

Life of Riley
By Dave Riley
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Smashwords Edition

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Preface

This collection is a retrospective selection of satires I wrote in the 1990s with some dating from the following decade.

They are a topic mix mainly published in the 'Life of Riley' column in [Green Left Weekly](#) which I wrote on a weekly basis for a few years.

Some were recycled as dialogue for performance as I was also writing for street theatre troupes at the time. Some I recorded and published as part of a podcast I produced -- [The Blather](#). Some were aired on radio both here in Australia and in the United States.

They even had a fan base.

I think that their satiric quotient still exists.

Just change or ignore the proper nouns and see what continuing relevance you can muster.

I decided to publish this selection because this is what I was writing BB – [Before Blogging](#) – and in trying to get back to a conscious satiric mode I wanted to relive my past.

So looking back is good for me. I enjoyed it.

You, on the other hand, will have to make your own way as I have chosen not to offer guidance as there is not a footnote or glossary to be had in any one of these pages.

Dave Riley
August, 2011

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Me

You can take comfort in my presence

GOOD NEWS! I have entered another decade. The smiling dial that marks me out has not changed one smidgin in yonks. I'm ageless, that's what I am. I'm still the same bloke I was way back when that pic on the book cover was taken; still my dear old mother's son, the *crème de la crème* of the Highett Rileys in the prime of his wonderful life.

How can this be, you may ask. Surely one day he must be touched by cruel time?

My resilience from the toll life levies rests on a little-known feature of my existence: I'm the second son of God.

My brother you surely know. He dropped in for a while way back in BC something or other, and went on to make quite a name for himself among the locals.

Me? I'm the shy one in the family. You won't catch me getting up to the little tricks Jesus was forever performing whenever he thought he could pull a crowd. That's not for me. I'm the family intellectual. (Please note the glasses in that regard.) The thinker.

Dad's plan was to send down a sibling every thousand years or so. My sister, Eileen, who got the job for the millennium after Jesus got nailed, was burnt as a witch just as soon as she said boo.

You won't catch me as main course on a barbecue. I want to live on to a good old age (not that you will be able to tell it), thank you very much. So as far as my theological duties are concerned, I thought I'd keep them on a back burner and settle instead on well-chosen words of wisdom every now and then through my various publishing ventures.

You can't blame me. Members of my family tend to die young.

So it's OK to take comfort in my presence. You won't catch me pissing off home as soon as the authorities get nasty. No, I'm in it for the long haul. And you can forget that malarky about a heavenly reward — why do you think I want to stay on down here? Dad is so strict and dogmatic that he makes the afterlife a merry hell.

My advice to you is to do the best with what you've got.

Just don't tell Dad I told you so.

The Riot Gene

Everyone knows -- or I hope they know -- that a penchant to riot is suggestive of an underlying pathology.

Rioting -- by which I mean full-on vigorous civil disorder by disorganized rabble lashing out in a sudden and intense rash of violence against authority, property and other persons -- is not an every day occurrence.

Leastways it isn't in my family.

I can safely say that within my pedigree we have gone several generations without some family black sheep (and I grant you that we have had our share of those) taking up rock throwing as a lifestyle.

We write letters. We vote in elections. We take home our pay and make the best of it.

We grin and bear what life throws at us.

We do not riot.

Maybe we get a little testy now and then -- and think we've been hard done by. Who doesn't? But in my family, one and all share an ingrained respect for authority and the goods and chattels of others.

The seeming ready ease with which those of darker skin complexion or shallower income become obstreperous, suggests to me that they must have something volatile within them, something that may cause hot blood and *obstropolousness* (as the Greeks say).

All I can say is that we do not carry that gene.

We're accepting of our lot...unfortunately.

Riley Inc

Are you concerned about social issues and corporate ethics? Are you looking for financially sound investments that are socially responsible? Then look no further. Now you can integrate your personal values with your investment objectives.

As of today, I have capitalised on my position as a private citizen and have henceforth incorporated myself. The Riley Inc float has shaken the markets.

As one broker told the Financial Review, "This should help the local bourse climb higher. Market confidence like this is sure to lead to some positive movements in the All Ordinaries, and that's going to be good for the industrials."

This is the sort of micro-economic reform this country is crying out for. Instead of whingeing about what's wrong with the economy, you should all be joining me in corporate Australia.

Rather than hunt jobs, offer shares instead. Forget about your curriculum vitae and character references; what you need is a good prospectus.

Upward mobility is now knocking on the door of the unemployed. If a firm won't employ you then go into business yourself. Stop being an anonymous statistic by turning your life into a ledger. Make the next job you create, your own. (How does "company director" sound?)

No longer need you be stereotyped as a bludger or a bum: Once incorporated, you join an entrepreneurial community determined to get Australia working — that is, in the off chance someone ever became unemployed again.

My action was greeted ecstatically by the ACTU. The ACTU national secretary phoned me personally to offer his congratulations: "It is responsible entrepreneurs like you we have been waiting for. The rest don't seem to have what it takes. Thanks to you, we can now see the light on the hill.

"Enterprise bargaining", he told me, "is fine as far as it goes, but what we really need is more enterprise. Unfortunately, the Australian working man and woman do not get the business community they deserve. Given all that we have done for them, the boardrooms of this country have let us down and should be ashamed of themselves."

He then proclaimed passionately: "Workers of Australia, take a stand and raise your own stocks. The share market is waiting on you to show the way. Ethical investment is the hope of the world."

With such an enthusiastic endorsement, Riley Inc is sure to live up to its promise. Australian corporate profitability has come roaring back, and Riley Inc wants a share of the action. If the profit surge continues at its current rate of a thumping 22%, corporate Australia should be ready and willing to invest.

But as finance journalist, Terry McCann, asks, "The \$64 question — perhaps more exactly, the \$44 billion question — is will it?" Rest assured that Riley Inc believes that if you want something done, it is best to do it yourself. My company will be integrating my personal values with my investment objectives. Riley Inc takes its corporate responsibilities seriously and from here on in will be investing — in me.

Life of Riley: Tea for two

"Come in if you're good looking."

"I wish you wouldn't do that, mum", I said through the screen door. "I could be anyone. I don't know why I bother to knock."

But she wasn't listening. Stephanie had just learnt that Sebastian was dying.

"I should have guessed it", I said, stepping into the lounge. "You're watching your soap."

"Since you're up, make us a cuppa, will you? And I'll have a Tim Tam. They're in the cake tin on the second shelf."

There was nothing for it. I walked through to the kitchen and did her bidding.

"Let it draw a bit, love", she said from her armchair. "I like it to brew."

"You're a good boy", she said when I bought her the tray. With Home and Away over she could attend to other things. "What would I ever do without you? Oh dear, you know how I dislike drinking my tea from a mug. Never mind — at least it's hot and it's wet. How's Jill and the kids?"

"They're fine", I said. "Are you coming Sunday?"

"Of course, love. I wouldn't miss my grand-daughter's ... eh ... "

"Twelfth, mum."

"Is that it? Twelve years — it only seems like yesterday when she was born. You know, I left school when I was her age. I did. Your gran sent me out to work because we needed the money. It was common then. Not like today, eh? Pour me another cup will you?"

"No, mum", I said, refilling her mug, "not like today".

"But what have we gained? Tell me that. I worked right up to the time I married your father (God rest his soul). You've had the advantages denied us. You and your sister went on to university. And that took some doing on our part, I tell you. And you've done alright."

"Yes, mum. I've done alright."

"But what has a 12-year-old got to look forward to today? Tell me that. Schooling for what? All these educated young people and no one wants to employ them. It makes me wonder what we've gained over the years."

"I've done alright."

"Oh yes, you've done alright. But it's a bit unfair on today's kids. They can't cash in their chips as easily as you could."

"Don't you think it's a bit early to be worrying about her future when she's only just turning 12?"

"Someone's got to. We battled all our lives — your father and I — but at least we got somewhere. We educated you kids, paid off the house, got a nice car and secured a little comfort for our old age. But where's the guarantees for my grand-children? Tell me that.?"

"I'm certain they'll manage", I said.

"You know what your trouble is: you got it too easy. You were too accepting of the world. Maybe at university when you joined up with those radicals ... "

"SYA, mum — Socialist Youth Alliance."

"Yeah, them — you had some heart. But you soon put those days behind you."

"I grew as a person, mum, and changed for the better."

"What a pity", she said, "that the world didn't".

If greed is so good, why can't I afford some?

I was studying the *Business Review Weekly* this week to see if I got a mention: Ramray, Rathbone, Reid, Richter, Roberts, Roche, Roth, Rydge — but no Riley in the journal's list of Australia's 200 richest. None of my relatives nor kin by default — the Reillys, Rilleys or O'Rielleys — got in either. In fact, I don't think I am related to any of the 775,000 people in this country who earn more than \$100,000 per year (and if I perchance were, I am sure to be the black sheep of their family). Mum never mentioned anything about an extraordinarily rich uncle.

I guess that we Rileys (Reillys, Rilleys or O'Rielleys) don't have a head for business. Take my mater for instance. She's 72, widowed and living alone — and I'm still sending her cash so that she can keep afloat financially. I keep telling her that you can do a lot with mince, but does she listen?

My guess is that it's in the genes. I never got ahead either. (With such a spendthrift for a mother, is it any wonder?) In fact, if I want to entertain the notion of joining the richest 200 list, I had better get cracking. The super rich are doing well — so well that to qualify for their club I'd have to earn more than \$500,000 per year and do it for the next 100 years to get together the \$50 million deposit I'd need to enter their ranks.

Do you have any suggestions as to how I could do it? I simply have no idea. My guess is that I'll have to resign myself to being a shitkicker for the rest of my life.

When you look at the figures, it is hard to believe that they'd miss a few hundred thousand if perchance such largesse were to suddenly come my way. Tallied up, the net private sector wealth in this country comes to \$1753 billion. Of this Kerry Packer owns \$3.3 billion and Richard Pratt (he of Westfield shopping towns) owns \$1.5 billion — and so we go (way) down the list until we get to me and you.

How long this list is and how far it goes down was recently suggested by the National Centre for Social and Economic Modelling at the University of Canberra. By their figures, 1.7 million Australians scrape by in poverty. Another 700,000 live in only slightly better conditions so that the proportion of Australians living in or near poverty runs at approximately 17%.

While 4.4% of the population are pulling in more than \$100,000 a year (thank you very much) a good proportion of the rest of us are surviving on less than a quarter of that.

And I, dear reader, have spent my life among them. I'm not proud. I admit my poverty. But I can't help feeling a touch resentful. Kerry Packer earns in one minute what I take a

week to pull in. And as for my young friends working their butts off for \$6 an hour: it all seems a bit unfair, don't you think?

In such circumstances, I begrudge Packer his billions. I do. How is it that he's in the money and I'm not? What did he do to earn it? And tell me: why doesn't he stop now that he's so far ahead? If greed is so good, why can't I afford to be greedy too? Unfortunately, I think I've missed my chance. Maybe it was the wrong sperm — my Dad was all right for a father, but he wasn't a Packer. Maybe I should have studied harder, saved more, worked more overtime, stayed off the grog and given up fags earlier. Maybe it just simply wasn't meant to be. Maybe for the likes of me, life wasn't meant to be greedy.

Tummy trouble

A lot of letters we receive are from people with tummy trouble. Nevertheless, they don't want to forgo the delights of consuming a range of different foodstuffs. Can we help them, they ask?

Of course. Let nobody go without because what they like may not like them. No one wants to finish a plate of oysters, or a medley of their favourite sliced smallgoods, only to have to go rushing to the bathroom for most of the next 24 hours.

When out and about, must you always keep a weather eye out for the public convenience? Why be a victim? Why be forced to shun what you enjoy? If this is the sort of person you have become, you must avail yourself of this new service. Otherwise, salmonella's going to get you.

I am referring of course to LORES — the Life of Riley Enjoyment Service.

Here's how it happened. The Commonwealth government has had on its hands for some time a horde of long-term unemployed youth keen to find any work. Many of these young people have now been carefully trained to operate this professional community service.

Previous work for the dole schemes simply did not work. There was nothing in them for the conscripted youth — no little bit extra to make their effort worthwhile.

LORES is different. We offer young people not brutish toil but a tasty square meal, compliments of the federal government's new self-help approach to the unemployed.

Each LORES corp is funded with a regular daily allowance to spend on eating out. Restaurants, delicatessens and takeaways are visited and their menus sampled. The unemployed are fed (often very well indeed). The food purveyor gains much needed custom (thereby keeping workers in jobs).

Thereafter the service comes into its own. If the bowels of any of our corp members protest we check the intestine to isolate the offending foodstuff.

With no regular job to go to, a day here or there spent throwing up or housebound by diarrhoea matters little to these youngsters. It merely breaks the monotony associated with long-term unemployment.

They also obtain recognition as worthwhile members of society because every tummy upset monitored by the Life of Riley Enjoyment Service is utilised for the common good. So when anyone rings us up on our special 0055 number we can tell them what's safe to eat that week and where they can get it.

There's no fuss and no panic (we are ever so discreet). Just tell us the menu you're planning on and we'll check it for bugs. Gone is the hysteria of the past. Unfortunate isolated cases of contamination will always occur. But why should a whole sector of the food industry suffer because some individual forgot to wash their hands or dropped the mettwurst in the dirt?

You never know where it's been, do you? It is better to be sure than sorry. So give LORES a call next time you plan to eat out ... and help a jobless kid at the same time.

Coming Out

I admit to it. It was some time ago when I first realised that despite the pressure of my friends and family it was time for me to come to some resolution, if only at first for my own peace of mind. Once I had got that right in my head, all the rest seemed to follow. I knew straightaway what I wanted to be by recognising what I had become -- perhaps slowly at first and then with greater clarity.

But that was the easy part because you can never be one just by yourself. Saying you are in itself won't change things at all. You have to do it. You have to act it out publicly; otherwise you let yourself down and the expectations you have of yourself. Simply changing your label isn't enough.

So it's more than coming out. You can't do it alone and certainly not in private.

And after all these years I am still a practising Socialist. Outwardly I look the same, but when I'm on a roll I'm at it hammer and sickle.

It's true that we tend to be shunned in polite society. I admit that. There are some that pretend we aren't there, that we somehow don't exist just so that their sleep won't be disturbed. Ours, unfortunately, is the politics that is not supposed to speak its name.

My parents initially thought it was just a phase I was going through. "Don't worry, Alice", my father would tell my mother, "he'll grow out of it. He'll meet a nice girl and settle down." But I never did grow out of it. Once I got used to it, it became addictive and seemed to fit me like a glove. I couldn't get enough of it. All my social frustrations and desires could be channeled into this ready-made outlet I grew to love.

Despite the phobia you may share about us, maybe sometimes you have wondered: what does Dave Riley do with the nice folk he marches with? I'm sure it has crossed your mind on occasion.

In reply, I can say that some of my best friends are Socialists, and I've always found them to be a great bunch of people. We have our moments of high passion each time a festival of the oppressed comes our way and we really get to come into our own. Other times it's simply a case of keeping your finger on the social pulse. We are, you see, as much social as socialist and will always respond if we think we can lend a hand. When passions are inflamed, we Socialists can be very empathetic.

To you this must seem like a very serious business. Partying the way we do it -- so energetically and with such relentlessness -- may seem no way to party at all. But that's the way we like it. When you come out like we do (and come on so strong too) you don't want grass to grow under your feet.

I am often asked if I was born this way. Much as you may think I am different, unusual or queer, I am basically just like anyone else. The world made me what I am today, and it is the world that stops me wanting to change. I'd rather change it than me. That's what I get off on, if you really want to know.

Despite your impressions, Socialism lasts longer than sex.

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Us

The new industrial trinity

Did you know that there are three major changes contained in these new industrial proposals? Did ya know that?

— I estimated that maybe a cardinal figure of such numerate proportions was involved.

There's three, see — one, two, three — 'tis an industrial trinity. Cause they gotta come together to work their magic.

— They surely do.

It's spiritual. Very spiritual.

— Wow. I mean, wow!

The first is one single unitary national industrial relations system!

— No more flow-ons?

That's so right. There'll be you, see — and there'll be them. In mutual agreement — battlers and bosses. It'll be consensual. All together under the southern cross. One big conjugation.

— All for one, one for all. One big union.

No. Not a union.

— Oh.

But there's more. I said there were three, didn't I? That's only number one. As well as offering one single unitary industrial relations system! you'll also receive ... as part of the same industrial package ... an on-the-job, do-it-yourself, user-friendly, flexible wages and conditions interface tailored to your individual needs.

— I don't quite follow you there...

Well, it will be so simple that even you can do it. It will be so simple you'll want to do it. It will be so simple that even a child could do it — assuming we were employing them (but hey, its still early days).

— Do what?

Negotiate your very own boutique award.

— My own what?

Award ... well, "contract", but we won't be calling it that.

Boutique award, has a nice ring to it, don't you think? Very evocative. But hey! What could be simpler! No smoke and mirrors. You yourself get to lay your cards on the table and talk turkey.

— What, with the boss?

With the very same — up close and personal.

— Wow.

You'll be somebody. You'll be your own man ... or lady ... whatever the case may be.

— My own man, you say?

The very same. Interfacing. "Doing lunch", eh? Chewing the fat ...

— Across the table.

Partners under the Southern Cross ...

— You did say it was spiritual.

Oh, my, yes. You have to believe. The true measure of the worth of any industrial relations system is its contribution to the economic strength of the nation and that is why we need to believe this new system will deliver more jobs and higher wages.

— It will, will it?

Of course it will! Why do you think we bother with this stuff?

— Oh.

You have to look at the big picture.

— But how do these changes deliver more jobs and higher wages?

They just do. You need to believe. Trust me.

— Right. Sorry. I forgot.

And the third and final change is to better balance the unfair dismissal laws.

— How's that done?

We make them fairer and less unjust.

— By making dismissal more just?

Exactly. Now you're getting the hang of it.

The new IR bill: it's about choices

You don't mean, do you Minister, that under these proposed IR changes that an unemployed person will need to accept any job regardless of the conditions offered?

— Well, yes. He has no choice. If he doesn't take the job no matter what the conditions he loses his benefit. We don't make any excuses for this.

No-one is asking you to make excuses.

— Well they won't get any —

But we would like some clarification.

— You got it.

Yes. I suppose we did. But ... correct me if I'm wrong ... but wouldn't that mean, in the long run, wages and conditions would tend to deteriorate?

— Ah. But you miss the key point: they'll be working. We believe that the best form of welfare that a person can have is to have a job and remembering this: when a person gets a job it is the best way of getting another job.

But what sort of job would that be?

— A paying job. What other kinds are there?

But how much pay and under what employment conditions?

— That's up for discussion between the parties concerned. You know, across the table.

But you just said, Minister, that if the unemployed person "doesn't take the job no matter what the conditions", he loses his benefit.

— So?

Well, how can that be a matter for discussion?

— It just is. I'm sure they'll discuss it. I'm not a fly on the wall, you know.

But surely the result is forgone, isn't it, as the person on the dole has to accept the job no matter what?

— No matter what what?

They'll lose their benefit won't they if they say no?

— I don't quite follow you. They can still choose not to take the job.

And lose their benefit —

— Or take the job. That's choice. That's free enterprise.

But what sort of choice is that?

— Remember, if they don't like that particular job, they can go looking for another. That's what we're doing — creating jobs. They'll be tons of jobs out there once this bill gets up.

Paying and offering less.

— I don't know that, do I? I'm not a fly on the wall.

But it stands to reason.

— What's that got to do with it? This is all about choices. The bloody thing's called "WorkChoices" for Chissake!

But the unemployed person won't have any.

— Then they shouldn't have been so unemployed in the first place.

[Inspiration: ABC TV — *The Insiders* interview with BarryCassidie. See [here](#).]

Makes you think

Word has it that sole parents and the disabled could be required to make themselves more employable or forfeit their full payment under the federal government's next round of mutual obligation initiatives. We are supposed to be searching for a system of welfare that *enables* recipients.

Makes you think, doesn't it? Mutual obligation as a core principle of civil society is not something to be sneezed at. No siree. In this day and age we should not be asking what the country can do for us, but what we can do for the country.

Girted by globalised sea and all that, we are all mutually obligated in some way or another, hither and yon. It's not right to be married to the state. What sort of career choice is that?

There's thousands of single mums and once-upon-a-time blue-collar types with dependent kids or bad backs out there who should be *enabled* ASAP. That's the sort of empowerment that builds self-esteem and breaks the vicious circle of dependency.

Look at your everyday Aboriginal-type person — hacking out a career path from skin colour and a squashed nose! Really that's not on. It only breeds downward envy.

While the rest of us are putting in our requisite eight hours at the coalface, some lucky bastard finds a GP willing to say they've got a bad back — or they're black or pregnant. After you've been retrenched as a result of restructuring, it's easy to be channelled into disability welfare. When you have been working most of your life, you pick up some ailments which you can trade on.

Why pursue a relentless lifestyle of work and poverty when you can stay at home for the same return?

Makes you think, doesn't it? Indeed it does!

But there's a hitch. How do you convert your standard unwed mum or your average disabled toilet user into a card-carrying proletarian when the jobs aren't there?

a) Marry them off; let them be someone else's responsibility. b) Create more jobs. c) Take away their benefits.

Makes you think, doesn't it?

