Wilberforce came to me, and at the centre of it was this anti-slave trade story. I thought, well, this is a great opportunity — maybe this is what I've been looking for.'



The film captures this key period of Wilberforce's political career with a sometimes burdensome sense of romanticism. Luckily, the presence of Gruffudd as Wilberforce, plus seasoned veterans such as Finney (as Newton) and Gambon (as Whig politician Lord Fox), lends a much-needed sense of gravitas to a sometimes overwrought script.

And while the action takes place in a time long past, Apted is in no doubt his film has a great deal to say to today's world. In fact, he suggests that some scenes bear a striking resemblance to the political climate of recent years.

He cites a scene in which Wilberforce's long-time friend, Prime Minister William Pitt the younger (Cumberbatch), warns Wilberforce that he will consider disagreement to be sedition. 'That's exactly what people like Bush were saying to justify going to Iraq', says Apted. 'After September 11, Bush would say if you oppose American foreign policy to go into the Middle East, it's seditious. That's rubbish — it's ridiculous to say if you oppose someone then you're disloyal or traitorous.'

Despite an emphasis on politics, the religious elements of *Amazing Grace* are potent. Interestingly, Apted is currently in pre-production as director of *Voyage of the Dawn Treader*, the third film in the Chronicles of Narnia franchise — another story with a strong religious theme. Still, Apted insists he's not necessarily drawn to religious films. 'My challenge with both films is to get a balance, so that they will appeal to a large audience', he says. 'That was crucial for the understanding of the Wilberforce character; and with Lewis, there's a universality about it. It's not just about Christianity.'

Apted is not the only one relying on the wide appeal of the message in *Amazing Grace*. Social justice organisations around the world, under the umbrella of the Stop the Traffik campaign, will use the film to put a spotlight on the modern trade in human trafficking — which, along with drugs and arms, is one of the three biggest illegal trades in the world. 'There's no point sitting there and saying 'Great, Wilberforce defeated slavery — yippee!'' agrees Apted. 'Slavery is with us today — more powerfully than it was in Wilberforce's time. Slavery's always with us, and we should be alive to it; it isn't something that arises and is solved, and we can all get on with our lives.' 'To me, the most interesting thing about Wilberforce is his courage; he really hung on and never gave up. He gave many years of his life to this cause and [through perseverance] he pulled it off. He was a man of principle, and I think that's a good message to be sending out in the world.'

Xenia, the first safety net

POETRY

Jaya Savige

Xenia

Looking back at the introduction
to the Odyssey, I realise what I once
assumed was an encompassing theme
was in reality a brief reference.

The reference was
to Zeus as Zeus Xeinius,
Zeus the protector of strangers,
of the shipwrecked exile, the refugee.

Xenia the root, hospitality.

Xenia made perfect sense:
anyone might get wrecked on the coast
of the Mediterranean. Where then
would one be, without a gentle host?

Xeinius was what you'd call the sky boss
when without a visa or a passport
you were at a loss in another land.

Having lost the bet with fate, you'd hope
for xenia, the west's first safety net.

You'd think it was hard to forget,
even if the ocean was choking sand.

But if one never thinks themselves a guest
in a strange land, how could they intuit
the priceless of a warm welcome?

[Listen \(1060k MP3\)](#)

Dead Air

for Merlin Luck

having stitched your lips shut
with the duct
tape you snuck
past the thousand and one lenses,
boos like angry bees
echoed through the studio
stinging executives — this was calculated
premeditated murder of television —
you knew full well
and we could tell by the welling
in your glazzies
bloodshot with conviction.
no cheap angel
wings propped up your eviction.
the enraged host, a former columnist
couldn't turn to grist your most
expensive silence.
uttering no words you spoke
volumes in instants
of our vacuous entertainment
and our treatment

of those who, like
you, we locked up, then voted off
the show.

The Monastery of Sant'Onofrio

Winter is in the trees. The fountain's moss-stained
cherubs spit endlessly, rehearsing
unrequitedness, their cold lips' 'O' wrapped
around the water's soft calypso. An old wind wakes
the holly oaks, sneaks along marble,
flirts with one plump Nike
dangling, fruit-like from a bough.
What hermit lived here, disowning
his other half, paired only
with an absent god? Another gust, another decade,
the nearby basilica rising like the scalp
of serene Janiculum,
the skeleton in the fresco hinting all.
Two birds fall into the fountain.
The martyred sun will soon come down
from its cross, prised from its sky of cruel silicon.
At the base of the stairs, an impatient Vespa
blares above the Vatican traffic;
someone shouts abuse, and try as I might
I cannot confuse the sound,
cannot mistake it for a lover's call.
'the economy, stupid'
benign as Mugabe, market

forces the not-so-new
religion, set to sort all things worth sorting
through competition & the rags
promote the fight in which they're invested.
(in bed with ads, big media roll over —
the advantage of poems, perhaps)
what's left for us? the choice between two
different brands of toothpaste,
finger-on-the-pulse stuff: wouldn't want to miss the
bargain on the zeitgeist shampoo.