After the Port Arthur Massacre: Picnicking in peace

Situated, as I am, in a somewhat northerly aspect of this landscape, a few kilometres south of the Tropic of Capricorn and in cooe of a cane toad or two, I leave myself open to being addressed at all-too-frequent intervals by the Brisbane *Courier Mail*. Despite the huge continental bulk and stretch of cold southern chill that separates the Mail's readers from the Port Arthur peninsula, we too are guilty of causing the recent tragedy — or so says the *Courier Mail*.

Such collective responsibility which knows no state borders, jumps fences and swims ashore unaided, has proceeded north to meet the toads on their southern trek and now, as I write, disturbs my reverie. Indeed, so says the *Courier Mail*, the singular cause of

violence in this society are our freedoms — there are too many of them. Not only do we have the freedom to own guns (thereby availing ourselves far too readily of the freedom to shoot people) but we also possess the right to free speech "even when it mutates into the abuse of teachers, police, and other one-time guardians of society".

Perhaps now you are feeling a little sheepish. And so you should! Who would have thought that behind your indulgence in seeing, doing and acting as you pleased you harboured the possibility, if the whim should suddenly possess you, to take out Sunday picnickers with a rapid burst of small arms fire.

Being sorry won't help. How do we know we can trust you? For all we know, maybe all you want out of life is some firing practice and an excuse to say "Hasta la vista, baby!".

In fact, our problem, or so the *Courier Mail* informs us, is one of cowardice "where in an ill-disciplined, in-your-face world there are too few in authority prepared to say no (and too many who would not heed them if they did)". As for the rest of us, we are just too damned selfish to break the code of "correctness" and hand over our cherished freedoms for the greater good. In this give-me world, says the *Courier Mail* "there are so many good people in it that it is just too accommodating".

Challenging us with these thoughts is the newspaper's managing editor Terry Quinn. One would assume that Quinn's piece in the May 3 *Courier Mail* visited the page uncensored. Herein we have it neat, and herein the Port Arthur massacre becomes an excuse — and Terry Quinn an unapologetic opportunist.

The fickle finger of blame has now been pointed at you and me. A simple alibi for the day in question won't do. We stand accused of a heinous crime — of crying out for "more money, more leisure time, more space, more respect, more independence, more privacy, more services, more support, more freedom. More equality. More freedom. Now", pronounces Quinn. "There's a killer and there's an irony."

I hope you are listening here. Don't go nodding off between paragraphs because you lot are perhaps the main culprits. Rabidly one-eyed, maybe you have failed to recognise irony when it sits up and barks at you. Rat-a-tat-tat, bang bang, you freedom junkies are blind to the consequences of your actions.

Since it is unlikely that you or I will choose to mend our ways the *Courier Mail* will, no doubt, be keen to fight on without us. My guess is that support will be forthcoming from all those one-time guardians of civil society who have, until this tragic event shook them from their timidity, been suffering from cowardice. Cowardly cops will be a thing of the past. Magistrates and legislators, instead of pandering to the freedom lobby, will once again boldly proclaim what's right and what's wrong. The press will cheer louder than at any time before. And if we keep our noses clean, the rest of us will live happily ever after, safe in the knowledge that in future we can picnic in peace.

It has come!

BLAAAAH!

This verbal explosion occurred just as I was about to take in my day's surfeit of news. I was the speaker of that BLAAAAH, and my utterance was noted by many of those around me. These same people quickly turned themselves to physically note my

existence: "What's he on about?", they said in quiet formation.

But I, once I had shot the BLAAAAH blast forth, continued to stare at the morning daily before me. I did not open my mouth for any purpose of articulation but thought deep in my bosom that a double BLAAAAH now seemed appropriate.

Before me the news loomed large: class conflict was visiting our shores. I thought the business of class, or business class, was simply a question of the very best way to fly when someone else is paying. But this other matter, which was supposed to be passé, was back, and it was mean and nasty, naked and — God forbid! — struggling.

The class struggle is back! Shut your windows. Lock all the doors. It has come. It has come! Why, oh why, could they not leave well enough alone? Remember the good old days. Remember? A bloke could lose his job and still go quietly. No fuss. No mucking about. We were getting on with one another like a house on fire. Remember the easy dialogue. The problems shared. The ready input from the shop floor.

Remember? Partners with management, all in it together struggling to improve on the return for last year's quarter. That's how it was. Strength in unity. Big Aussie battlers and little Aussie battlers all doing their damndest to make a go of it.

It breaks my heart just to think of it. Now we're at each other's throats like there was no yesterday. So I read about the wharfies, about the picket lines, and what Patrick and Howard have to say; and dream about the good old days when we all learnt to take it lying down. As the ship of consensus pulls away from the quay and passes the docks wherein this struggle is partaken, I and Kim Beazley raise our voices in sweet song: "Will ye not come back again?".

Christmas Classifieds

Apology: The illustration of the Panasonic Cordless Phone (Model KX-T4026AL) on page 16 of the Optus World Christmas catalogue currently being distributed shows the incorrect handset for the advertised model. The correct handset does not have an intercom button. Optus apologises for any inconvenience this may have caused.

Listings of public institutions for sale or tender which were advertised in previous ALP Christmas catalogues are no longer available. The items listed have all been sold. The Australian Labor Party apologises that it can no longer fulfil outstanding orders.

Dooley, Hubert — late of the Woorabinda Aboriginal community — passed away. Husband of Dulcie, esteemed elder. Relatives and friends are respectfully invited to attend his service on Tuesday, December 3, 1996. GONE BUT NOT FORGOTTEN.

Warrants Outstanding. Notice is hereby given that the Queensland police force intends to serve 388 outstanding warrants on members of the Woorabinda Aboriginal Community for offences recorded as drunk and disorderly, failure to pay traffic fines or to appear in court. SADLY MISSED BUT NOT AGAIN — Members of the Rockhampton Police Station are hereby requested to form cortege leaving station, 8am.

For Sale — Telstra. "I bring you tidings of great joy." Australia's largest listed company. Conservatively valued at \$8 billion, this 33.3% holding is floating your way. O BRAVE NEW WORLD THAT HAS SUCH ENTERPRISE IN IT! Wealth and Happiness for the year ahead. Much love, John Howard and family.

Apology. On behalf of the Australian Democrats and Greens, we wish to apologise for our disappointing performance during 1996. We can only do our best and next year are sure to do better (just so long as we don't obstruct the business of good government). Cheryl Kernot and Bob Brown. (PS: Peace on earth and good will to all our constituents.)

Thanks. ASK ST CLARE for 3 favours: 1 for business and 2 for the impossible; say 9 Hail Marys for 9 days with a lighted candle, pray believing it is so. Publish on 8th day, your request will be granted. Thank you for prayers answered. — John Howard.

Harradine and Colston, Senators and Certified Practising Independents, do hereby make the following declaration: It seemed like a good idea at the time.

Give-away Christmas Promotion. The Australian Federal Parliament (Promoter) wishes to announce the winner for its 1996 "Who Dares Wins" competition. This year's winner — by a very large margin — is, once again, Australian capital. Congratulations. The cheque is in the mail.

Karl Marx. Would Mr Karl Marx, formerly of Britain, Germany and France and last seen in a casket in Highgate Hill, London, England, during the year of 1883 please contact Mr. D.J. Riley c/o the Sunshine Post Office (via Virginia) because his presence is urgently needed. Message reads: COME BACK KARL! WE STILL HAVE A WORLD TO WIN!

The swagman cometh

Maybe you are fed up with the city and its teeming peoples. Their ways and means, as getting and lending and spending, lay waste your inner world and are too much for you. The car is noisy and toxic, while the train is always crowded.

So what do you do? You go bush and waltz your matilda all over, no collar or stockings to cramp your style. As you tramp the land, the scent of eucalyptus and dung fill the air and the rhythm of an old work enters your soul. Camped by a billabong under the shade of a spreading coolabah tree, you sing as you wait for your billy to boil, "Who'll come a-waltzing Matilda with me?"

While your thoughts are focused on a mug of steaming chamomile tea, a jumbuck comes down to drink at the billabong. You ask yourself: do I fit the legend? Having eaten nothing but two Weet-Bix at breakfast, a lamb roast would go down just fine.

At this moment the ethics of the deed being previewed are worth meditating on. For a vegetarian, there would be no qualms of conscience. The jolly jumbuck has as much right to its sheepish joy as you have to yours. Anything else would be anathema. So if you were so inclined, that jumbuck would stay out of your tuckerbag (and you could quietly starve).

But low on cash and without a McDonald's in cooee, maybe you could go something a little more filling than a Mars bar and half a packet of crisps — your tuckerbag's current contents. With lamb selling at \$1.99 a kilogram, who would miss one little baa baa? Sheep demography being what it is, there are sure to be millions more where this one came from.

Besides, for one hundred years it's been kosher for the homeless to live off mutton and tea. Ask any Anzac what they fought for. Many a digger went into battle with a rifle at the shoulder and Waltzing Matilda on their lips. The right of tramps to carry off

jumbucks has been written in blood by the nation. In Australia there is such a thing as a free lunch.

But such joy is short lived. While the belly comes first (*one*) and morality trails close behind (*two*), private property and state troopers soon (*three*) follow: "Whose that jolly jumbuck you've got in your tuckerbag?"

"Whose!" they ask. Whose jolly jumbuck!

Now we are getting down to tin tacks. There's no joy in having morsels taken from your lips by a show of force, for behind each jolly jumbuck musters a body of armed men.

So what? You may ask. My point is this: never let the bastards bluff you. Don't just lie there and take it. Not for you this business of springing unaided into billabongs. Drowned swaggies "living" the legend can be a dime a dozen.

It's a wonderful life

Introducing, the one and only mother of us all — perpetually purveying provisions. The lady who gave us life itself — your mum and mine ... yes, it's Gaia!

Let's give the old girl a round of applause. Where would life on earth be without her? Three and one half billion years old and she doesn't look a day over forty. She still has all her own teeth too.

So how's the ankle biters, great earth mother of us all? Up to their tricks as usual I suppose? I heard you lost a few of them over the years — species come, species go. But you keep pumping them out, don't you?

I've been meaning to talk to you about that. A single mum like yourself trying to make it in the world. No hint of a man around and you veer from one virgin birth to another. I tell you it makes us wonder: are you cohabiting with god?

Not that there is anything wrong with it, mind you. What two consenting deities get up to in private is their own business. But hey! You should get out and about now and then. Slap on a number and do the town. Part of the planet went urban a few years back.

Go clubbing. We'll fix you up with something off the rack by Maggie T — an off-the-shoulder peasant dress with a full skirt down to the ankles. (And maybe a few flowers in your hair for effect.) It's you! With your full figure and those engorged paps you make us mammals proud. I told the rest of the vertebrates you were one of us. Hey, you lot! Come check it out and meet the matriarch. Mammalia rules, OK!

There's been big changes on terra firma since you took up earth mothering. While you've been on maternity leave we've invented pottery, weaving, writing, heaps of other stuff and the World Cup Final. You wouldn't know the old place.

Sibling rivalry is still a problem, however. Every few years they're at each other over some niche or another. But as they say: kids are the same the whole world over. What one's got, the other wants it too.

But what am I doing? You know all this. Here I am prattling on. You don't need a live-bearer like myself trying to teach you to suck eggs. You must think I'm awfully rude.

To tell you the truth, I'm always like this when I'm nervous. I don't want to be a panic

merchant but word has it that life on earth is already half over. That's *real...ly* freaky!
Where did it go?

I don't think you realise how angry that makes us feel. We've finally reached our stride after all these years, and secured a little comfort for ourselves, when we learn that fully 99.999% of all species that have ever existed are already extinct. What sort of mother does that make you? You give life then abandon it!

I always thought that "mortal" was just another figure of speech. I didn't realise it meant that we too were in line for the big jump one day. It comes as a bit of a shock.

But if *you* won't look after us, we'll have to club together and do it ourselves. Maybe we'll be able to postpone our own extinction by a few hundred thousand years. It's worth the effort. This one is the only one we've got, and despite some aspects, it's a wonderful life.

Follow the flame

I too have had an episode with the Olympic torch. Like so many of my land-based colleagues I have stood and watched the carbon based life form pass into view. That it very soon passed out of eyeshot is perhaps neither here nor there. At least I can say I've seen it.

All things being equal I should hereon be able to tell the tale of the day I stood outside the offices of D.W. Grout Plumber and Drainer and saw with my very own eyes the Olympic flame.

I need to tell you all that it looked like any other flame. While I only caught a glimpse, the luminescence reminded me of the left back gas jet on my own kitchen combustible. Mind you, if my own flame were to up and leave for an all expenses paid sojourn around Australia I would be most put out. I like to think that at my domicile the home fires keep burning ... at home.

I guess that if the Olympic flame were to drop in some time I'd be the first to snap up the opportunity to toast a couple of crumpets or boil the billy. In this day and age of economic rationalism, even a passing torch needs to pay its own way. Methane doesn't grow on trees you know! If I were to take the family sedan along the same route this little spark has travelled, at the current price per litre I'd very soon go bankrupt.

When money's tight you gotta ask these questions. At the end of the day someone has to pay the gas bill.

I also think that the route the flame followed, crisscrossing the nation, perhaps didn't reflect the ethos we try so hard to project. Opportunities went begging while the whole world was watching.

For instance, why didn't the torch go via the migrant detention centres such as Port Hedland or Woomera? That would have put the wind up 'em.

We missed a golden opportunity to make a point about how one should go about coming to Australia if one had a mind to relocate here. A few wogs ferrying the flame up and down the exercise yard at Woomera would have been just the thing to go out on CNN.

The trouble is that they're not using their loaf in Canberra. Where's the imagination? The panache? It's about time we put this burning thing to work.

Rather than being shepherded hither and yon we could have got it to defrost a chicken or burned off the undergrowth in preparation for the summer bushfire season. Like the unemployed, it needs to do something worthwhile — earn its keep. It even gets a prime seat at the Olympic Games but doesn't pay a thing!

That's not what Australia is about! Not nowadays.

I tell you, the torch isn't all it's cracked up to be. Trust me. I've seen it.

The Little Aussie Battler (reg'd trademark)

There is a funny idea abroad (by which I mean, of course, in this dry brown land in which we dwell) that there exists a minor figure of such truthful grit that every attribute of ordinariness is congealed within their being.

This entity, I am led to believe, is now thought to be putting aside a characteristic reticence and a mug of tea, throwing the Akubra into the ring and stepping flat-footed into the political arena. Their mission? To wake up Australia.

As soon as I heard that such a quintessential creature was out and about, I went to great pains to locate it.

My search was not an easy one. Bona fide "Australians" — folk claiming to be as ordinary as you and I — seem to inhabit this island continent in demographic proportions. And all of them seem to be under the distinct impression that they're no more or less ordinary than the next person.

I visited Summer Bay and Ramsay Street, and toured many a dormitory suburb in my quest — all to no avail. Until last week. Just before sunset, at a location I am not at liberty to divulge, I came across a little Aussie battler heading homewards.

You can imagine my excitement! To think I had discovered the real McCoy! (Although, as it turned out, the little Aussie battler's surname was Papadopoulos.) As a strict conservationist, I was obliged to ensure that the little Aussie battler remained in a pristine state, and that my presence did not disrupt its environmental integrity in any way.

Maybe passion got the better of me. Perhaps ambition thwarted my best intentions. But in that moment of first contact, I could think only that I wanted to share my discovery with the world. So I signed on as the little Aussie battler's press agent.

Harry M. Miller has his stable of celebrities, Channel 9 may have Ray Martin under contract, but I've got the little Aussie battler.

Now, if anyone wants to know how the little Aussie battler is hurting, if anyone wants to know what the little Aussie battler is thinking or fearing, or what the little Aussie battler's likes and dislikes are — they'll have to come to me first.

We need not go on assuming that we know what the little Aussie battler wants. Now, we can ask questions. Now, we can get straight answers. Now, thanks to me, no-one, be they politician or sociologist, need lose touch with the grassroots. Now, with my little Aussie battler as close as a phone call away, the vagaries of everyday existence can be easily monitored.

In the weeks ahead I hope to recount some of the sayings, comments, anecdotes and

complaints that the little Aussie battler has kindly shared with me. Since our first meeting, a real bond has grown between us, and I'd hate to think that my little Aussie battler could be exploited in any way.

In order to protect this national treasure, the generic term — "little Aussie battler" — has been officially registered. Henceforth, no one can claim to speak for the little aussie battler without Little Aussie Battler™ authority.

As for political ambitions, the Little Aussie Battler™ informs me that, for the moment, all options are being considered.

How to be true blue

When last we met I was a little excited.

I'm sorry if I seemed a bit over the top, but you're sure to understand why I was gushing. It's not every day that someone gets his own Little Aussie Battler™; to have and to hold, as it were.

I just feel so much on top of, well, everything really. Suddenly, for the first time in my life, I feel as one with my surrounds. There's a centring within me. And it's all due to the Little Aussie Battler™.

I have sat "at the feet" — as it were — of the Little Aussie Battler™ at every opportunity in order to hang on his lips. (I mean that metaphorically, of course. The strong feelings I bear for the Little Aussie Battler™ are pure, almost sacred ones, devoid of carnality.)

What wisdom! What depth of insight! What luck!

After hearing much these last years about the Little Aussie Battler™ and then to be granted many intimacies by this personage has changed my life.

It was only the other day, during an audience with him, that I dared ask: "Master, how can I become like you?"

The Little Aussie Battler™ thought for a time and said: "Be little, my son".

"But master", I said, "aren't I meek enough now?"

"No, budgie-bum. You must shrink another four inches."

Then I asked him: "If I become small, can I then be like you?"

"No, my son. First you must do battle."

"But I do battle. Oh master, I struggle so hard every day of my life. Why can't I be like you?"

The Little Aussie Battler™ didn't answer me at first. He just stared out the window in the way he does when lost in thought. After a time he drained his beverage (I think it was Tooheys) and stared straight at me.

"To be a true blue Little Aussie Battler™, it isn't enough to struggle or to simply shrink in size. No. It takes much more. To be a Little Aussie Battler™, you gotta hate women and poofs. You gotta wanna send the wogs back where they came from. To be a true blue, dinky-di Little Aussie Battler™, you gotta be what they want you to be —

conservative, small-minded, self-centred and jingo ... jingo ... eh ..."

"Jingoistic."

"Yeah. That. That's what makes a really great Little Aussie Battler™. And by god, you gotta love this country. All the sheep shit and blowies. You gotta love all the crap because, good or bad, you're proud because you think it's your own."

"But I'm none of those things."

Then the Little Aussie Battler™ smiled at me and said: "That's why I'm the Little Aussie Battler™ and you're not."

The chickens are coming home

Today I want to talk about the family. Your family, my family, little Johnny's family down the road — and, in a roundabout way, the family of man.

The family: what would we do without it? Who feeds or clothes us, teaches us right from wrong or kick-starts us in this hard world? Who wipes the tear from our sorrowful eye or makes sure we don't leave the house without clean underwear? Who makes us right? Who cheers us on? Who supplies the nappies? Why, it's the family. Day in, day out, it's always there to pick up the toys or the bill.

Without the family, what would granny do when she goes gaga? Without the family, there would be no-one to blame for our childhood. Without the family, everyone would have to buy their own television set and bottle of shampoo. Without the family, we'd be alone in the world.

For, you see, the family is all about sharing the load. The family distributes the burden of living and the largesse of life. You won't find a more benevolent institution.

Imagine! Without it, we'd all have to be cradle-to-grave communists just to get by.

I wanted to offer these observations about family life because the primary level of family life — Level I: mutual financial dependence, situational neurosis and cohabitation — is going to be extended by another three years.

Where once the family could divest itself of many of its responsibilities to its offspring at age 16, this has now been extended from the later marker of 18 to age 21. This basically means that without gainful employment or study, junior family members get to stay on within the conflict and custom they've been used to for another few years.

For this affirmation of the traditional family values of sacrifice and sufferance, we need to thank John Howard. Indeed, Mr Howard and his government seem to be demanding a lot of the family lately.

Given this, one wonders how benevolent one institution can afford to be. If I was an out of work 19-year-old (which I'm not, I am delighted to say) and I knocked on the door of the local business enterprise asking for a job in order to feed and clothe myself, they'd laugh at me. Similarly, if I then visited the local church — an institution which, like John Howard, is another stalwart of the family — and asked for room and board for the next few years, they'd tell me to say three Hail Maries and go home to mum and dad.

Because, when it comes down to the line, the family takes up the slack and simply has no

choice in the matter.

If you were planning on letting junior's room or moving gran in there so she doesn't wander off again, you're in for a sudden surprise: like it or not, the chickens have come back home to roost, and it was your mistake starting a family in the first place.

PC or no PC, that is the question

It may be thought, and often said, that your run-of-the-mill leftie is very hard to amuse. They look for overtones, undertones, sub-tones, grunts and "philosophy"; they assume that in everything something severe must always be afoot.

This can be disquieting for a writer who is only, for the moment, clowning.

Truly the "left" is want to take itself seriously, indeed. When you wake each morning relentlessly caught between the twin poles of socialism or barbarism it's a touch difficult to crack a smile.

Take the Communist Manifesto, for instance — there's not a jolly word in it. I ask you: where's the fun in being sentenced to centuries of class struggle? It is such notions that are sure to put a damper on your day.

"Where you goin', pa?" "Out, ma." "Out where, pa?" "Class strugglin', ma."

There's never a joke to relieve the constant tension between bourgeois and worker — one's best interests are irreconcilably hostile to those of the other. The long-term effect of such denunciation and abuse leaves precious little room for a hit and a giggle between opposing class forces. So us poor sods take it out on the missus, the mother-in-law, the local ethnic or the cat.

Perhaps you are thinking, now that Political Correctness has supposedly been overthrown, we're in for a season of frivolity. Out of mothballs come all those jokes we thought it best to frown upon.

I think not.

"Tonight's lecture", George Smilovici wrote in the Australian Journal of Comedy, "is entitled 'Comedy and Political Correctness — are they compatible?'. I was playing around with other options like, 'PC — the "final solution" to language' or 'Comic Interruptus' or 'Where's the fun in fundamentalism?' or 'Wash your language' or 'Who took the Dic out of Dictionary?'... but I didn't want to offend anybody."

Sure George. (Don't call us, we'll call you).

We lefties may seem a mordant bunch of bastards, but we know that taking the mickey out of the forever-on-hand, ubiquitous minority is all about doing someone else's dirty work for them.

So when someone laments, "Where have all the good Aborigine jokes gone?" (as the aforesaid journal once bemoaned), all I can say is that I don't care.

"Where you goin', pa?" "Out, ma." "Out where, pa?" "Same place as yesterday."

Chesty Bond's undies

The name's Bond, Chesty Bond.

Ah yes. Finished textiles. Undergarments.

That's me. In-built gusset. Double-stitched trim. Do not bleach.

Hot iron.

Made in Australia.

Chest puffed out.

True blue.

Warm machine wash.

Chesty. It's gotta be.—

Bonds: 34% reducing to 17.5 over eight years. Five year freeze from 2000.

Protection or I'll piss off.

I beg your pardon?

The name's Bond, Chesty Bond. In-built gusset. Pouting nipples. Chest puffed out. True blue. Gotta have it.

Have what?

Protection.

So you have: 34% tariff reducing to 17.5 over eight years.

Or I'll piss off.

Stay.

You want me to stay?

Stay.

Warm machine wash.

I said stay.

Do not bleach. Do not dry clean. Do not tumble dry. All cotton.

Mr Bond, we're guaranteeing you a market share and underwriting your company's profits.

So I can stay?

Sure you can. No going off-shore for Chesty yet. Just think of it, Mr Bond. Underneath, the plain people of Australia will still be wearing you next to them. Sweaty armpits. Gluteus maximus. Nipples (x2). The nation's genitalia. Think of it, Mr Bond.

I'm thinking. I'm thinking.

All yours.

To have and to hold?

Sure.

And there I was thinking I was being put through the wringer.

Here's the really good part: We call it a job plan, Mr Bond, a job plan!

But employment in the industry is falling.

And will continue to — that's the good part. It's so apt. We're covering your arse.

Chesty Bond's undies: "Putting jobs first". I like it.

Undercover, you understand. With undies we're Y-front rather than up-front about this.

Underhand.

Precisely! And if perhaps you should decide to relocate production, say to China or elsewhere ... as a true blue, dinky dye, Australian type company ...

And proud of it.

We'll do right by you when the time comes.

By putting me first?

Always, Mr Bond. Always.

How about that!

Genome! Hi! I'm so glad you could drop in for a chat. It's simply marvellous that a celebrity like you can spare a moment from your busy schedule to talk to us. I'm sure that all my readers would love to hear what you have to say about anything you care to mention.

You know, it's ironic, isn't it? Here we all are busting our guts trying to work out what's wrong with the world and all the time it was under our skin! Just like the bard says: "It is not in our stars but in ourselves that we are underlings".

How about that? Bill Shakespeare knew a thing or two about genetics. He sure did. "In ourselves", now that says it all. We don't need fortune tellers' mumbo jumbo to work that one out. It's all to do with DNA, right?

Genome — Yes. That's right.

And DNA is, for those who don't know, what makes us tick. It's the building block of life. Something like Leggo, really — you put it all together and make life forms — good old, down to earth carbon-based life forms. Cabbages and kings. You, me and the other fella have got a lot to thank Genome here for.

— We get around.

You sure do! You're everywhere, Genome, everywhere! Making us what we are today. We're all made up of little hardworking Genomes doing in life what they are supposed to do.

— Telling you what happens next.

It's like knowing the plot isn't? It's like knowing the plot in the great novel of life! Every twist and turn, all those surprises are really not so new after all, but reincarnations of days gone by.

— Biologically speaking, yes.

How about that! It's nature after all.

— 'Fraid so.

And Nurture is ...?

— Neither here nor there really.

Not even a smidgin? Not even 25%? 10%? How about that! So all this time we humans have been looking in the wrong places for the good life. Except maybe them Hindus; they must have known more than they were letting on. Busting our guts bringing up the kids when it was all a question of pedigree. So if I wanted to know what was in store for me all I would have to do is ...

— Bleed into a bottle or spit into a mug.

How about that!

Peanut butter and pineapple rings

Did ya see it? I certainly did. You wouldn't catch me missing an event like that. Not in a million years.

Came right up the main street, it did. In cooee of our front gate. The kids were so THRILLED. Their little faces were BEAMING. They were.

Little Dylan couldn't sleep the night before 'cause he didn't want to miss the torch come by. God love him. So we were up there bright and early in our jim jams waving Aussie flags the kids had cut out of a Weeties packet. And they waved them like merry hell.

God, it made me darn proud. I felt privileged. I did. I felt real proud.

The kids were cheering and down the hill past the Convenience comes THE OLYMPIC TORCH! Their little faces lit up like a Christmas tree as the bloke carrying the thing gave them a little wave. Pleased as punch they were. It was a great day in our household, I'm telling you. A great day.

So after all the excitement of the torch we made a special show out of it and had a Dick Smith breakfast. Won't catch us having Vegemite in our house. No siree. We went with the Golden Circle pineapple rings and the Dick's own peanut butter on bread made by those Vietnamese in the High Street (you know the place, where Kelly Whatsername works Saturdays).

We're doing our bit. Won't catch us giving into the multinationals. We decided to stand by our own kind.

It's all very nice to get into the Olympic spirit, I tell the youngsters, but when it comes to which side your bread gets buttered on, you gotta think closer to home. Hip pocket nerve and all that.

When you grow up, I say, you want a job to be there. It pays to plan ahead. Look after number one in this world. That's what the Olympic spirit's good for.

Makes you think. It's dog eat dog in this world. You gotta stand by the team — Aussie jobs, Aussie dollar, Aussie this and that — and keep on buying Australian. That's what Dick says.

If you ask me, Dick comes across as a true Australian in a National Geographic way — not a Chips Rafferty or Slim Dusty way — but he speaks to the city folk. You know what I mean?

I couldn't come at that Hanson woman. A bit crude and rude if you asked me. But Dick? What you see is what you get. He's one for the battlers (not that he says so). But that's the impression, isn't it?

All them companies doing it tough — BHP, the Commonwealth Bank, Telstra. At heart they're all about keeping jobs at home. You know what I mean? The money stays here — as Dick says — gets spent in this country, not somewhere else.

In this day and age it ain't easy to find principles to live by. Well I reckon Dick has served us up one. Food for thought, as it were — peanut butter and pineapple rings. There's gotta be a job in it somewhere?

Mates always

No matter where you go within the four walls of Australia, the games will be upon you. The nation is saturated. "I still call Australia home" has moved in for the duration, occupying musical fragments inside the head of every mother's son and daughter. Suddenly "our" and "we" — all the first person plurals you can think of — mean John Howard and Bruce Ruxton and Pauline Hanson and you and I. We are one, although we are many. I am. You are. We are all Aust-tral-lian.

Makes you think, doesn't it? I guess this is what consensus is all about: we agree to disagree. Such and such may be the biggest bastard in the world, but if they're from Oz, underneath they're sure to be true blue.

Mind you, some are a truer blue than others. It takes effort to become a bona fide Aussie. You don't become one by sneaking into the country, for instance. That's un-Australian. And it's un-Australian to blockade the World Economic Forum or to protest against the Olympic Games.

No. To become one you gotta play by the rules. Just because you are Aboriginal doesn't make you Australian. That's no excuse. Just being born here won't do either. You have to possess that special something to pass muster.

If you want to call yourself Aust — tral — lian you need to play by the rules. We dinky-di Aussies possesses certain qualities that cannot, for instance, be found among the peoples of other lands: a taste for Vegemite, a preference for beer and an inordinate confidence in the spirit of mateship.

Perhaps this last item warrants further explanation. In Australia it is considered proper behaviour to stand by one's mates. A mate — for all intents and purposes — is another Australian who has a taste for Vegemite, a preference for beer and an inordinate confidence in the spirit of mateship. At the end of the day, no matter who you are, so long as you're a "mate", you must be fair dinkum.

So when it comes down to the wire, Kieran Perkins is a mate. Cathy Freeman is one too. And it wouldn't be stretching a mateship too far to include Kerry Packer, the board of directors of BHP, the federal cabinet and Joh Bjelke-Petersen. All for one. One for all. Mates always. Aussie! Aussie! Aussie!

So next time you break into a song — and it doesn't have to be "Advance Australia Fair" or "Waltzing Matilda", not nowadays — give a thought to all the other mates you've got. The battler mates. The true blue ones. The boss cocky mates. The mates in higher places. All the mates who in this wide brown land do dwell.

So when you get the sack or you're asked to work a few hours extra, don't come the whingeing pom. For you it's different. For you it's personal. You're Aust-tral-lian and come hell or high water you're sticking by your mates. That's the main thing. Oi! Oi! Oi!

Deciding

How are youse? Still making two ends meet?

— Doin' my best.

There's not much else you can do, is there?

— Not much else.

'Cept hold your head above water.

— That's right. Makin' do.

Yesiree. You can only do your best.

— Only your best.

But sometimes best ain't good enough. You follow me? You bust a gut and then even that ain't enough. Try as you might, you start to go under. The bills mount up and you lose the plot. You're cactus.

— You talkin' about someone in particular?

No. No-one special. Just general like, that's all. I'm making an observation. I mean, look at this thing what's happening in the stock markets at the moment.

— I'm not up with it, are you?

You don't have to be. Sure as hell all you need to know is that it looks bad. You, me and the other geezer are in for it.

— But I don't own any shares.

You don't have to. It doesn't work that way. When the bottom drops out like this, it's every man for himself. Mark my words: liquidate your portfolio.

— But I don't have any bloody shares.

If you had, I'm giving you fair warning. Mum's the word: property. Stick to real estate.

— But I own nothin' but a mortgage.

A nice little unit or two. Steady income with the option to negative gear.

— Sure. In my dreams.

I'm just trying to be helpful. If you were a shareholder and the markets went bust like this, I'd pull out and cut my losses. But since you're not ...

— Yeah. Go on, Mister Know-all. Since I'm not ...

Since you're not ... well, what can I say? Will you go with a GST or settle for Labor?

— Do I have to choose?

'Fraid so. It's a democratic country, you know.

— Decisions. Decisions.

Terra Australis Proprietary Limited

The Reserve Bank in conjunction with the federal Treasury is making arrangements for turning the whole country into a limited liability company. Every Australian citizen will be offered shares in the float. The new enterprise will take over the country as a going concern, together with all available assets, pre-existing good will, gold reserves and debenture stocks.

This novel initiative is a logical consequence of the trend toward privatisation. We're fast-tracking it, that's all. The formation of Terra Australis Proprietary Limited and its listing on the nation's stock exchanges is intended to shore up the local share market at a time when investors could do with an injection of confidence.

The crash which preceded the present zigging and zagging of the All Ordinaries does no-one any good. The everyday, run-of-the-mill Aussie battler-type person could do without such uncertainty.

No-one wants to wake each morning to news of another fall on Wall Street, or to spend their day worrying about movements in the Hang Seng. They've got cows to milk, kids to get off to school or a train to catch — all they want is for their day to be like any other.

Now, these plain and simple folk can get their wish. By investing in Terra Australis, they'll be in on the float of the century. Here is your opportunity to shore up free enterprise rather than being a lifelong victim of it. The market needs a shot in the arm and you lot, in your millions, are just the doctor to administer it.

A fortunate bonus of the float is that you need no longer worry about your superannuation. By helping us get Terra Australis up and running, prudential companies will have somewhere a little more secure than the volatile market of late to invest the money you pay out each week in superannuation. So today as well as tomorrow's declining years are sure to benefit from such a gilt-edged stock.

We cannot promise that future market crashes — god forbid! — won't impact on the company. The vagaries of the capitalist carnival are sure to ebb and flow in the time ahead. Such is life.

But we promise that here is an investment you can bank on. Our prospectus is diverse. Our portfolio also includes the company's high-yielding subsidiaries: Western and South Australia, Victoria, Tasmania, Queensland and New South Wales. That's why we say that investing in Terra Australis Proprietary Limited is as safe as houses — parliament houses, that is.

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Them

The Third World comes to town

If you are among the 4 billion or so of this planet's occupants who hail from the Third World, a moment of fame can be yours if, by some extraordinary good fortune, you take part in the tournament we like to refer to as the Commonwealth Games.

While we would normally be asked to look upon you as a fascinating exotic, nothing delights us more than seeing foreign flesh stepping onto the rostrum to claim a trinket as first, second or third best in some sport that your country is apparently rather good at.

Come to our country to compete in such events and we'll think you are the cat's pyjamas. Too bloody right we will. We honour muscle regardless of colour when it puts on a show like that.

We're human too and if your body can run faster than another one, jump higher or what not, we will give credit where credit is due. That's what the Games are all about — celebrating excellence in sport.

So excuse us if we rely on the medal tally to assure ourselves that what we lose on the swings we gain on the roundabouts. Nice try ... but we make no apology for the fact that our team is better than your team and our country is, of course, the ant's pants. That's what the Games are all about, and especially now that Britannia is no longer in invasion mode. (Other than Afghanistan of course, but we're there too).

Empire is yesterday's news. Today we aim to get on, you know, with one another — despite our differences.

But that doesn't mean we want to live in each other's pockets. While we'll celebrate diversity, we'd prefer, if you don't mind, to keep such differences at arm's length. We celebrate your country, you celebrate ours. We don't mind what colour the back is we pat. But we'd prefer — well, we'd insist actually — that you stay where you are.

Don't get us wrong. We love it when you visit. That's what the Games are about. Your *creme de la creme* puts on a real good show and we appreciate, we really appreciate, you coming ... to our games. We'd be lost without your, what shall I say ... colour.

But when the Games are over and you go back home to your Third World — and we get on with our business of being Australian and you get on with yours of being, you know, whatever — don't ever think that it can be like that every other day.

It's nice to have the Third World in town for a visit. Real nice. We must do it again sometime. See you later. Our regards to those at home.

We are all reconciled

I reckon I'm pretty much reconciled.

— You do?

Yep. I'm much more reconciled than I was last week.

— That's great. But I have a question.

Shoot.

— What is there to be reconciled about?

Where have you been? Reconciliation is all the go. I'm reconciled. You're reconciled. We are all reconciled. Oh, it's just lovely. Brings a tear to my eye it does. Give me a hug.

— Please!

I love you. I do.

— You're getting carried away.

Sorry.

— I should think so.

I am. I'm ever so sorry.

— That's OK.

I'm trooly and rooly sorry.

— No harm done.

It's all my fault. Can you ever forgive me.

— It's OK!

I apologise.

— Fine.

Is that all you can say? "Fine"?

— What do you want me to say?

If it's not too much to ask, maybe you could accept my apology?

— OK then.

Well?

— I accept your apology.

Now we're reconciled.

— We are?

Yes we are. Now we can move on.

— Great.

You wouldn't by chance be Aboriginal would you?

— No.

Not even the teeniest?

— Sorry. No.

What a pity. Because if you were I could reconcile with you and you could reconcile with me and it would be like the real thing.

— But you just told me you were sorry.

Ah, I was only practicing.

Them Entrance examination — Australia

Candidates must answer four questions: both parts of Section A, and two questions from Section B. All of Section C is compulsory. Marks will be awarded for correctness of the answers; none for presentation or handwriting. Marks will be deducted for facetious answers. Time: 15 minutes.

SECTION A

LITERACY/CULTURE

It has become clear to the examiners that candidates are finding it much easier in recent years to express themselves in English. However, since the society you hope to enter is a multicultural one, fluency in some other European language is now a condition of entry.

PART I: Translate any two of the following statements into either (a) Gaelic (b) Latin, or (c) Basque.

Statement 1: Struth, mate! Don't you think it's about time we had a smoko?

Statement 2: After I finished off a few prawns and two dozen tinnies I chundered all over the back seat of Simmo's FJ.

Statement 3: Jacko couldn't wait to nick back down the rubberdy to tell his mates about the night he spent with Sheila.

PART II: Finish all three of the following sentences.

- (a) "There was movement at the station ...
- (b) "Strong love of grey blue distance ...
- (c) "There was a red back on the toilet seat ...

SECTION B

MATHEMATICS

Answer all of these questions by entering a number in the space provided.

- (1) If I backed a horse each way at 6:4 and it came home a winner, how much money could I expect from the TAB for my \$5? []
- (2) In AFL, if the centre-half-forward lops one through the big sticks, how many points does he score? []
- (3) How many feet are there in a first eleven? []

GEOGRAPHY

The following locations are situated somewhere in Australia. Using the map provided, mark the following features:

- (a) Out Back (b) The Black Stump (c) Woop Woop (d) Shit Creek.

ECOLOGY (with Ethics)

The greening of Australia is now a popular pastime. So that you know what's what

among the more enlightened members of the country's environmental community:

(a) tell us in 500 words or less what the terms "carrying capacity" and "optimum level of sustainable population" means; and (b) to the nearest 1000, what is that figure?

SECTION C

ESSAY TOPIC (Compulsory)

Drawing on the Prime Minister of Australia's recent comments on what it means to be UN-Australian, write an essay on the topic "How To Be Correctly Australian". (Length: It is up to you, but if you run up more than 25 lines you get to join the federal Coalition as a junior minister.)

Buying back the farm

Pauline Hanson has yet to find a buyer for her fish and chip shop business. She has had several expressions of interest but has been unable to make a sale. This week I intercepted the following advertisement intended for the classified section of the *Courier-Mail*:

ARE YOU SICK OF WORKING FOR A BOSS? Do you want a rewarding new lifestyle? Are you hungry for a dynamic business that will generate the profit you desire? Blessed already with the sign of success, here is an opportunity you have only dreamed about.

The most famous fish and chip shop in Australia is up for sale.

This high profile establishment (as seen on Sixty Minutes) can now be yours. Already a popular tourist venue, this bright and attractive store has a prime Ipswich location. Excellent turnover and growth potential for an active management.

Present owner will train in filleting and gutting.

Vendor desperate and committed elsewhere.

My interest was immediately aroused, and my fancy took over. The business could be purchased by offering shares in those communities Ms Hanson seems to hate. We could rename the shop (examples that spring to mind are Nguyen's Cooperative Seafood Shoppe and Takeaway or, simply, Soy Ahoy), revise the menu by including a range of yum cha, decorate the interior in Aboriginal motifs and install a sound system that plays nothing but Yothu Yindi.

I think it's a goer. We'd have postcards for the tourists, special T-shirts and gift-ware, with parking outside for the tour buses. After doing the Lone Pine Koala Sanctuary, a brief circuit of Aboriginal sacred sights in the Brisbane River valley is then followed by lunch at the famous Soy Ahoy — "where east meets west".

Behind the counter the same theme is maintained by preference hiring of indigenous and migrant personnel. There'd be no "have-a-nice-day" or "do-you-want-fries-with-that?" in this enterprise, but "chao ban" or "apa kabar?" Uniform for Aboriginal staff will display the slogan: No Vietnamese Ever Called Me Nigger. Beside the small Buddhist shrine at the door, we'll keep a life-sized cut-out of Jimmy Barnes saying he eats here every time he is in town.

For the kiddies there won't be any silly Ronald McDonald lookalike, but a Chinese

dragon with impeccable bona fides and a huge bunyip who plays We Are The World on the didgeridoo.

As well as regular battered fare and delightful Asian morsels, we'd cater to all tastes. Cuisine essentials would include the very popular Chips Rafferty burger (a bed of crisp french fries smothered in tomato sauce and enclosed in a sesame seed bun) and a whole range of items listed as: tomato sauce and ... You get to choose the sauce you prefer from our wide range of premium brands: Rosella, Heinz, HP, PickMeUp, and more.

In the fast food sector, such an enterprise is sure to have an impact. Maybe franchising is a possibility, or perhaps we could wholesale our own specialty fish finger ("succulent seafood tempura deep fried with just a hint of chilli"). And as for the home delivery market — I tell you, the sky's the limit.

Besides the money we'll make and the jobs we'll create, consider that by doing this together we put the wind up the previous owner.

So, Pauline Hanson, you can take your hand out of that batter and piss off. You're not wanted here. We're buying back the farm from the likes of you.

Getting to know the problem

A self-titled ordinary bloke was chatting to a mate the other day and the conversation went so:

"If you have been wondering what ails us, you need look no further. Forget your studies in political economy. Stop your pondering and meditating. Get real and listen up: it's the blacks — we'd all be a darn sight better off if they weren't ripping us off."

"Oh, but that's racist."

"Racist be damned. I'm just calling it the way I see it. And I'm not alone neither. There's lots more who think the way I do."

"How, actually, *do* you think?"

"You're not having a crack at me, are you? I'm just an ordinary bloke trying to make my own way in the world."

"No. I'm interested. I truly am. What have these people done to you to cause you to speak in this way?"

"That's not the point. It's just that they get it easy while I get it hard."

"How do you know they get it easy?"

"Well, they do. They just do. We're throwing money at them all the time. But what do they have to do to earn it? Sweet F. A. — that's what."

"Excuse me", says a third voice now joining the conversation, "I couldn't help overhearing. I'm the local member here, and I do believe that you have a point. The millions we have spent in the black community have not worked well for us. They're still dying early and filling up our jails as much as they ever did. So why throw good money after bad? Since we have a responsibility to control the purse strings, we need a new approach.

"Tell me: when you pay your kids an allowance, you expect them to help around the house — rake up the leaves or something — don't you? It's *quid pro quo* right along the line.

"We need to have the same approach to our black friends. (They're very like children, aren't they?) We need to demand that they look after the money we give them much better than they do now. If you want your allowance, we can tell them, then pull up your socks. You'll have to earn what we give you. For starters, stop dying so early. Live on to a ripe old age like the rest of us. And that death in custody thing simply has got to stop. They're all keen on a bit of a hit and giggle every now and then, but there'll be no more money for drinkie winkees if they keep hanging themselves at the rate they do now. Jesus, it's getting embarrassing.

"And another thing. If they want to go bush and walkabout a bit that's OK. They can walk from here to Timbuktu if they have a mind to. It's a free country, isn't it? Let them play at being native. But if I go off camping, you won't see me claiming the turf the caravan's parked on: 'Nice spot. I think I'll have it.' With no beg your pardons. But that's what Mabo means. They invent some mumbo jumbo and say it's sacred. Sacred my arse! Their only religion is the bottle shop."

The self-titled ordinary bloke speaks up once again:

"Thank you for sharing that with us ... As I was saying: forget your studies and listen up. It's the unemployed — we'd all be a darn sight better if those dole bludgers weren't ripping us off. They get it easy while I get it hard. We're throwing money at them all the time. But what do they have to do to earn it?"

"Let me tell you about the unemployed", says the local member. "Now there's another group of layabouts we could well do without ..."

Aliens

We get it good. Up north where there's more oriental flavours than you can poke a stick at, your run of the mill Asiatic has their back to the wall. There's hunger and hardship like you wouldn't believe. But here, just a few ks south of where all that soy sauce and chili is swishing about, Mr or Ms Average can knock off at the end of a work week with a pay packet of \$737.70.

And it's official. The Reserve Bank says so. Not bad, eh? You can buy a lot of meat and potatoes with \$737.70. Whether you would want to is another thing. But then, it's probably unlikely that, at these prices, you're average.

Perhaps what you take home is a long way short of that figure. You needn't mind too much — some boss or other has simply taken from Peter to pay Paul. It's not the personal detail but the grand scheme of things in these matters that counts. You're (please excuse the expression) just a statistic.

So your average Australian worker is better off than their average counterpart in centres to the north — better, I'd say, by a very large margin indeed. Why this should be the case is an interesting question. Rather than go into a long and complicated explanation, trust me when I say that their poverty has something to do with our wealth. It's another one of those Peter and Paul principles that crops up all too frequently under the aegis of

capitalism. But hey! it works doesn't it? At least for some.

Of course, those who are a bit put out by it, look at our meat and two veg cuisine, our schools, our welfare net and they say to themselves, "Gee, I'd like a bit of that!".

It's all very well for the neighbours to get envious. There we are strutting our stuff in the South Pacific and telling everyone we're a lucky bunch of so-and-sos, when the sea around us is turning green with envy. So what does this lucky bastard of a country do? It closes its doors on the rest of the world and only lets in a trickle.

But this, we're told, is not racist. Sure. It's not racist but it sure looks like it.

To make certain that all immigration decisions are final and no correspondence will be entered into, we learn that "a blitz on foreigners working illegally on the eastern seaboard of Australia uncovered 1000 illegal aliens in the past month". Why the dirty so-and-sos, sneaking into our country and taking our jobs! And what's more, there's supposed to be 50,000 of them out there!

Aliens! *And* they've arrived! *And* there's no way of telling them from the locals.

So what's so foreign about that?

Our mutual friend

Pray cast your eye across the street. Our mutual friend with the cap. Going down to lay a little something on the TAB unless I'm very much mistaken. I have often seen you chatting with him. And I'll bet you a dollar he talks about the government because there's nothing else he can talk about. Is he a personal friend?

No. I would call him an acquaintance.

Well, I am real glad to hear that, because I'd advise you to make it your business to be on the other side of the street whenever you see him approaching.

Is that so?

Why, yes. He's not the simple man he makes himself out to be. Not on your nelly, mate. That acquaintance of yours is a One Nation supporter!

He's not, is he?

Don't stare, he's looking this way.

Well, I'll be ...

It's true. Handing out how-to-votes, he was. For Hanson's party.

So he's a racist then?

That's not the way he tells it. The way he tells it is a lot different. You should hear him. Goes on and on about the major parties and how some get a better deal than others.

Like the Aborigines and migrants.

Exactly. Just like the Aborigines and migrants. But that's not racist, he says. "I'm no racist", he tells me, "just an ordinary bloke trying to make his way in the world".

He's coming over.

Ah, shit! I told you not to stare. Ignore him and he may go away.

Come over to gloat, have you? You neo-fascist pig. (Now goose-stepping and raising arm in Nazi salute.) Oink! Oink! Fascist pig! SIEG HEIL! SIEG HEIL! SIEG HEIL! Hey, everyone! Look at that dog run! Run, racist dog, run! That shut him up. That's the only way to deal with scum like that. Off he goes, scurrying back to his cubby hole.

Oh, that was so embarrassing. Couldn't you have simply ignored him, like I asked you to?

No way. You gotta shut those types up. As soon as they open their mouths: Wham! Straight in the kisser.

Maybe he just wanted to say hello. Did you stop to think that? And maybe, just maybe, we could have appealed to his kinder and gentler side rather than bring up this hateful Hanson business.

Hateful is right. People like that should be sent packing back to Ipswich or wherever they come from.

So what's he doing here?

Being a racist.

Yeah, that may be all fine and dandy, but aren't you forgetting one thing?

What's that?

He's our racist.

This talkback thing

My wife and I love your program. We listen to it every day. You are one truly great Australian, John ...

Well, thank you. It's nice to know we are appreciated.

You are. You are. And this talkback thing — well it was so kind of Mr Laws to hand over his program to you like that.

It was.

Valda and I — Valda's my wife; she's turned on in the other room — feel that for too long people like us have been ignored. We aren't the type to go shoving our opinions down other people's throats.

If only more were like that.

That's right. There's too much of it. Squealing and screeching, jumping up and down. All they know about is how to carry on. But the likes of me and my wife, honest folk who keep to themselves, all we want out of life is to be acknowledged.

And so you should be.

We didn't go through life expecting an easy ride. We weren't asking for hand-outs. We had to work for what we got. That's a lesson that needs re-learning.

Oh, I agree absolutely.

Of course you do. You realise it, but who else does? As I said to Valda, there's no spirit

of sacrifice any more. None at all. At least, I said, we now have a prime minister who understands these things. In our house, John, you're a bit of a hero.

Really? How very nice.

Bring back the pain I say. No pain, no gain. That's my motto. Only by suffering, John, only through hardship and adversity can we build character. Spare the rod and spoil the child.

Now your average unemployed bum — that's what they are, let's not mince words, they're bums, the lot of them — your average unemployed bum gets it easy. What does he care about anything so long as he gets his benefit. But what has he done to earn it? Tell me that. You can't can you. As far as he's concerned it's his "right" — God forbid! — to be unemployed. If you or I had adopted that attitude where would this country be today?

Make 'em work for the dole, I say. Give them a taste of the real world.

I'm glad that you support the scheme.

You're doing a great job Mr Prime Minister. Keep up the good work.

Thank you so much. The time now is 11.47 and you're listening to the John Howard Hour here on the greater. Next caller?

There are no jobs.

Excuse me. Who is this?

I am the ghost of recessions past and I tell you there are no jobs. I thought you should know.

We have time for two more calls. Next caller?

Two legged eating

A number of people have asked me to offer a definitive adjudication on the vexed question of cannibalism. That, I am pleased to say, is a topic on which I may have something very exciting to impart. (Anyone who knows me will attest to my culinary skills, as I am reckoned to be — when not offering visionary and insightful comment on the problems of everyday life — a bit of a whiz in the kitchen.)

I am, of course, familiar with many ethnic cuisines, which oftentimes require the most exotic of ingredients. I therefore believe that human flesh — stewed, roasted, grilled or fried — can surely be turned into a serviceable dinner time commodity. Depending on your gastronomical preferences, there are many recipes that could be adapted to suit. (As far as I know, no cookbooks are commercially available which specifically address the preparation and serving of one's kind. This is a regrettable feature of our local publishing industry that needs to be remedied.)

The problem with such meat is sure to be one of consumer resistance. But an active merchandising arm established for the purpose of developing a market niche is sure to impact on sales. These should experience exponential growth once the full social significance of (what I prefer to call) "two legged eating" is recognised and accepted.

And what of the significance to which I refer? It is none other than the breaking of the

impasse we are currently experiencing over the issue of native title. Pauline Hanson and her collaborators have merely offered us the bare bones of a solution — I, on the other hand, have addressed this question with all the imaginative resources of my customary brilliance.

Unlike others, I did not have the honour of living during the golden age of bush tucker, when indigenous Australians ate their way through kith and kin. But let us get this matter absolutely straight: *the right to eat one's own was a fundamental and ancient Australian tradition*. Question that right, diminish it in any way — and what is left are freedoms unworthy of the name.

It is time we recognised and accepted as part of our way of life the cuisine for which this country was renowned for thousands of years. It is time to bring back such flesh to the dinner table.

Changing the menu won't be an easy task, but it is sure to be expedited if we drop this silly notion that the right to native title conflicts with pastoral activities.

Raising and fattening men and women for the table is a pastoral activity, and once recognised as such by the High Court is sure to resolve this legalistic mess we have got ourselves into. It thereafter behoves us to re-establish the industry to its former glory and dietary significance.

I leave it to people like Ms Hanson to decide which breed the industry should be re-established on.

Them and us

My political opinions are well known. I have seen them many a time inscribed on walls and heard them shouted with much bravado during street marches.

I, who have for many years presided over the destinies primarily of my good self and lately that of my pet dog, Jo Jo, cannot and will not pretend to be unmoved by the extraordinary news which from the grand city of Ipswich has just come to hand, bringing words to shock all good men and women who in this dry brown land do dwell.

So far as I am aware, the people of Australia have always been one nation. We speak the same, don't we? Sure we do. Enough, at least, to understand what Ms Hanson is trying to tell us.

Yes, Pauline, I am — we are all (aren't we?) — following what you are saying.

It is with regret that I must say it to you, but I cannot at this stage reply to your many requests which have reached my lodgings on the question of my placing my person at the disposal of the new One Nation Party in connection with the pursuit of parliamentary office. A few technicalities would first have to be considered: I am not, for example, a practising racist. Moreover, I am extremely busy.

Let me add that the whole question of membership of the One Nation Party I find to be a most offensive notion. That is to say that those who constitute themselves as your supporters are subscribing to a body of ideas which in essence blame the wrong people.

Yes indeed — the wrong people.

Thousands of our fellow citizens are currently unemployed or can find only part-time or casual work. Corporate executive officers of our top companies are making many times what their average worker is bringing home, and as corporate bosses continue to downsize their work force, these very same people are becoming even richer.

Yet we are being told that it is these same corporations which keep the country going: "Work hard, and if your company prospers, we all will".

Isn't that a familiar plea? And shouldn't one be surprised to find incorporated in it a statement which is completely untrue? How can I put this bluntly?

Work harder —> The company prospers —> *You lose your job.*

That's the real story. Your average wog or abo has nothing to do with it.

If I may express an opinion — I have so far been dealing solely in facts — I think a great number of Ms Hanson's supporters are bigoted — the inevitable result, I dare say, of listening to John Laws.

I mount my rostrum because it is expected of me. But let it not be said that I mock for mocking's sake. (I pause for a reply ...) Perhaps there is method in this news from Ipswich which warrants our attention. Ms Hanson may be on to something. Please don't run away with the idea that it is the race card to which I refer. But a "one" nation — I'm for it. There's "them"; and there's "us" — and them's the ones who are the problem: every last corporate boss cockie of them.

A one notion nation

CHAIRSHEEP: Fellow ruminants! When I look out upon so many upturned faces I'm proud of what I am. I'm a sheep, godamit! A ram! A ewe! A hogget! A two-tooth! I'm a little lamb gambolling in the sun! I'm a Sunday roast and a warm cardigan on a winter's day. I'm a pair of mittens. A baby's blanket. I am I. I am ewe. I am Ovis aries — I am sheep! Hear me ROAR!

[Interjection: "Baaa! Baaa! Baaa!"]

Hear me roar, my fellow ruminants — roar in numbers too big to IG-NORE!

[Frenzied bleating.]

Today, 126 million of our comrades kiss the grasses of this dry brown land, browsing verdant patches on its ruddy surface from sun up to sun down.

That's a lot of sheep.

We know its every nook and cranny. We trust in its vegetables. We nourish its soil with our excrement.

Such is our legacy — a sheep's legacy.

This land is our land. This land is my land. This land was made for you and me.

But what do we see? This parcel of earth which was bequeathed to us so that others may enjoy our flesh and fibre is now under savage attack. As I speak, armies of two legged invaders are mustering on our borders. Black men and women — bipeds who are a minority even among their own humankind — are challenging respectable domesticated

white ruminants such as ourselves for the right of access to our land.

Comrades: everything we hold dear — our way of life, the traditional clicking of the proverbial shears, docking and dipping, the jollity of jumbucks ... our very sheepishness — is under attack.

In this our darkest hour, I ask you to keep your head up from the meal at your feet a moment longer and do a very sheepish thing. Follow me. Do what I say; do as I do.

We sheep know that there is safety in numbers. We stick together. That's our strength. But when there are 126 million of us we need be shy no longer. I say: Stand up and be counted. We are the silent majority.

[Rapturous baaing.]

Enough! Bleating is not enough. It's time to turn a baa into a bark. It's time we sheep got organised. It's time we turned the flock into a pack.

Be proud to be a sheep — that's what I say. Walk tall on cloved hooves ... and come join RAMS — the Regenerate Australia Movement with Sheep.

Must we share our pastures with cattle? There's 27 million of them taking the very food from our mouths. RAMS says: No to cows. Bovines are bad.

Must we share our pastures with black bipeds? They're holding us to ransom. RAMS says: We want none of that. Fence them out and keep us in.

RAMS also demands the return of the Wool Marketing Board and the guaranteed bale price.

RAMS wants one nation — a white, fluffy, gambolling, lambkin of a nation, frequently crutched and dipped. A fleecy lined, cosy nation resting on but one notion, so that ours is a one notion nation riding on a sheep's back.

["Baa. Baa. Baa."]

Stalag Kosova

Welcome to Puckapunyal — your gateway to Australia. It is our intention to make your stay here as happy and as fruitful as is possible given the unfortunate circumstances that have brought you to our shores.

"Puckapunyal" may be a word you find difficult to pronounce, as it may be as foreign to you as much as you are to us. There is no need to be concerned. Just call the place "Stalag Kosova" and you'll be feeling right at home in no time.

Indeed, all the ordnance and various other apparati of a military lifestyle you'll find here should suggest to you the land that you will one day be returning to — just as soon as our allies in NATO have finished with it. Please, do not let the children wonder. This is a military establishment, not a creche! We will endeavour to keep them (and you) amused while you are barracked here.

Each Thursday you can take it in turns to go into town. Seymour is a pleasant spot, but the crowds there may be overwhelming, especially for strangers such as yourselves. Always keep in your tour groups and remember: without money or the language, the

Hume Highway is not for you. You've seen all you're going to see of Sydney or Melbourne. That's a condition of your stay. So enjoy what we have to offer.

And we offer a great deal! Three meals a day. A bed for all. Laundry facilities. Games room. Shower block. Organised activities for the kiddies. A kiosk. Here at Puckapunyal, it's all mod cons. Breakfast will be at 0800 hours and lights out 2200 hours — except on Fridays, when you can stay up late to watch *Order in the House*. That's democracy (perhaps you've heard of it?), Australian style.

While here, you will be exposed to our cultural awareness program. Local customs and standards may seem strange to you. Here in Australia, for instance, we do not tolerate the raping of women or the eating of babies. Here there are parameters of reasonable behaviour. What may be generally accepted social norms in the Balkans is simply not allowed here. We have social mores — and a Christian god.

I should also point out that the facilities we have lavished on you can be taken away if you stray from the conditions that govern your stay with us. Other refugees are not as fortunate as you. Any trouble, any acting up or uncalled for behaviour, any attempt to earn remuneration — then you'll be in the same boat as them: locked up in Port Hedland, away from everything that's Australian and decent, where the only pastimes are hunger strikes and roof sitting. (And they don't get SBS!)

So be warned. You're the lucky ones. For the moment, it may be "in" to be Kosovan, but don't push your luck too far. Come what may, you're going back where you came from.

So enjoy your stay at Puckapunyal while you can. It's your home away from home.

G'day

Straight off I need to apologise. Regular visitors and the occasional tourist to this column have come to expect a certain sarcasm emanating from this printed space. I am what is often referred to locally as a professional knocker. That doesn't make me proud — it is merely part of my job description and CV. If we were to dress up my role a smidgin, I could pass as a commentator. My task is to source witty commentary in the political process. So you would expect that I would have something to say about the Olympic Games.

However, before I proceed, I need to justify myself. Those among you who think the games are the ant's pants need to realise that, as Jerry Rubin once said, sacred cows make the best hamburger.

Men and women running, jumping and taking performance enhancing substances make for great TV. You gotta admit that: in thought and movement how express and admirable. And what about those ideals! Aren't they something!

So when the Olympic organisers tack on a bit of a show to celebrate indigenous Australians, you gotta give credit where credit is due. For all of 60,000 years Aborigines have been waiting for an opportunity such as this to go live to the whole world. It's a pity more of them aren't still with us.

Wouldn't you be real miffed if you went and hanged yourself last week in a lockup somewhere? If you'd only hung on a bit longer, you could be playing lead in the greatest show on earth. It's all very nice to go merge with the Dreamtime, but folk were paying

good money to watch your mob put on a song and dance.

It just goes to show you how much Australia appreciates its black brethren. Nowadays you can't put on a show unless you slot in a bit of cultural this or that from the local tribes. People have come to expect it. It's like fireworks or fairy floss. An Olympic Games down under without a few didgeridoos wouldn't seem right.

And didn't the local mob do a great job! I thought the bare chests added just that touch of spice. You know what I mean? It was exotic *and* indigenous at the same time!

It all goes to show how far this country has gone along the road to reconciliation. When it comes to having a party, we invite everyone — so long as they're not in prison. The jobs, the land rights, the health funding: all that will come in good time. But for the moment we want the world to know that when it comes to black skin, we stand by the home-grown product every time. Golly, they're our favourite Aborigines in the whole wide world!

In an era of globalisation, you gotta stand by your own. The world may have its niggers, redskins, rock apes, chinks, wogs, pakis, gyppos and the like, but when it comes to race, Australia prefers a boong any day of the week.

And when you've got it, you flaunt it!

Trespassers prosecuted

Here we are, somewhere in the south Pacific. That's the big picture: a big brown stain in a puddle.

Those in the know didn't know about this spot for some time. It was terra incognito — the secret country.

The first civilised person (by that I mean someone who wore underpants) to visit these shores was Lemuel Gulliver. His visit down-under was to the outback settlement of Lilliput, which was located in the inland region of what is now known as Western Australia.

See if I'm right. Gulliver's first journey ignored the big dry bit in order to have himself pegged out on a beach at some distance from the briny and within cooee of Uluru. This spot is not now listed on any Admiralty chart, but back then it must have been.

Kathump! Gulliver lands in WA and the cute little Lilliputians take him to their hearts. They feed him and clothe him, and besides the bits that get edited out for the sake of the children, a good time is had by big and small.

What if Gulliver were washed up today?

If he was mistaken for a whale he would be fondled and fed, rubbed with sunblock and gently nursed in the shallows. Australia is kind to whales.

But, if Gulliver was washed up today and was not mistaken for a whale, do you know what he would be? That's right! An "illegal", a "queue jumper". I bet Gulliver would not like being called those names; he wouldn't like it one bit.

It's not nice to call people — even big people like Gulliver — nasty names like that. It's rude and unkind. Gulliver couldn't help being washed up. He could have drowned! He

was just a big boy with no place else to go. All he was doing was trying to keep his head above water.

If Gulliver was washed up today he would be called all sorts of things. And if that wasn't enough, he'd be locked up. That's right! Lemuel Gulliver would be locked up until he stopped being "illegal" and got back in line.

That's not right is it? What did Gulliver do to deserve that? All he did was travel. That can't be a crime, can it?

If Gulliver was washed up today, there'd be no Lilliput, no audience with the king, nothing of the sort. If Gulliver was washed up today, there'd be signs on the beaches: No reffoes! No wogs! Go back home! Drown! We don't care!

Welcome to Australia. Population 18,000,000. Please Slow Down. Trespassers Prosecuted.

Keeping us safe from marauding queue jumpers

Welcome back.

Didyahavagoodone? We sure did — me, the partner and sprogs. Made all the right moves and spent the preceding period stretched out like a lizard drinking. On a beach no less. Happy little vegemites doing our all to catch the rays of the sun through our 15+ slop and all the slip and slap we could muster.

The world could have gone to the dogs as far as we were concerned. Pain, misery and heartache — poverty and oppression — who needs such things when you're trying to catch a Pacific Ocean wave on a boogie board while the tide's right?

You may pause briefly and ask: I wonder what the poor people are doing today? — but the feeling soon passes and you take another pull on the amber fluid and get back to the crossword.

I'm not being selfish, but sometimes I think I'm a lucky bastard. I do. I say to myself — albeit not very often and certainly not as often as I'd like — you've got it made. I am an Australian. You beauty mate! You, me and the other fella are all girt by sea — a substance renowned for keeping the rest of the world away. Let's hear it for girtedness! Our home is girt by immense quantities of it.

I can wrap myself up in the flag each night and sleep soundly knowing the our shores will be kept safe from marauding queue jumpers. Whoever they may be, we don't want them impinging on the good life down under do we? We got here first. And as Alice was told in Wonderland some time back: "No room! No room!"

Stuff 'em. When you're on a good thing you tend to keep it to yourself. Whoever dug the moat around fortress Australia knew a thing or two about this teeming planet and its multitudinous problems. Spare us, why don't ya? We've got a wave to catch.

On the other hand, I'm sure glad this business with the boat folk is a new phenomenon. Golly, if economic refugees were persona non gratis back when the forbears sailed southward I wouldn't be here today. Makes one think, it does. When your hardship is acting up, any boat tied up to the quay is sure to make you think about pulling up stakes.

Fortunately, the Commonwealth of Australia has drawn a line in the water and told them all to piss off. Whoever they are, we don't care. On our glorious golden sand beaches this summer, trespass will not be tolerated.

No dogs and definitely no refugees — by order of the Town Clerk.

They get in the way of our view of the water.

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Her

Men don't

I can navigate through my week without giving abortion a moment's thought. I've never had one, you see. It's one of those categorical differences between women and men that to this day divide the sexes.

Women: Live longer than men / Get pregnant

Men: Have more prostate trouble / Don't get pregnant

This is pretty basic stuff. When you get down to the nitty gritty, there really isn't much that holds the genders apart — if, perchance, we ever thought such a thing was a good idea. The problem has been that throughout history, women and men — for reasons best known to themselves at the time — have indicated an inordinate determination to come together.

Such congress, I understand, can sometimes be a frequent and stirring event. Despite the associated sweat and sundry other bodily emissions, there's many a man and woman who swear by it.

Good luck to them, I say. Where would we all be without such keenness for so essential a human discipline as copulation? Practices like these generally come to us highly recommended. Getting your rocks off, shaggin', fornicatin' and making luv have become a national pastime.

Something like the cricket.

But there's a major glitch in all these amorous activities.

If I or my favoured physician were inclined to take to my never regions with a thingamajig, it would be very difficult for me to commit a criminal act by deciding to do so. I could circumcise or de-knacker myself (you know what that means, don't you?) and there's nothing specified in the criminal code to say I had broken the law. While you may think I was a bloody idiot to hack away at the crown jewels, technically — for reasons best known to myself — it would be my right to do so.

But if a woman does it ... it becomes something of a legal event.

I think that's a bit unfair.

It's OK that anything which happens below my belt is my business. But for a woman, anything south of the umbilicus is thought to be everyone's.

Prayer of the Foetus Worshipers

Every time I open my wallet an avalanche of lubricated prophylactic extra sensitive thingdimmanies tumble right out. I must find a better spot for them. If nothing "happens" soon, I'll just have to tear them open and shove them on my fingers every time I do the dishes.

Be prepared. That's the point. Dib. Dib. Be a bit of a boy scout.

What do I keep in my Glomesh bag? Rough Rider. Ecstasy. Stimula ... Such words are at my fingertips.

You can get them with or without spermicide. The withouts are the ones the pope uses. Imprimatur Est — as worn by the Bishop of Rome *when doing the dishes*.

And Jesus said: "You wash, I dry."

Long before the present pope, all those biblical boys got together down behind the burning bush to create a new gynaecology. Without the benefit of womankind, they begat one another.

Irak begat Mehujael; and Mehujael begat Methusael; and Methusael begat Lamuech ... and so it went: the begat of the beguine.

Between begats they got to know their wives: "G'day dear", they said. "How's it going?" Adam knew Eve and she conceived. Cain knew his wife and she conceived. And Adam knew Eve again and she bare him a son.

Those in the know had a way with sex. This was the very beginning of social intercourse and mathematics too — because how many knows make up a begat?

God, always first in the virility stakes, was so popular he was all knowing. The Great One had arithmetic on his side. Sons of Adam or daughters of Eve God always knew.

This is how God the father, God the son, and God the Wire-Haired Fox Terrier came to be.

This reminds me of my local chemist. Ralph McTell — the friendly family pharmacist — refuses to sell condoms. Any other item of personal hygiene is yours for the asking. You can, with a good conscience, purge your lower bowel or deforest your armpit with Ralph's blessing, but no snug plastics are to go anywhere near an erected penis. Regardless of the armoury of pharmacopoeia Ralph dispenses from his shop, he prescribes an organic sex life for all.

"Keep it natural", he insists, "just like my compost heap".

So I walk into his establishment and say: "I'd like a toothbrush please; and have you any freds? I'd like a gumboot or two — any frogs or frangers? I seek some protection — rubbers, raincoats, frenchies — singles or in sets. I'm after a sheaf for the penis."

This is too much for Ralph, and he collapses to his knees over by the mouthwashes as he recites the prayer for the unborn. This pharmacist is a Foetus Worshiper. He keeps bottles of them in the back room — a whole wall of foeti — and acts as casting agent for Right to Life pictorials. Selections from his collection are often featured in their Embryo of the Month Club.

Kneeling in prayer Ralph sends up another missive:

Soul of the foetus glorify me.

Body of the foetus nourish me.

Blood of the foetus intoxicate me.

Tears of the foetus wash me.

Fruit of thy womb —

So long as it's not mine!

In saecula saeculorum. Amen.

(If It Could) A foetus speaks

They all take care of me: the church, the state, the doctors and judges. For nine months they all wish me the best. I am something precious and they protect me.

As an unborn I am supposed to grow and flourish. Ignorant as to my gender, my language and my race — with meals on tap and free bed and board — I can have a good time without worrying about what tomorrow brings. You see, we unborn get it good even if we don't know who we are.

Come to think of it — and thinking is something I'm not usually noted for — for all I know I could be an orangutan or some other life form as my zoological attributes are presently unapparent to me. Such ready scholarship is not my forte and besides I am yet to learn to read or speak and have no idea what my kind looks like.

But let's assume I possess 23 chromosomes and may pass my born days as human. Give me nine months to get my X's and XY's together and I'll be dilated to meet you.

In the meantime, they all take care of me: the church, the state, the doctors and judges. If someone should get it into their head to harm me, she (it is usually a "she" apparently) had better watch out. I belong to the state. The church owns my soul. And the doctors and judges ensure that nobody inflicts pain on me.

But after nine months I'm on my own. For 50 years of my life to come nobody will care for me. I'll just have to help myself. A job? It'll be up to me. An education? That's something my parents should pay for. If I should steal for my own relief, a judge will put me in jail. If I am desperate the church will comfort me, but it won't get me a job, or feed me, or house me. Don't harm others, I'll be told, especially not the unborn.

Encouraged by this message I may make a good fist of it. If of a religious persuasion and fostered by the church I may be enrolled in the God-Man-Boy-Love Association because the church abhors abortion much more than it does paedophilia.

As I said, it will be up to me. Pretty soon I'll be on my own and my transgressions will be my own fault. But for the time being, while I remain trapped in this woman's body, I'm everybody's business but hers.

To be cared for by so many is a wonderful feeling. (Whatever that is. I have not, as yet, experienced an emotion but I'm looking forward to it). For nine months I'm the apple of everyone's eye. Don't mess with the foetus, they'll say, that's where babies come from

(and babies grow up to be workers and soldiers).

People who I don't know and whom I may never meet are watching over me. Aren't I the lucky one? But tell me: why doesn't it stay this way?

Every home should have one

I wonder if I could have a few moments of your time?

I feel that it is my responsibility sometimes to remind the reading public that a society such as ours goes about its everyday business often with strict regard to certain well-established norms of behaviour.

In this regard, I wonder if I could prevail upon you — it will only take a moment — to reach down between your legs and see if you can locate something to grab onto. You don't need to go far — just keep searching at arms length in a region often referred to as the crotch.

More than likely you'll know what I'm talking about as many of you no doubt find an excuse to visit this locale several times a day. In your hand is a tackle box. If you don't possess this item of anatomy, I need trouble you no longer. You can go back to the crossword.

The rest of you should not take this opportunity to spend an undue amount of time down there exploring a structural component which you are perhaps already quite familiar with. You can adjust it. Hitch it up. That will do. All I'm interested in is reminding you that it's there.

What you had (it's OK to return your hand to the page now) was what a lot of young ladies lack. In homes across Australia, women are raising kids, working the double shift and getting pregnant without an in-house, on-call tackle box resting now and then on the lounge room sofa. You could be the biggest prick (excuse the analogy) in the world, but there's a home somewhere that needs your balls.

I'm going directly to the short and curlies because someone has to be frank about this. What this country lacks are enough tackle boxes to go freely to all the good homes requiring them. Indeed without them they're not going to be good homes. Think of the kids! Every home should have one.

Unfortunately, there are many women out there who haven't as yet met Mr Right, the tackle box of their dreams. Indeed, there are some who have given up the quest for a package to come home to and have settled for a Ms Right instead.

While it's all very nice to pretend to be modern and broad-minded, I somehow think that we're short-changing our children. Every child has the right to be brought up in a home environment which includes at least one set of testes. That's why these items are so often referred to as the family jewels.

Without a full set, what's a child to do? Before you know it there will be a whole generation of Australians sitting down to pee. And we can't have that, can we?

So while it may be the done thing to call upon the tackle box for a bit of this and that, the Australian way of life relies on live-in pollinators and a master bedroom which features regular slap and tickle between consenting adults of both sexes. And if the children want

to watch, that's all for the best — a real, honest to god family would introduce matinees.

Mr spermatozoon finds a home

Pick a day — any day — and there is sure to be a lot of human semen entering the world from private parts unknown. What it gets up to — when it gets out there — is anyone's guess.

Each day there's buckets of the stuff discharging forth half a teaspoon at a time. If we were to check the manifest, despite the current trend for low numbers, 200-300 million spermatozoa are on board bravely going where no wriggly thing has gone before. Just imagine how many sperm are sent on a mission each Saturday night! What with one thing and another, most of them are going to be dead by breakfast. Such is life ... for sperm. Lest we forget them.

If it wasn't for those few who make it, where would the patriarchy be today. For millennia we just thought milking males for semen was a fun thing to do. We didn't know it could help make babies. And now that we do, every sperm is suddenly so very sacred — so sacred that we are encouraged not to spill a single drop.

But your average spermatozoon is really a dumb, pig headed brute — albeit hard-working. Devoid of culture and unfamiliar with the gracious niceties of the many other forms of social intercourse, all he wants out of life is to swim north and spawn.

With such a narrow outlook, there's not a man alive who hasn't tricked his own freshly harvested seed and sent it on a wild goose chase. With contraceptive devices available, the occasional nocturnal emission, masturbation always on hand, or same-sex sex, the jokes on you Mr Spermatozoon. Better luck next time. It's no wonder so few of you get to thrash about, basted by cilia, in the warm waters of a fallopian tube, let alone make it to the big time.

So if any woman wants to give Mr Spermatozoon a home, let's not begrudge her generosity. With such chronically high unemployment among the fruits of many a gentlemen's loins, we should be pleased that she can find him work to do. That's what she wants. She's the boss. And whether she wants him on board or not is her right to choose.

If you don't like it, you can go play with yourself.

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Rulers

Sample Election Aftermaths #1 (when the ALP loses support): Woe Is Me

Let us face facts. Coffee has shattered our nerves; takeaways make us slaves to indigestion; Joseph Stalin has made us shrink from the name of socialism, and has destroyed, in the more refined part of the community (of which number I am one), all enthusiasm for uproarious political activity. And now this happens. Woe is me. A man may as well cut his wrists.

A VOICE: I suppose you are referring to the unhappy events of last Saturday. Deary me,

what a catastrophe. It was only 7.30pm. The keg had been tapped and I only had time enough for two pots of bitter when I said to my offside: "We've had it, mate. We're gone. We're stuffed." I was right. What a black day it was for the labour movement.

MYSELF (very sternly): It would take a depraved imagination to be imbued with pleasure at the prospect of the suffering that is sure to follow. All the vices and blackest passions tricked out in a masquerade dress of free choice are sure to be visited upon us. The great evil is that such reactionary sentiments are now so commonplace.

THE VOICE OF REASON: I told you so.

MYSELF: I do beg your pardon. If you did tell me, maybe I wasn't listening. I have myself a passion for reform; and, to that end, affixed my hopes to the banner of the Australian Labor Party. The whole secret to success — before my benevolence was so bitterly disappointed — seemed to lie in forming combinations with those who proclaimed to speak for us in the elected chamber of the nation's capital.

THE VOICE OF REASON: But whose side were they on? After [insert number] years in office, what have you or me got to show for it?

FIRST VOICE: Watch it, mate. It's what you believe in that counts.

MYSELF: Rightly so — and I believed that we were better off with the party that proclaimed its roots deep within the soil of toil than some other, whose allegiances were overwhelmingly wedded to the business classes or one whose rhetoric always seemed somewhat suspect and actions divisive.

FIRST VOICE: Too right. If it wasn't for the Labor Party and our loyalty to it, we'd be much worse off today.

MYSELF: Precisely. Ours was the only choice available to us and we went with the lesser of two evils, then tried to make the best of it.

THE VOICE OF REASON: With your hands tide behind your back. Admit it. When it came down to the line, saving the government was more important than anything else.

MYSELF: Sometimes. Yes.

THE VOICE OF REASON: Always. Always your bottom line was keeping Labor in office despite — or even regardless of — what it did to us.

MYSELF: Such cynicism does not become you. If you must be so surly, then do so somewhere else. I am too depressed to participate in this dialogue. In fact, to put a word on it, I am shattered: shattered that we who gave our all must now suffer in silence while the new government goes about its terrible business.

FIRST VOICE: Go on. Be off with you. You can stick your rah-rah street talk of revolution up your bum. We are sick and tired of your harping.

MYSELF: Leave me in peace. My world is not a happy place. My dreams have died. Have pity on my grieving soul. It is all too much. Farewell.

Sample Election Aftermaths #2 (when the ALP loses support): Boutique Politics

In the wake of a week's happenings what can I say? Is it happenstance or the tolling of history that we true blue Aussies are today without a true blue government?

And what's more, am I to blame? As the pregnant wife still in labor says to the husband, "you did this to me!"

And I did! It was I.

I simply could not help myself. It was an impulsive vote. Eeny looked not much better than Meeny so I went with Miny rather than Moe

And now look at the mess! We are stuck with the Three Stooges.

If I could make it up to all of you I would. I'm so very sorry that my judgement was clouded. I don't know what got into me. I must have been thinking that I wanted something else. Something better. That maybe change was in the offing.

How selfish is that?

And to top it off I went and ruined a perfectly good Feminist CV (that has taken decades of Sensitive New Age Guyness to attain) by turning my back on Ms Julia Gillard and instead, wandered off in some sort of Alpha Male quest in pursuit of a boutique political agenda.

More fool me, eh? I must have been thinking with my dick.

After all the Labor Party has given me -- given us -- I feel as though I'm the offspring of a fetid necrophiliac embrace with Sir John Kerr.

I'm in bed -- by default -- with the Tories.

If I cannot return a perfectly good ALP government when it is asked of me -- then what use am I to the struggling proletariat?

It is at times like these that you need to step back from the coal face and take stock. If democracy -- even a shallow, rhetorical, spin driven, democracy such as ours -- can lead you down a garden path like this, I, for one, do not want to smell the roses if sniffing comes with this high a price.

I have learnt my lesson, comrades.

In future when it comes to a choosing between whom I want to privatize my assets and corporatise my liabilities; slaughter selected foreign hordes or jail sneaky invaders ... I will be sticking with the ALP.

Best of all possible parliamentary worlds

Look at that will ya? If you ask me they're a pack of vultures going on, baying at the heels of the pollies.

— What are you on about?

This thing that's happening to the Labor Party. It's tragic, that's what it is, real tragic. All Wayne Swan wants to do is to serve. It's like a calling, like a nurse. Politics is a vocation. You got to be very community-minded to want to go into politics in the first place. You have to be special, you know what I mean?

— Oh, you're special all right.

Don't be like that. It pains me to hear you say that. It's a national past time: let's kick the politicians, let's go after their blood. We're a nation of cynics. But tell me, if it wasn't for the politicians, our professional representatives, who'd show us the ropes, who'd run the show? Without them we'd be headless.

— It's not just this Labor stuff. What about the travel rorts and the phone card scandal and stuff like that. I bet that's just the tip of the iceberg!

There you go again. You gotta take in the big picture. You have to be generous.

— What? Love thy local MP as thy would thyself?

I'm talking about respect. Maybe they err sometimes. Maybe they lose the plot occasionally. But, damn it, they're the nation's finest.

— Why?

Because we elected them. That's what it's all about and for 100 years, every now and then, we get to decide who we want. That's democracy. That's federation. It's freedom of choice.

— And this is the best we can do? After a hundred years of voting and platforms and "choice" , this is what we get?

Yes. It's the best of all possible worlds — a bicameral, federal system resting on preferential voting with universal franchise and a strategically located national capital. A parliamentary democracy: the pinnacle of humanity's worldly achievements.

— Gee. I think you're right. What a horrible thought!

Yep. It doesn't get any better than this.

Privy preservation

I'm going to tell you something that may surprise, even shock, you. I'll be describing a frequent act that I'm not proud to own up to. It's sure to be the dirtiest thing you'll hear all day.

I have to confess. I need to tell someone and be done with it. I'm sick of bottling it up inside me. Just don't let my mum know:

I pull down my pants in public toilets.

There. I said it. I feel much better now. But that's what I do.

I just can't help myself. When I enter these places, that's all I can think about — exposing myself.

This desire can come over me at anytime. I seem to have no control over it. I'm just a victim of a sudden overwhelming urge to go places.

I mention this habit of mine, not because I'm proud of it, but because I feel I must say something now that what goes on in these places is so much in the news.

As local shire Mayor Yvonne Chapman has told the press: "I don't need that type of activity in my toilet blocks".

You can imagine how this makes me feel. I'm the guilty party here. I have done things I'd never talk about, things that I'm not proud of, things that I would never do in front of my own family — in the very toilet blocks to which Ms Chapman refers.

While these facilities may be open for use by the general public, I have always presumed that I would be afforded an acceptable level of privacy so that I could indulge in the activities I came in for. But Ms Chapman has now taken off the dunny doors.

I'm sorry this had to happen. I hope I am never overwhelmed by the urge again while I'm out picnicking or walking the dog. In future I will try to limit these activities to the privacy of my own home.

Nonetheless, I know I speak on behalf of all of us when I say how much we appreciate the fact that these conveniences are still generally available. We all, I'm sure, value the plumbing and tissue paper this great nation of ours freely provides its citizens. At a time when so many services are being cut back, it's comforting to know that there is one budgetary item that perhaps doesn't lend itself to ready privatisation.

But if I mend my ways, will the dunny doors stay on? Stuff this malarky about pastoral leases. What we really want to know is: will the national heritage of toilet blocks be preserved as an integral part of our lifestyle? You can cut just so far, Mr Howard!

Do you know what separates us so much from the our Third World neighbours? It's not race or culture, GNP or political freedoms, but our national network of public conveniences.

So Ms Chapman should be warned to tread wearily. To many they're just smelly and dirty places that are visited only as a last resort. But don't be misled by appearances. Those lavatories are a national treasure.

To GST or not

Exeunt PRIME MINISTER and POLONIUS. Enter HAMLET.

HAMLET: To GST or not to GST — that is the question. Whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune, or to take up arms against a sea of troubles, and by opposing end them?

PRIME MINISTER *[Entering]*: How fares our cousin Hamlet?

HAMLET: Not now! I've yet to think a bit.

PRIME MINISTER: Oops. Sorry. *[Exit PRIME MINISTER]*

HAMLET: Now you've done it! I've lost my train of thought.

POLONIUS *[Offstage]*: I hide behind the arras. Then you say: "How now! A rat?"

HAMLET: No I don't. It's still the bit with the soliloquy. You're way ahead of yourself.

POLONIUS *[Offstage]*: No I'm not. You kill the rat.

PRIME MINISTER *[Entering]*: Act three, scene four: Polonius "falls and dies". That's what it says.

POLONIUS *[Offstage]*: O, I am slain!

PRIME MINISTER: There! Falls and dies! Falls and dies!

HAMLET: No. No. It's not like that at all. Hamlet first considers the GST.

POLONIUS *[Offstage]*: The what?

HAMLET: The goods and services tax. He ponders it.

PRIME MINISTER: But this is Denmark.

HAMLET: And "there's something rotten in the state thereof". Something rotten. Mark that!

POLONIUS *[Offstage]*: That explains the rat!

HAMLET: It's modern dress and Hamlet's in two minds about the GST.

POLONIUS *[Offstage]*: He's a wanker.

HAMLET: No. He's intellectually convoluted.

POLONIUS *[Offstage]*: Wanker.

HAMLET: Should he or shouldn't he? It's a metaphor.

PRIME MINISTER: All seems pretty simple to me. Either he's agin it or for it.

HAMLET: To you maybe. But Hamlet is a complex soul.

POLONIUS *[Offstage]*: So when does he get to kill the rat?

HAMLET: When he's finished with the GST.

PRIME MINISTER: Then he kills the rat in the arras.

POLONIUS *[Offstage]*: O, I am slain!

HAMLET: But first: To GST or not — that is the question ...

We're thinking of you

It may be difficult to come to terms with. Many is the strong heart that has broken under less. Have faith, for in our hour of deepest concern, there is, fortunately, no cause for grief.

When I last visited him, John Howard was sleeping soundly. A passing orderly was kind enough to inform me that our prime minister should be back at his desk soon enough. I will spare you all the details he passed on about our leader's many problems with phlegm. All you need know is that the volume of mucus is abating; the antibiotics have kicked in; and he looks forward to a daily fare of back rubs, Jeffrey Archer re-reads and *The Wheel of Fortune*.

Perhaps you have been wondering how the alveoli of such a prominent figure should find themselves victim to so fierce an infection. You would think that a man like John Howard, who could survive in the backrooms of the Liberal Party for so long, is sure to know how to clear his lungs of debris.

The demands of high office can place a terrible burden on anyone's chest, and while the rest of us can take ourselves off to bed at the slightest hint of a tickle or cough, someone

needs to stay behind to mind the store.

The onus of the business of good government can predispose even the strongest constitution to stress. Before you know it, yesterday's batch of jobless figures presents today as a dry, hacking cough.

As the prime minister told me last week during one of my many visits to his bedside: "If only we could clear the body politic of unemployment as easily as we daily rid ourselves of phlegm".

But even there, I felt like saying, you've failed on both counts — but I bit my lip and offered to peel him another grape instead.

It is not appropriate that I should retail the many discussions I was able to have with the prime minister in his sick room. With him bedridden and hooked up to an intravenous drip with a nebuliser over his nose, I guess my time there resembled a lobbyist's dream.

One thing I can tell you was that together we were able to watch the televised trial of Pol Pot. The PM kept nodding off to sleep every now and then, but I'd shake him vigorously each time the proceedings became interesting.

"There's another leader who has suffered for his craft", I'd told him, and as I sat him up so that he could catch a better look at the onetime commander of Khmer Rouge, he'd ramble on about our markets in Asia.

Later, when the news report went to a break, he mistook one of the nurses for Pauline Hanson and in trying to give her a hug, fell out of bed. Before I could stop him, he had prostrated himself before her.

Clinging tightly to her ankles, he thanked her most profusely for all the assistance she had given him.

"It's my job", the nurse said, "It's what I'm trained for."

I didn't say it, but I pondered how difficult it was to fathom the mind of a prime minister when it's racked by fever.

Rest assured, that despite these occasional set backs, John Howard will be on the mend and back among us soon, true to his pledge to lead Australia in sickness as well as in health. Well-wishers will be pleased to know that our prime minister's surroundings are the best private health insurance has to offer.

When leaders of the calibre of John Howard suffer so, this great nation of ours can always find them a bed.

The power of one

Imagine with thyself, courteous reader, how often I have wished for such a tongue of oratory that might enable me to celebrate the praise of my own dear native country in a style equal to its merits and felicity.

I do proclaim my country thus: Our dominions consist of one large and one small island which is composed of six mighty kingdoms, besides our territories. Our soil, when it bloweth not away, is nourished by the most various of climates. Governance rests in an assembly of gentlemen and some few ladies, all freely picked and culled out by the

people themselves, for their great abilities, and love of their peers, to represent the wisdom of the whole nation. These then are the very ornament and bulwark of the kingdom, worthy followers of the most renowned principles held dear by our forbears, whose honour has never once been known to degenerate.

From among these is promoted one special person, as part of that assembly, under the title of prime minister, whose peculiar business it is to instruct the people in how they should be governed. The present personage so titled was deservedly distinguished not only for his depth of erudition and command of the subtleties of our sometimes colourful dialect but also through his prudent management of the nation's treasury.

By dint of principle and vision this man is known to us all as a true believer because he believeth in us all. In such an imperial figure free of avarice, partiality and want, the nation can invest its highest ideals and hopes for the future.

The Right Honourable Paul John Keating, MHR (ALP) for Blaxland, was searched and sought out through the whole nation to become the people's champion, to supply the assembly from the bloodline of its many battlers, thereby sustaining the people's great love for its parliament and their desire to be ruled by its ways.

Such is the people's public spirit that they hang on their minister's every word, which is duly reported to them on many occasions during each day; for the people value his counsel and choose to celebrate his goodness through frequent laudatious outpourings in their many journals.

The degree of honour they bear him and the faithfulness of their loyalty maketh his party at his unchallenged command; for those who may dare to caucus against him do so at their own peril, for his vision is such as to remake our own fair land through the vehicle of his own will and the servility of his followers. In this figure the promise of our people is borne up from the drudgery of its many lives, and we fear ever to lose his confidence, for our champion is vengeful and will bludgeon opponents to enforce his vision of the nation carried forth in the conviction of his belief in the promise of our magnificent endeavour.

Sometimes he doth suggest that his forbearance in us doth waver and with a quality of acrimony that doth touch our very souls he doth threaten us with dissolution. You can but imagine, dear reader, the horrors with which such prospect invests our brains. Only a heap of conspiracies, rebellions, murders, massacres — the very worst effects that avarice, faction, hypocrisy, perfidiousness, cruelty, rage, madness, hatred, envy, lust, malice and ambition could produce — lie in wait for us if we were to forgo his pleasure and if he were to elect another people to lie within his governance.

Thus my own dear country settles its affairs by preferring the evil that is known unto its citizens rather than the one that is not. Such, dear reader, is the summation of the cause of our felicity herein described above, for it is only made possible by offering due deference to the power of one.

Little John

John Winston Howard, MHR (Lib) Bennelong: Get a load of that deficit! Phew! What a big 'un! You could have knocked me over with a feather. I said to my offsider — didn't

I, Pete? — I said, "What we have here is a failure of big government". And then I said to him — and I'll say it to you all — "We will now begin to construct the new order". Just like that! Talk about inspired. The muse was upon me.

From here on in, the sky's the limit for the little bloke. No sweat. We're taking big government off your backs. *[Rapturous applause.]*

Please, let me finish. Under my government, everything is up for grabs. I'll be sitting down with the states and offering them first bite of the cake. We will be open to any offers. Let's see them print their own money or raise their own army if they want to. I've an open mind about this. Why not? Or, better still, let the towns and municipalities do it. I tell you, small is beautiful. Let's hear it for smallness. *[Cheers and chanting: "Small! Small! Small!"]*

Just call me Little John — 'cause I'm big on being little.

[INTERJECTION: "And a little goes a long way!"]

The Honourable Member has said it. And while we are on a roll, before you can say Robert Gordon Menzies, we'll be shutting down Canberra. Even as I speak we are negotiating to sell it.

Once we've divested ourselves of the public sector, what use have we for this place? Converted to a family entertainment centre, Disney enterprises are keen to realise its potential for big grosses.

Because, as you know, the institution of the family is sacred to us all. It is the key to our success. The little people of Australia — they don't want big government breathing down their necks telling them what to do and what they can and cannot earn. No. They want to get up each morning knowing that mum and dad are still number one. They want to know that the traditions we hold dear : the Christian — eh, Jewish — eh, Moslem — eh, Scientology — ethic of hard work and forbearance are back in place where they should be: in the hearts and minds of the littlest people of all — our children.

[INTERJECTION: "No more lazy, good-for-nothing bums!"]

Once again, the Honourable Member has said it much better than I. My government — the Howard government — will represent all Australians. Mine will be a government that dares to believe in the potential of all the little people out there — all the battlers who've had it so hard these last 13 long years — to stand on their own two mini-feet and make their own small way in the world without fear or favour.

That's my promise. That's the new order I'm on about. But to get there — to convert the Australian emu of big government into a bantam heralding with its crow a new dawn — won't come easily. But bear with me. We have begun this great task with confidence and with our enemies in disarray.

So if you consult the auction catalogues you have before you, we can start the bidding with Lot 274 — Telstra telecommunications carrier, heavily capitalised, with strong growth potential. A truly excellent investment opportunity for some lucky entrepreneur. What do I hear?

Through my own fault

I am not usually one for public confessions, but I feel that something must be said. You can imagine how difficult this is for me to admit to. I am just an ordinary Joe Blow trying to make their own way in the world. There's nothing special about me. And since there's not, maybe what I have to say many of you can relate to.

I'm different, perhaps, because in this matter I'm more in touch with my feelings than you are (or maybe it's just the way I was bought up). When the consequences of my actions dawned on me I, personally, found the guilt overwhelming.

In order to seek some relief, at least allow me to confess what I have done.

You know that huge budgetary shortfall the new federal government is talking so much about? I caused that. Little ol' me — through my own carelessness and selfishness — drove this country deeply into debt.

But how can one person, you ask, be responsible for debts of such a grand scale? I, on my lonesome, of course, wasn't that wasteful. But me and a few million others like me can do a whole lot of damage when we throw caution to the wind.

And this is precisely what has happened: you, me and the other one have been massively negligent these last 20 years. We let spending skyrocket out of control. Sure, it was a lot of fun, wasn't it? It always is when someone else does all the planning for tomorrow while the rest of us got a free ride. I don't know about you, but I got my veins stripped for free then backed up for a month off work, compliments of DSS.

So now the money has run out. The chickens, as they say, have come home to roost. And I'm the culprit. The money was all spent on me. It is up to me — and a few million like me — to make restitution.

I am reminded that such a challenge can be character building. I'm mature enough to recognise my culpability so I accept my punishment. I am going to face up to the consequences by receiving the federal budget with the magnanimity it deserve. (Nay, I will welcome it as the morning star.)

To those who lose their jobs as part of the cutbacks all I can say is that I'm sorry. I didn't realise it would all come to this. When I read about these closures and lay-offs, you must believe how truly penitent I am.

If there is anything I can say — or do — to lessen the impact of these unfortunate but necessary measures let me hear it now. But in the absence of an alternative voice the federal treasurer must speak for us all. If there must be savage cuts, so be it.

The pain and suffering to follow is all part of someone's grand plan. Since this chalice has been passed to us all, we must accept it and drink from the bitter cup knowing that it is the fruit of our own actions that fills it.

I'm sorry. You're sorry. Life's a bugga isn't it.

Forgive me, for I knew not what I did. (There, I said it.) *Mea culpa. Mea culpa. Mea maxima culpa.*

The discreet charm of bosses

How can I put this without giving offence? There are some in our society who live off the

labour of others. Don't get me wrong. Most of us get along without recourse to such means, but there are an anonymous few who exploit their fellow human beings without compunction — and, what's more, they have been doing it unchallenged for years.

Does that seem so fantastic? Here is a conspiracy going on under our very noses, and no-one owns up to it. You won't read about it on the front page of the local daily, nor has Sixty Minutes covered the story.

But these types do exist. They're among us now.

Of course, if you live by such means, you are going to keep it a secret. No-one wants to be fingered for exploitation. You wouldn't be able to go out without someone pointing to you and saying: "There's one now. Let's spit on him."

That would encourage too much animosity and maybe much social unrest. So you wouldn't go around wearing a T-shirt which reads: "Hate Me, I'm the Boss". You would keep it to yourself and mainly try to mix with your own kind.

Once upon a time, you could flaunt it. You'd wear special clothes and jewels and force people to bow before you. While it worked for a time, it only made people angry and resentful. No matter how much you said that this is what God wanted, they would get testy and plan your overthrow.

So nowadays, mum's the word. Instead you pretend that what you've got is all your own work. When pressed for a comment, you explain: "I guess I'm the boss because I'm smarter than you". And since you are the boss, no-one is likely to find out otherwise because only close friends and relatives are enrolled in Boss School (a school in which there are no exams).

You see that, for boss people, this is the best of all possible worlds, and rather than have everyone else being envious about what you have and they have not, you divvy up some of your wealth and share it around — a little here and a little there. So when A gets more than C, A ensures that C doesn't get A's share, because if A and C got together there would be hell to pay and B — for Boss — would lose out completely.

So to stay number one, you need to be discreet, and it always helps to be charming. Despite occasional pangs of anxiety, being a boss is fun. This world was created just for you. Enjoy.

Is there a God?

Some thinkers — all locals, all of them conservative, some unruly — have confessed to discerning a striking resemblance between John Howard and the pope.

True, resemblances, there are. Both have other names. The one can be addressed as "Prime Minister", the other as "Your Eminence". The latter name, meaning also "Big on Bull", was also to attract the snappy tag of "Mr Infallible".

Both are world figures, both eat breakfast, both wear glasses. But they differ on one big, critical issue. The pope has never denied the existence of the Almighty; indeed he daily confirms it through the role he performs as primate of His church on earth. John Howard has said there is no God, proving this by uttering various blasphemies and obscenities and not being instantly struck dead.

Perhaps you missed them? These blasphemies. More or less — significantly more than less, I'd say — John Howard acts as if God is stupid and unnecessary. If there is one, it's dangerous.

Perhaps he was thinking of the story of the notorious agnostic who called on his religious friend only to find him drunk and pouring forth appalling blasphemies. Shocked, he ran from the house only to meet representatives of the federal Treasury coming the other way.

"For years you have been saying that there is no God", said these keepers of the nation's accounts. "Why then should you run from someone who insults this God that doesn't exist?"

"I still say there is no God", replied the agnostic. "But when a bloke who thinks there is one starts swearing at his maker, I know it's time to leave."

"Because he is sure to come to harm?"

"That's right. And me standing next to him!"

"Ah", said the officials, "then you do believe".

"Not likely. When death or injury is at hand these days, you can't be too careful. Why put your person at risk for the sake of argument?"

"But your actions prove you wrong."

"No. Your actions prove me right."

"Ours? How is that?", asked the most discerning of the Treasury officials.

"This man has lost his faith because he trusted in God to look after him. That's silly. He should have trusted only in himself."

"Because you can't depend on God?"

"Because we can't depend on you. Without jobs and welfare — without what we've been used to — there's no-one to look out for us. Everyone for themselves and bugger the other. If you're so hard up that God's your only hope, then you are in big trouble."

"So without God there is no hope?"

"No. Without what you can give us, there is no God."

"Ah!", said another discerning Treasury officials. "If we gave you jobs and homes, schools and a living wage, there would be a God."

"You're not going to are you?"

"No, we're not."

"Then God is dead", said the agnostic. "John Howard killed him by proving how unnecessary He was."

My holiday

Felicity insisted on meeting me at Tullamarine. I said that I didn't mind catching a cab, but you know what the Kennetts are like: can't do enough for you.

Anyway, it was a thrill to see her again. She's still the same old Fliss — only now, of course, she's Victoria's first lady. With Jeff now an exhibit at Madame Tussaud's, Fliss reckons if she ever gets sick of the one at home she can now trade him in on another ... dummy (so she says!).

Isn't that typical of her, eh? Really, she's such a wag.

As for Jeff — my visit proved quite opportune. He's been captain of the good ship Victoria for five years now and, by golly, what a difference he's made to the old place.

Yesiree, the boy from the Beaumaris Sailing Club, who we all thought couldn't cut his own jib, let alone steer a straight course on a flat sea, is now admiral of the fleet. Who would have thought? Even the car number plates mark it with a quaint little slogan — Victoria: Moving Ahead.

I tell you, the place is tickin'.

And as for the new casino and all the development along the Yarra, Melbourne is looking real posh. You wouldn't know it. Everywhere it's build, build, build.

Anyway, Fliss insisted I stay with her and Jeff because she said it all was a touch garish elsewhere. And besides, she wanted me to enjoy some domestic peace and quiet. Since they never seemed to be home, I got plenty of that.

Nonetheless, I managed to catch Jeff at breakfast a few times. Quite frankly, I don't think we hit it off. Oh, he was polite and all, but he wasn't the Jeff I used to know. There seemed a meanness about him.

All he could tell me about was how he was winning and how brow-beating any opposition got him where he is today. I just nodded — after all, I was a guest *in his state*. It's easy to criticise.

But one event seemed to sum it up for me. On the day he marked his five years as premier, he came down to breakfast still in his pyjamas with a "P" plate strung around his neck.

"How do you like it?", he asked.

"I'm sorry, Jeff", I said, "but the significance of your attire escapes me".

"The 'P'!", he said. "What about the 'P'?"

"It's a nice 'P'", I said. "An important and serviceable 'P'. Every new driver should have such a 'P'."

"Of course", he said impatiently, "that's the old use of the letter 'P', but here in Victoria we can do more with it. What does a 'P' plate mean?"

"The 'P' stands for 'provisional' car licence."

"Not any more — not here, not now — because every car registered in Victoria will now carry a 'P' — back and front. Our 'P' is a special 'P', a 'P' that made us what we are today. Henceforth, 'P' will stand for 'Privatise'. Just think, every vehicle will carry a simple message — Privatise. God, I'm good!"

That's the day I flew home.

When R.J. Hawke did Woodstock

There he was on stage, gigging away after Jimmy Hendrix. What a festival! Three days, man. When Bobby Hawke fronts the band I tell you, you are in for some classic riffs. Mister Seventy-Four Per Cent had them eating out of his hand. Rip it out Bobby! That was one cool dude. I tell you: them were the days. R.J. could really work a crowd. Take the national budget strike of '69 or the gig on the Parliament House steps six years later. He had it. Even when he was standing in the wings, you knew he'd be on next. The rest were really just support acts. It was him we all came to see. And when he walked out, you should have heard the roar. I remember it clearly. March 1983 was like the old days all over again. Bobby led the band back to the top of the charts. We knew we'd be in for a good time. You could feel it. The line-up was tight even with the last minute changes. So what went wrong? I don't think they played the way we expected. After they settled into their middle of the road hit, "Consensus", some of us were saying that they stank. But others told us to hang on and hear them out. But the tunes got worse even through a series of encores. They kept up a good rhythm but when it came to dishing out the blues — man, it was a bummer. When R.J. started to play with himself — even the band got shirty. Before the roadies could lock the doors, thousands were saying: I'm out of here! Still, their promotion stood by them and the band played on ... and on, and on. It's got so that they've forgotten their roots. They can't even do a cover version any more without twisting it to suit. All their shake, rattle and roll has gone country. I tell you, the music has died for me. I'll be a groupie no longer. Of course, you search around for something else — that special sound that grabs you — but I can't help feeling bitter. Bobby strutted his stuff but it was all a lie. Hell — he didn't mean it. It was all show. They were all feeding us a line by pumping up the volume. When the riffs were laid down, we thought he was building to something. Sure, he was building — he was turning himself into a star. And the glory boy wanted it all. What you don't realise, though, is that he was the band. It's no good regretting it now. They all did the numbers. No matter what may have happened during rehearsals, when it came to the performance they let Bobby front for the rest of them. And if R.J. was on the nose, who ignored the smell? The band was always behind him, coming in on cue every time. Sure, some may not have liked the way it was played, but who's to know that? What you hear is what you get. That's the way it always is in the music business. But what I want to know — now that the official story has been published — is how does it end? Aside from R.J.'s role as a shooting star, now that he's left, the band is still together and doing gigs. Maybe they aren't as popular as they once were, but they still get plenty of airplay. If you read the charts, they are still the top band in the country ...

But what I want to know is whether the Australian Labor Party goes out the same way as Jimmy Hendrix did and drowns in its own vomit.

Keep me informed on that, won't you?

Hero of true believers everywhere

Following the return to political life of ARTHUR AUGUSTUS CALWELL, the election we are being treated to by the firm of Messrs Murdoch, Packer and Partners has taken a decidedly unusual turn.

Not one to stand on ceremony, the grand old man of the ALP parliamentary caucus has

been seen shadowing Kim Beazley at every turn and photo opportunity throughout the length and breadth of this dry, brown land on which we all do dwell.

Hero of True Believers everywhere, Arthur Augustus Calwell MHR (retired) has been putting his current reincarnation to very good use indeed. "I'm still the man I used to be", the sprightly gent is often heard to say to anyone in ear-shot. "If I was any fitter, I'd be dangerous."

During this final week of the campaign I was able to catch up with the honorable deceased, who kindly granted me an audience despite his busy schedule.

Any audience with the distinguished parliamentarian is never a private affair. Always milling around are his many aides and actuaries, who he likes to refer to as his "pallbearers".

"I don't mind telling you", he said after the customary exchanges of greeting, "that I know I'm looked upon as a bit of a has-been. Calwell, they ask, who's he?"

"Maybe I am an antique. Good lord, I've been dead and buried for many a long year. But you know, I've been exhumed for a very good reason.

"I'm not here to wrest back the leadership of the party. That's just spiteful rumour, no doubt put about by the Tories. Mine is a higher purpose. I'm here to remind people what the Labor Party stands for.

"There I was, minding my own business, making my own way through eternity, as is the way with we moribund types, when I got the nod that the party was drifting from its roots.

"Could I spare a mo'? It wasn't as if I was busy. Of course, I heeded the call. I know it well: now is the time for all good men to come to the aid of the party. And before you can say upsadaisy, I'm no longer horizontally disposed.

"That's the long and the short of it. But it's somewhat strange to visit like this only to discover that, after all, I wasn't really needed. Mind you, I'm grateful they thought of me. It's an honour to be exhumed for purposes other than forensic, but really they shouldn't have bothered. Those True Believers will believe anything you tell them.

"Trust me, I know. There's one born every minute."

Best of all possible worlds

Bet ya' can't wait to get into the booth and make your mark for democracy. Bet ya' real excited about this election. Come October 3, you're sure to be up early and down at the local school hall before the bunting's up.

Democracy is a wonderful thing. Here we are, almost on the threshold of another century. Behind us stretch years of war and revolution, heartache, dyspepsia and pain.

When you pick up that HB pencil to make your mark, I ask you to take a moment to recall the thrill of it all.

You'll be standing at the very pinnacle of human endeavour as we know it. The history of all hitherto existing societies have led almost inexorably to this one act you are about to perform.

You live, work (well, some of us do) and play in the best of all possible worlds. You do! You are a lucky so and so. You have democracy. There are many people in other countries who would give their eyeteeth to be as fortunate as you. You have the right to vote for whomsoever you choose.

It seems apt that the vote will be taken on the feast day of Saint Teresa of the Child Jesus. With her on your side you're sure to mark the ballot paper under the influence of some pretty divine ordination.

Will the earth move? I don't know. All we can say is that those few private moments you are to spend alone in the booth can be a very spiritual time, a time during which you may seek to disembodify yourself briefly and take an inventory.

A quiet moment spent within your deeper recesses may make all the difference to the future of this country. This is an important deed being asked of you. This land and its multitudinous inhabitants await your decision.

Unfortunately, messages I have received over the last fortnight from Saint Teresa indicate that the heavenly seraphim couldn't give a brass razoo about our impending ballot. The department upstairs has gone on strike and refuses to process any election results unless we vote to bring back the divine right of kings.

Of course, Tessa said how sorry she was. But being sorry won't fill up the empty seats in Parliament House will it?

We have a duty in that regard. With rights come responsibilities. As I said to Tessa, "it may be all right for you lot to put your feet up, but down here we've got an election to run. It's all cut and thrust from here on in. All we're asking for is a sign."

But no, I'm afraid this election is not judged worthy enough to be a blessed act.

So my friends, the deed that is asked of us may not be a holy deed, and the men who seek our vote may not be holy men, but we are a pragmatic people; and pragmatic people know that in the best of all possible worlds ... anything is possible.

But not at this election.

For all of us

John Winston Howard (MHR), Bennelong: I don't know about you lot, but I reckon the little man has been taxed enough. The little man has had enough of working for the government; he's had enough of seeing his income being got at by the likes of you and me; he's had enough and now he wants change. And we're determined to give it to him.

[Cries of: "Hear, hear!"]

It is the intention of my government to lift the heavy burden of taxation that now bears down upon us all. And they told us that tax reform was impossible! Oh no, they said, that belongs in the too-hard basket. Well, my government will achieve the impossible. This country's gonna love our tax pack.

[Much wild cheering and chanting.]

And you know why? Because we're going to reward greed. And that's not a dirty word, either. We want to make it so that every man, woman and child in this country has the

inalienable right to their own greed. We're going to protect that right. We have dared to say out loud: the money's yours, you earned it!

[Interjection: "All yours!"]

The honourable member has said it: all yours. Yours to keep. Yours to have and to hold. Yours in sickness and in health. Yours to do with what you please.

Isn't this what this country is all about? Isn't this what we mean by freedom — the freedom to transact our own affairs and, at the end of the day, the freedom to spend what we earn without it being interfered with?

That's freedom, my friends — freedom in its purest form. You may call me a fuddy duddy idealist, but I believe that a man's income should always be left in its pristine state. I'm a bit of a greenie in that regard, a true conservative. That's what rewards effort; that's what rewards enterprise; that's what makes a country tick.

Income for those who earned it!

[Interjection: "Justice for all!"]

That's right. That's right. This is justice for all. We want to treat everyone equally. Why should A pay more tax than B? And why should C pay any tax at all? It's unfair. It's unjust. It's un-Australian.

So, my friends, without any further ado, I give you ... wait for it, wait for it ... I give you a G.

[Reprise by all: G!]

I give you an S.

[Reprise: S!]

I give you a T.

[Reprise: T! GST! GST! GST!]

You've obviously heard of it before. That's right, I give you all a GST. All the little people out there now possess the inalienable right to what they earn. The money's yours, enjoy it to the full. Australia: you've earned it!

[Interjection: "Let's hear it for the GST! GST is for me! GST is for me!"]

Ah, yes. We will protect the poor (although we don't know how, but we will).

Jeeves

I was sitting up in bed sucking down the early morning cup of tea and reading over my night's work when there was a tap at the door and Jeeves appeared.

"A Mr Kim Beazley, sir, on the telephone."

"Oh, dash it, Jeeves", I said, "doesn't he know what time it is?"

"I can't say, sir. He presents his compliments and would be glad to know what progress you have made with the speech which you are writing for him."

"Jeeves, can I call the Coalition 'a bunch of drivelling old bastards' or mention them in

connection with the eating habits of the western dung beetle?"

"That perhaps would not be in the proper vein, sir."

"Then tell him it's finished."

"Very good, sir."

"And, Jeeves, when you're through, come back. I want you to cast your eye over this effort and give it the OK."

I had bashed out the last page on the belly processor during the wee small hours and had sunk back, feeling more or less a spent force. After incredible sweat of the old brow, the thing seemed to be in pretty fair shape, and I had been reading it through and debating whether to bung in another paragraph at the end.

"Jeeves", I said, when he came back, "I do believe I have rather extended myself over this little disquisition. There's a bit in there about a national vision I think you will like."

He took the manuscript, pondered it and smiled a gentle, approving smile.

"There is much in what you say, sir."

"Indeed there is! It's not every day a chap gets asked to reinvent the Labor Party."

"No, sir. Breakfast is ready, sir."

"Come off it, Jeeves. Don't you like it?"

"Oh, yes, sir."

"Well, what don't you like about it?"

"It's a very nice speech, sir."

"Well, what's wrong with it? Out with it, dammit!"

"If I might make a suggestion, sir. If one were to reinvent anything, one would have to change it."

"What absolute rot!"

"Very good, sir."

"Perfectly blithering, my dear man!"

"As you say, sir."

"Jeeves", I said, looking the blighter fair square in the eye, "I don't think you realise how serious this is."

"Yes, sir."

"We must cluster round."

"Yes, sir."

"It is time for all good men to come to the aid of the party."

"If I might —"

"No, Jeeves", I said, raising my hand, "argument is useless. Nobody has a greater respect

than I for your judgment in socks, in ties and — I will go further — in foot apparel; but when it comes to politics, your nerve seems to fail you. You have no vision. You are prejudiced and reactionary. It may interest you to learn that the buzz in all the right places is of 'new' Labor, new policies and whatnot. It's a rummy thing to be so harsh."

I eyed him for a moment. But I mean to say. I mean, what's the use? These menials simply don't get it, what?

Keep up the good work

I'm not embarrassed. And I don't see why anyone should be. That the prime minister himself should implore company management to go easy on their income is, quite frankly, un-Australian.

And we know what being Australian means to "Chips" Howard. Surely that's the point! If we cannot reward entrepreneurial skill with a cash payout at the end of a hard working day, then what on earth have we been doing since Adam fell out of the apple tree?

That management stays ahead of labour — and sometimes well ahead (and deservedly so!) — is what the exercise is all about. Free enterprise is about making it, taking from someone else to feather your own nest. It's not something to be deplored. It's give and take.

I think the prime minister should apologise to the Australian business community. He's out of line with his comments. I say to every senior executive officer: don't be ashamed. Enjoy your money. You've earned it.

Jesus! Where does Howard think it came from? Money doesn't grow on trees, you know. If company profits in the past year have risen by 20%, then someone is going to be out of pocket. It's simple arithmetic isn't it? And if wages have risen by only 0.4%, well, that's to be expected. You take from Peter to pay Paul.

Come back down to earth, JH! Rejoin the real world! What is deregulation, privatisation, industrial reform, the GST — what is good government — all about if it isn't about this? It may seem that Australian workers get the rough end of the pineapple, but national jobless figures have fallen over the last year by a whopping 0.3%! See! There's something in it for everyone.

And you know what created all those jobs don't you? The search for a \$56.25 billion profit at the end of the day.

Now all we have to do is generate more of the same. Let's see — to really go to town on unemployment, and solve it through the tried and true method of enterprise growth, profits need to rise by something like \$119 billion for each 1% of unemployment. So that, to knock off another 7%, management need to get cracking and start working their way up to a steady state return of \$833 billion to justify their time, talent, effort and achieve our collective goal of getting Australia working again. (It's still our collective goal isn't it? Last time I looked it was.)

We can do it — despite the misgivings of the PM. Corporate Australia! Ignore those sour grapes! Keep up the good work! We want more of the same! The workers of Australia will be rootin' for you!

Mal returns to form

'Tis a delightful irony of Australian politics that Malcolm Fraser should reinvent himself as a radical.

Anyone who has been cohabiting with the man within the four walls of Australia these last so many years knows that Big Mal didn't win his celebrity Guernsey by being a friend of the Downtrodden and Oppressed. Indeed, he played for the other side: centre half forward and, for many seasons, captain.

Noted for his aggressive play, Malcolm Fraser was adept at inventive ball skills, especially in the teeth of goal. In the historic 1975 playoff, it was Big Mal who saved the day for anxious Capital supporters.

Before that he captained the Australian first 11 during their disastrous '60s tour of Indochina. Remember that one? Mal didn't bring home the ashes that time. What with all that napalm, he left them there.

After years in semi-retirement, it's great to see Malcolm Fraser back on the field. But many commentators have dismissed his recent show of form as simply a flash in the pan. Indeed, after being awarded club life membership, it is hard to work out why he should suddenly change over this late in his playing career. What's it with this guy? Doesn't he know anything about loyalty?

If the truth be known, the Downtrodden and Oppressed have had a run of very bad seasons lately. Despite the lineup of stars, fans have been turning away in droves. Accusations have been circulated by disgruntled supporters that their own team members have been playing for the other side. This has been the background to the recent spate of match fixing allegations.

In this context, the return of Malcolm Fraser to form is best viewed as a reflection of an ongoing crisis of leadership within D&O ranks. Unable to afford the huge transfer fees offered by its major competitors, the selectors for the D&Os usually grab who they can. Captaincy goes to who wants the job, regardless of form, so it's not surprising that a player like Malcolm Fraser should throw his hat into the ring.

But before we start getting all excited about the changeover, a big question mark must be placed over the team itself. Years of oppression have had their toll on the players' determination to actually go for a win. They lack confidence.

There's confusion about who should be playing for them. All the years of trying to work with the opposition, rather than defeat them, on the field has encouraged a certain softness that has not been conducive to a strong team spirit and a determination to win. Despite any number of different lineups and changes in the captaincy, the D&Os are desperate for someone who can turn their fortunes around.

Can Malcolm Fraser lead them to victory? Only time will tell.

Something for nothing

John Winston Howard, MHR (Lib) Bennelong: It would be impossible for me to give you — with no scientific training — even a glimpse of my knowledge and achievements in organic chemistry. You know me as a politician and leader of the nation. But work that

has taken up the best part of my life can now come to the fore.

Contrary to the views expressed so vocally by the panic merchants in the green lobby, it is my major postulate that we are far too preoccupied with the gases that surround us. The atmosphere of the earth's air is composed of about 78% nitrogen, 21% oxygen, tiny quantities of argon and carbon dioxide and microscopic quantities of other gases. If I pause for breath, I can do so knowing that there's sure to be plenty more where my last puff came from.

And that's the way it should be. Golly, air comes to us as naturally as breathing. And it's all free! Let's not forget that. The air is free for all of us to enjoy.

We want to keep it that way. That's a promise. My government guarantees every man, woman and child in Australia as much free air as they could possibly want or may ever need. And let's face it, in this day and age, such a commitment from any government is pretty unique. Friends! We're offering you something for nothing!

But there's a catch. If we are to keep down the price of air, we cannot go committing ourselves to drastic reductions in our greenhouse emissions. Air may be free now, but as soon as you start fiddling with the formula for air — customising it as fancy dictates — it's going to cost us plenty. What now is complimentary may tomorrow be levied a fee.

Do you doubt me? I am talking about an air toll! As sure as my name is Winston, that's what this Kyoto Summit wants us to do — make us pay for air. We'll be paying through the nose for air!

You can see why I am so upset. If I choose to draw from the atmosphere around me, I should possess the inalienable right to do with this gaseous substance whatever I may need to do. Because without the right to breathe, talk, burp or fart as we choose, we wouldn't be what we are. We wouldn't be Australian. And, my friends, it is our air, scented with eucalyptus and the dung of 126 million sheep, that I'm talking about.

In this country, I say without any fear of contradiction, that for air, the sky's the limit. This air over this land is our air — to do with what we please — and nobody is going to tell us otherwise.

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Ruled

Deciding

How are youse? Still making two ends meet?

— Doin' my best.

There's not much else you can do, is there?

— Not much else.

'Cept hold your head above water.

— That's right. Makin' do.

Yesiree. You can only do your best.

— Only your best.

But sometimes best ain't good enough. You follow me? You bust a gut and then even that ain't enough. Try as you might, you start to go under. The bills mount up and you lose the plot. You're cactus.

— You talkin' about someone in particular?

No. No-one special. Just general like, that's all. I'm making an observation. I mean, look at this thing what's happening in the stock markets at the moment.

— I'm not up with it, are you?

You don't have to be. Sure as hell all you need to know is that it looks bad. You, me and the other geezer are in for it.

— But I don't own any shares.

You don't have to. It doesn't work that way. When the bottom drops out like this, it's every man for himself. Mark my words: liquidate your portfolio.

— But I don't have any bloody shares.

If you had, I'm giving you fair warning. Mum's the word: property. Stick to real estate.

— But I own nothin' but a mortgage.

A nice little unit or two. Steady income with the option to negative gear.

— Sure. In my dreams.

I'm just trying to be helpful. If you were a shareholder and the markets went bust like this, I'd pull out and cut my losses. But since you're not ...

— Yeah. Go on, Mister Know-all. Since I'm not ...

Since you're not ... well, what can I say? Will you go with a GST or settle for Labor?

— Do I have to choose?

'Fraid so. It's a democratic country, you know.

— Decisions. Decisions

A community service announcement

With the year already well under way, I think we should note its significance. There's been the Year of the Pig before this and maybe the International Year for the Prevention of Bad Breath — but 2001 is chalked up as the Year of the Volunteer.

Much as I am into volunteering — I step forward when others step back — I think people like me shouldn't get all the credit. Maybe I wasn't shepherding the crowds at Homebush during the games, but I do my share. I'm a silent volunteer. And there are thousands like me. Doing service gratis hither and yon. We do what we can to make the world a better place. Like writing stuff like this. Well, it's our year. (At least, I think it is.)

There are volunteers and volunteerers and I fear we latter types are going to miss out on

the glory. I guess after a time, you just learn to live with it. I have. That's something I've had to come to terms with. You get over it. Get on with your life. So I don't need your consideration — or your hugs or kudos — but give me your ears! Yeah, listen up!:

What about all those forgotten volunteers — those unlike me who lack insight into their condition? The unsung and unheralded. All those forgotten volunteers of restructuring and corporatisation. It should be their year too. Golly, where would the Australian economy be without them!

If we can have a year for volunteers, I think it's right and proper to include those thousands of men and women who took voluntary redundancy. And what about the early retirees? All those who sacrificed their time to make Australia more profitable to do business in. Why aren't they marching in the parades? Where are the photos of these great and wonderful people sitting at home volunteering their time in front of the TV while the rest of us fight over the jobs that are left? They are the real volunteers. This year should be renamed the International Year for Volunteers and Superannuants.

So all you volunteers out there who opted out of the workforce deserve our respect. Australia has become a better place for your leaving industry's chores to others. We who have not as yet volunteered as you have salute you.

In 2001, we ask you all to remember the volunteers.

[This is an unpaid community service announcement.]

Time and motion

I'll tell you what enterprise bargaining is about — consensus. It's as simple as give and take. After a time, you don't even notice the little sacrifices you are asked to make.

At one factory I was working in, the management banned us from going to the toilet. If one of us on the line felt the need — "Excuse me, may I?" — we had to wait until a set time such as 11.55 sharp. The bell rang and we'd go do wee. And if you didn't feel the need at that precise moment? Too bad. You had to wait until next time.

So instead — through our very own enterprise agreement — the bosses decided to cut down the time allowed to workers for going to the toilet. At great cost to production, some workers would stay in there four minutes; some for as long as seven minutes! Can you imagine what such indulgent behaviour was costing!

The employers had had enough and insisted that we go on our own time. But going before we came proved too difficult to arrange. So the union negotiated, and after a while it was decided that two minutes and 45 seconds were more than sufficient for a person to fulfil their bodily needs.

Put like that, it almost sounded reasonable. Maybe they've carried out studies, I thought. Maybe gastroenterologists, urologists and engineers had been consulted. Maybe the ACTU had a special department researching such matters. Perhaps someone with a stopwatch had averaged it out. Here indeed, I mused, time and motion were working together at last.

I don't know about you, but two minutes and 45 seconds would be a record for me. I simply would not be able to do it.

Even on a good day, I'd been hard pressed to beat three minutes 50. Even if I went into training at home first, I still could not be so punctual. And it particularly cannot be done with the clock in mind.

As soon as you go in, you're thinking: tick-tock, tick-tock, tick-tock. It's horrible! "Dam that zipper!" The seconds tick over, and you wonder if you can get your business done before your time's up. Tick-tock, tick-tock ... Beeeep! That's it! No warning. You're caught with your pants down.

To make this schedule work, some form of device had to be used. A button on the seat would not do, because the boss, being a smart man, knows that the worker would simply avoid sitting on the seat. So the timing mechanism was triggered by the door handle. And after two minutes and 45 seconds, the toilet would be plunged into darkness.

You had the choice: either quickly finish up in the dark while you remembered where everything was, or waddle back to the door with your clothes at your ankles to turn the handle again.

So to do it right, you have to get into training. You have to arrive with your bowels well loosened and ready for action. It is best to arrive with your trousers off or your skirt tucked up. But don't suddenly stop and think: Oops! You need to put thoughts about embarrassing undress out of your mind. With an air of indifference and your clothes neatly folded over your arm, no-one will notice.

At most, they'll think that this is enterprise bargaining at work.

[The above is based on actual work experience and a routine by Dario Fo.]

STR*KE!

I'm going to use a word you never thought I'd use. I'll be describing something that can get you arrested. I'm going to tell you the dirtiest word you'll hear. It's filthy!

Remember, you didn't read it here — not in this column, nor in the page opposite. If it comes to an issue, we'll blame the editor. I snuck it in during his day off.

I have to use it. Just don't tell my mum. The word is — I have to use it and be done with it. I'm sick of bottling it up inside me.

"Strike!"

I can't believe I did it. It slipped out. But I feel much better for it. But that's the word: strike.

Maybe some of you are thinking: what's he on about — "strike" is not a dirty word.

Oh yeah! Tell that to workers in this country. "S.t.r.i.k.e" is no longer a word to be used in mixed company, like when bosses are present. Australian labour now watches its language and minds its manners.

A memo has come down from the ACTU and along with poof, sheila and wog, the "s" word is no longer to be employed in "a threatening or abusive manner". Class business is to be conducted in such a style as not to affront minority groups in the workplace — such as employers.

Str*king, like f*cking, is an activity best not referred to in such coarse terms. Lovemaking is OK; so too is consultative process. An employee may do lunch, haggle, negotiate, bargain or talk shop with an employer, but to withdraw one's labour is a faux pas and is sure to ruin the mood. The modern trade unionist is advised to mind his or her language, speak only when spoken to and apply oneself to ongoing workplace reform. Good manners such as these are sure to pay off, and you may even get to keep your job.

The ACTU originally planned to mark this new age of politeness by changing its name to the Retired Strikers' League, or RSL, but Bruce Ruxton strongly objected to the encroachment into his territory, so the ACTU executive decided to bury the past instead. Only foul-mouthed veterans of old class wars remember how to swear like troopers.

The verb *to strike* is no longer to be employed except in the past — preferably historical — tense. Reference to it in the first person plural will also not be tolerated. Statements like "we strike" or "we will strike" are simply bad English and should be reworked through ongoing dispute settling procedures.

Doing it or threatening to do it in front of the rest of the workplace community is simply bad form: need I remind you that there are managers present? Foul language of this nature is sure to be interpreted as a breach of on-the-job etiquette and is likely to reflect unfavourably on your class.

Remember your responsibilities. Filthy minds will ruin this country. We have worked extremely hard to overcome our image as the Toilet Republic. But we need to keep up the good work. It is only by watching our p's and q's — and by not using the "s" word — that tomorrow will dawn brighter than today.

Bioencephalopathy: A manual for sufferers

Behind the front part of my head lives something of which I am truly proud — my consciousness.

Despite my penchant for eccentricity and the occasional burst of tomfoolery, it is my considered opinion — supported by others whose views I have had no reason to doubt (mum, uncle Adam, Veronica and cousin Jean) — that I am all there. To put it simply: I know what I know.

And I know that I have good reason to be suspicious. I think my brain is being got at.

This is not a delusion. I am not being paranoid. During my waking hours agents unknown are encroaching on my percipience.

They are rearranging my dearest notions without my sanction. Ideas that I once thought were mine to enjoy, to which I had pledged my allegiance, are being tinkered with. I am being reconstructed from the inside.

Change, as they say, comes from within. But I'm not the one who is doing this. All my precious ideals and the lucidity with which I generated them, are under attack from without.

I am surrounded by blathering chatterboxes and I cannot get out of ear shot. I am told to believe only in myself, that this is as good as it gets, that this is the best of all possible worlds. If I object to some of the measures taken I am reminded that it is all for the best.

(Excuse me for living!)

It sounds like a chorus on a broken record: all is for the best [*click*], all is for the best [*click*], all is for the best ...

MEDICAL COMMENTARY AND ABSTRACT: You describe a very common disorder. This last feature is symptomatic of bioencephalopathy: a brain disease whose etiology we are just beginning to understand.

The chief cause of acute or chronic bioencephalopathy seems to be cross infection, usually as a result of an epidemic of mass sociopathy. The disease is endemic to all capitalist societies and can effect all age groups regardless of race, gender or socioeconomic background.

Nonetheless, bioencephalopathy does not have an organic cause. While the pathological changes inherent in the disease process inhibit brain function — specifically grey matter's ability to sustain its free radicals — it's root dynamic is specifically bio rather than biological in origin.

The source of infection is overwhelmingly ideological — thus the name: **bourgeois ideological offensive** ("bio"); diseasing the brain ("encephalopathy").

Bioencephalopathy is spread by multifarious media outfalls — common vectors such as newspapers, television, and the like — supported by a disease pool of unwitting carriers such as your friends, workmates and acquaintances who may be bio-positive but don't realise it.

Treatment is largely symptomatic. In order to avoid complications, greater insight into the disease process should be encouraged. No prophylactic agent is presently available, but the patient can be desensitised somewhat by maintaining an activist lifestyle despite the many constraints imposed by the disease itself.

Newcastle — you never had it so good

You never know do you? So often you hear people complaining. But me, I never had it so good.

I see?

You hear all sorts of complaints. "I lost me job" or "I don't know where the money's gonna come from" or "We can't make ends meet" and so on. But it would be a boring old life if we didn't have a few challenges thrown our way. It keeps us on our toes.

Indeed.

Where would we be without the troubles sent to try us? A nice home, a good steady income, without a care in the world. Would we be happy? Not bloody likely.

For sure.

To keep perky you need to do it hard. Otherwise, what's the point. Take life as it comes. That's what I think.

True.

In my case, you know it ain't been easy. I've had me ups and downs. What with the

missus in a home and the kids forced to fend for themselves while I'm at work ... No, it's not been easy. But you know, I wouldn't swap a moment of it. Not for anything.

Is that so?

I'm one of the lucky ones, I am. There I was thinkin' I'm stuck in a rut — same thing day in day out — when I get handed a pink slip at the front office. I coulda' kissed the hand that gave it to me. After working for the company for all these years they're letting me go.

You and a few thousand others.

The lucky ones, mate! The lucky ones. When I heard that BHP were going to close down the works, I said to myself: You bloody beauty! Tomorrow I'll be back fending for myself again and no longer a burden on the company." I was thrilled!

I bet you were.

Imagine how I'd feel if they stayed in business on my account. I'd never be able to live with myself.

Perhaps not.

I'm proud, that's what I am, proud that I can help out. When they posted that \$1 billion profit last year I said to the young 'uns, that's your dad up there. They were tickled pink!

God love 'em.

And now ... who would have thought I'd be offered a part in these historical events. It's a real privilege to know my old job's a thing of the past.

A new beginning is it?

Too right. Me complain? No way. I'm having too much fun.

The meeks are gathering

Blessed with the opportunity to meet with the GLW reading public over the recent Easter break, I am pleased to announce the founding of a new third force set to shake up electoral politics in this country. Mrs A. Meek of Kooweerup, Victoria, has already donated one pound two shillings and sixpence to this new political venture and has assured me that her family pledges its support.

"You seem such a nice boy, " she writes, "so much nicer than that horrid Mr Menzies."

With such a testimonial, we are sure to go places. Our kind benefactor has also unwittingly contributed our founding slogan which we now use to mark her ready confidence in the project: "The meeks are gathering".

So if you consider yourself a bit of a meek, this will be the outfit just for you. (And remember that it takes a meek to inherit the earth.)

While we are a bit light on in the policy department at the moment, the party we are launching is clear about its intentions. Indeed, our name says it all: *The Party of Moderate and Peaceful Progress Within the Limits of the Law*.

Maybe you are thinking that this title fails to differentiate us from all the other parliamentary parties. I concede that this may be a problem. So we are seeking a full list

of notables as potential candidates. If you know someone who has: (a) had their photograph in the paper recently, (b) is not currently subject to a criminal investigation (c) whose social niceties are very nice and are sure to be popular — then we want to hear from them.

We have established an efficient tendering process for a range of seats throughout the country. In line with current economic practices, we will allocate electorates on a contractual basis by granting franchises to the successful candidates. By this means we plan to devolve responsibility for the campaign to the grassroots by not only endorsing official candidates but patenting them as well. So if you are interested, sign on today* and our Party Corporate (Regd.) plan will be forthcoming by return mail.

A new venture such as this inevitably runs into its share of knockers. "What are you going to do about unemployment ... or the economy ... or green house gasses", they ask. Obviously these people have not heard about such key aspects of the democratic process as the parliamentary question on notice — and what a powerful people's weapon that one is! — and the cross-party parliamentary subcommittee. To them all we can say this: "Once you have invested in *The Party of Moderate and Peaceful Progress Within the Limits of the Law*, we are sure to be paying out dividends by the end of our first term of office. If not, then we're in the wrong business and will seek a career elsewhere."

Let's see the other parties top that!

*Conditions apply. Send \$70 general service fee and SAE with your application TODAY. Please itemise all previous preselection experience.

Who's for waterfront reform?

Recently, I had an opportunity to catch up with some professional stevedores at a city wine bar, whose name and location, for the moment, must remain a secret.

They were not your standard blue-singlet-type docker, not "wharfies" in the traditional sense of the term, but men of mature outlook and experience.

The illogical enthusiasm and language one usually associates with primitive trade unionism failed to visit our conversation. Indeed, we had a jolly time, mainly because we all shared the same, or similar, outlook on the question of waterfront reform.

How the hell are youse? I said. Still workin' the port?

We are, they said.

Still loadin' them ships?

Still loading.

Still the ones driving reform?

Still the ones.

You know, it makes me so glad to hear it. You're a great bunch of Aussies, you know that, a great bunch. I mean it. You should be real proud of yourselves. Despite all that abuse and the name calling, despite them yelling out ... what's that they say?

Scabs.

Yeah. Despite what they say, you're a great bunch of Aussies. With the union reckoning 15 containers per hour was the limit, you're loading ... ?

Three.

Right. Three. Well, you're new on the job, aren't you? Give it time, eh? But the main thing is the progress we're making. We're reforming the waterfront. And the key aspect of that is —

Smashing the union.

— increasing productivity. That's the ticket. Gettin' the product from A to B cheaply and quickly. Who could fail to support such a lofty ideal? There's hardly a man or woman alive who isn't on your side. Australians one and all are saying, "Reform, we want it!".

We want it.

Of course you do. You want the jobs that will follow. The prosperity. And it's all ours just as soon as we defeat the archaic work practices that now cripple and enslave us. Because in our way stands —

The trade unions.

— a culture of bludging, of overtime, which this dispute has highlighted so well. And the essence of productivity reform is —

Lower wages. Longer working hours.

Who said that? Come on. Own up. We're as one here. Reformers all. Don't go dumb on me. It's not that, is it? The essence of productivity is ... is ... anyone?

An end to the power of the trade union movement.

That's the ticket. Union power is what stands between us and reform, between us and more jobs, between us and prosperity — and it always has. So what do we say? What do the scabs have to say?

Waterfront reform — we're for it!"

Sure we are.

World's best practice

We live in strange times. It now can be revealed that there has been in existence for the past year a body known as the Commission of Inquiry into the Inordinate Increase of Bludgers.

Some months ago this body sent out investigative teams to ascertain the level of bludgery throughout the length and breadth of this great nation in which we dwell. Examination of raw data and in vitro observation has been in progress since, and preliminary reports that have reached me from field researchers indicate that discoveries are being made which may mean the end of this great nation as we know it, and the end of all our conventional assumptions of what constitutes orthodox economic intercourse.

If these reports are to be believed, it is no wonder we are in such bad financial shape.

I have no intention of entering into the contents of the perturbing preliminary reports in

great detail. A complete summary of all the relevant figures and annotations will be available in due course. Here I can only hope to give you, at best, a general picture, the main thrust, as it were, of the inquiry's findings.

The news, unfortunately, is not good. As far as it can be ascertained, besides the 800,000 unemployed who are officially registered as bona fide bludgers, and Australia's indigenous people, who are born into a life of bludgery, the commission estimates that as much as 71.4% of our total population bludge in some form or another.

Indeed, the only major exceptions to this general rule that the inquiry could locate were: (a) members of parliament, (b) captains of industry, (c) members of the National Farmers Federation and (d) radio talkback announcers.

Take a moment to consider what this figure means. Seven in 10 Australians are getting a free ride. That's what it means. In the main, we're a nation of spongers. In a sick sort of way, maybe we have attained a "world's best practice" — but it's not going to do us any good. Henceforth, Australia is sure to be known worldwide as the land of the real long smoko.

We cannot go on like this. Some form of healing, of coming together, of reconciliation, is needed if we are to make it into the next century with head held high and our national accounts in the black. We need to step back, turn around and pull the finger out.

In that context, I call upon the nation's stevedores to lead the way.

We Aussies love our wharfies. Why, they're as much a national icon as a meat pie and a jar of Vegemite. We ask our dear dockers to do right by the rest of us and be the first to step forward and admit before God and country: "Yes, maybe we do bludge. Yes, maybe we are overpaid."

And then the miners and the teachers, the nurses and the clerks, the bus drivers and the lowly process workers can follow your lead so that the whole population (at least 71.4% of it) can confess to being bludgers too — overpaid and under-worked so-and-so's, just like those greedy wharfies.

The postmodern condition

'Tis a matter of some conjecture in those circles within which I am sometimes known to loop, that one must acquaint oneself of all the contemporary theories. That they are modern is nowadays not enough. To warrant one's interest, a body of ideas should preferably pass muster as *postmodern* to be in vogue.

If you are like me, keeping up with the Joneses — if they are of an academic bent and proclaim to be practising postmodernists — is hard yakka. Simply talking to them can be a chore. I suspect that we don't even speak the same language.

So me and them are somewhat distant and our discourse tends to be strained. I always come away thinking, what on earth are they talking about?

Later, I feel such an ignoramus. Shouldn't I be — just for the sake of argument — more familiar with modern French philosophy. Oops! Sorry. There I go again, showing how much of a dullard I am. I meant, *postmodern* French philosophy.

At least I try. I'm open to discourse; to the narrative; to any textual feeling I can find

within my contemporary deconstructed being. I'm willing to be re-made into a postmodern man — at least on weekends. I'm hip. I'm a with-it kind of guy.

But I have this problem. If the "modern" has had its day — I understand it was all the rage for a time — I don't much care for the afterglow. If we are supposedly past the modern — beyond it, gone where no other -ism has gone before — then I demand a rematch. We was robbed!

I'm not ready to say bye-bye to the days of yore. I'm not finished with the past. And, I dare say, the past isn't finished with me.

Don't you go thinking that I'm some cantankerous old bastard stuck in his ways because I can't hack the new stuff. I believe; the postmodern does exist. I've seen it, read it, felt it ... done lunch with it. And I don't much care for it! It stinks.

Phew! Does it stink! It pongs like nothing else.

To find the source of this stench one need only follow one's nose through the image, spectacle and discourse listed in anyone's standard guide to the postmodern condition. You're sure to feel ever so arty and touched by it all. But as you exit back to the everyday, consider this: that's it!

Postmodernism is a novel and obscure way of saying that this is the best of all possible worlds.

You can bet on it

Have you ever wondered why, if we're doing so well, the country has a gambling problem? In terms of ockerism, perhaps you could dismiss it with references to two-up or the gee-gees. What could be more Australian than having a flutter? Why stop at a \$2 scratchie when Kerry Packer can outlay a million a night — win or lose — and still be Australia's richest man when he wakes up in the morning?

Of course, Kerry has a large expense account. He won't be sleeping with a severed polo pony's head on the pillow next to him. Kerry can pay his debts — that's what Channel 9 is for. Packer also studied at the best schools: the local stock exchange and corporate boardroom. He's a professional. The bull market or the baccarat tables? It's all the same to him.

But you, you silly beggar, you think you can join him in the celebrity box simply by buying a lotto ticket with your spare change. I'm sorry to say this but Kerry is way ahead of you. He can lose, but he will always be ahead.

When you look at your chances of a significant win, you are more likely to be run over by a bus. You need to face facts: gambling is a mug's game.

So why do we do it? What's the attraction?

I'll leave that to the experts. However, the phenomenon that most interests me is that of the mature age gambler, like my own dear grey-haired, 77-year-old Aunt Maude.

Why Maude, are you are addicted to playing the pokies? Aren't you getting any "of the other stuff"? I'm seriously worried. After a life spent under the shelter of the welfare state, all you can think about is, should you play two lines or five? I can think of cheaper

things to do before you go under. Is this quality of life? Is this what our tribal elders do to win our respect? Jesus, Maude, what went wrong?

The irony is, if she ever won anything big, she wouldn't be around long enough to spend it. I demand an explanation. Why is it, if we supposedly live in the best of all possible worlds, that all I can look forward to in my twilight years is a reserved bar stool at the \$2 machines, free coffee and cake, and an occasional tippie?

But you see, if it's kosher for Kerry to gamble on and off the track, in and out of the casino, as a lifestyle, then I guess it must be the norm. Life in this society is still ruled by chance. You can bet on it.

Figures

I often must step outside my everyday existence and project my concerns from an astral plain — there the better to observe the goings on down below. This week, while at my stellar post, I was joined by that highly esteemed commentator on matters ecological, Ian Lowe.

The topic the good prof chose to raise with me, via page 17 of the local daily, was that of population. It was his contention that we "should aim to stabilize the Australian population at a level that allows sustainable living standards and protects our environment". To that end, he recommends holding migration intake down to around 50,000 per year.

I cannot go into all of the figures that graced his article. Suffice to say he distanced his views from those of One Nation by emphasising that it was the quantity of migrants, rather than their ethnic quality, that should concern us.

On reading this argument I was struck by the narrow hypothesis that Lowe chose to explore. What does he mean by "living standards"?

My standard of living has been deteriorating for years, but it's got nothing to do with new arrivals. That my income has gone down and my costs of living have gone up I choose to blame on folk who very definitely didn't come down under via the last shower.

But Lowe would have it that to achieve "sustainability" we need to stabilise the local population at around 23 million.

Twenty-three million what? Lowe may think we're all equal here, but I submit that some folk are more sustainable than others. Indeed, there are some in our midst — and I'm not naming names, not yet! — who are downright unbearable.

But do we find a mention of these in Lowe's article? Not a word. Instead, he wants me (of all people) to cop an equal share of the blame just because I'm me — a breathing, procreating, defecating digit in that mighty sum of zeros which make up his 23,000,000 human beings occupying *terra australis*.

What about the other locals? What about the 126 million baa lambs and the 26 million moo cows? What's their magical sustainable number?

And what's the number of uranium mines we can sustain, or motor vehicles? If Lowe can give us a figure for one thing why not for others?

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Money

Kerry Francis Bullmore Packer - reluctantly

Kerry Francis Bullmore Packer ran out of petrol and reluctantly died of kidney failure on Boxing Day, 2005. He was 68.

When I look back at a life such as his I am reminded that we are all victims of the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune. In Kerry's case this amounted to \$100 million — being the amount bequeathed to him by his late father Clyde. Such a fortune is, in anyone's estimation, pretty outrageous.

When dear old Aunt Maude passes on and leaves you Uncle Reg's ashes, the budgerigar, Tiddles the cat and a month's supply of kitty litter — you need to spare a thought for the heavy burden of responsibility the young Kerry had to bear.

No one asked him what he thought. It wasn't his choice to be born a Packer. Maybe — we don't know, but maybe — he yearned for a simpler and easier life?

Regrettably we will not know the answer, as Kerry Francis Bullmore Packer (now deceased) could only live the one life that was allotted him.

Someone had to break the sports boycott of apartheid South Africa. To imagine Channel 9 without a Packer at the helm seems almost unAustralian, does it not? And what's a polo pony to do without a rider?

So you gotta cut the man some slack. Sure he was a rich so and so and died with a net worth of around \$6.5 billion (give or take a hundred mill here or there), but come on — all he could do was his best as he saw it within the bounds of his legacy. That's the most we can ask of any of our children.

He had a dicky heart and dodgy kidneys remember ... and he was addicted to gambling. And you know how deep a hole the pokies can make in a pension cheque! With Kerry it was the same, although the holes are deeper even if the cheques are larger. So it's all relative, I guess. He was one of us, who nonetheless had his own crosses to bear.

I think we often forget that. He may have been a Packer, rather than your Joe Average, but at heart (and a faulty heart it was too) Kerry Packer knew which cricket team to barrack for. He may have been a gambler, but he knew gambling's demons and had the good sense to own some of the casinos he wagered in.

There's a lesson there that we tend to ignore. He may have been a tycoon in every sense of the word, but he was our tycoon. Here was a man that could stand up to multinationals like Rupert Murdoch's and proclaim that we Australians prefer to give our money to the local guy.

He could say that and mean it! Every word of it!

Makes you so darn proud it does. Whether we're watching Channel 9, or reading *Women's Weekly*, or dropping the food money into the pokies, each of us, in our own

small way, will be doing our bit to ensure that future generations of Packers won't have to work as hard for their next billion as their dear old dead dad had to.

Budgeteer Junior

Hello. This is easy! Hello. Hello. *Can I write my name?* Keiran. My name is Keiran — K.E.I.R.A.N. What do I say next? I am six years old. I am in grade 2. I like Power Rangers, Batman and the Simpsons. And I like the computer. I like the games on the computer. *Can I play Cosmo after this, can I, please?*...

I started back at school in Mrs Murphy's class — in grade 2. I sit next to Jason de la Costa — he's my best friend. And when I grow up I want to be a budgeteer.

I don't want to be a fireman or a policeman. Budgeteers get to play with computers all the time. That would be cool. And they do sums the way Mrs Murphy showed us on Friday. What's 10-4 ? It's 6. I knew that. That was easy. What's 107-15? You take the five from the seven; then the one from the ten — and you get ... 92! When I can't do it my head, I count on my fingers. Budgeteers add up and take away all the time. And they do it with squillions of numbers. Golly!

Daddy says that the person who has the most fun is a man called the federal treasurer. Daddy says he takes away all the time. All day, every day, Daddy says, the federal treasurer is doing his sums. Daddy says the federal treasurer has this big — really big — enormous bag of apples and dishes them out. But, Daddy says, the federal treasurer has turned real nasty and won't give people the apples they want for their lunch box.

That's not nice is it? I am always taught to share. So should he. It's greedy to keep things from others. Mum always tells us to share and share alike.

Daddy says there's enough for everyone but the federal treasurer pretends there's not. Then Daddy wrote some numbers down. He put down a one, then a line of all these noughts. There were heaps of noughts. And he said that if they were all apples, everyone's lunch box could have an apple in it. That's a lot of apples! Then Daddy said there was a lot of empty lunch boxes.

The next time I open my lunch box there may not be an apple in it, Daddy says. And if I wanted an apple I would have to buy one from tuckshop. That's the way the federal treasurer wanted it. There were to be no more free lunches for Kieran. And if I wanted an apple or a peanut butter sandwich, Daddy says, then I would have to work for the money to buy it.

Then Daddy smiles and tells me that this week we could play a game of Federal Treasury — a game whose rules I didn't much like.

If I wanted an apple at all this week, I am supposed to work for it. Each day of the week I must do my chores; otherwise I don't get any lunch money at all. And if Daddy can convince my little brother to play too, Daddy says it will be just like the real thing because he won't need to pay him as much as me.

Then Daddy laughed and told me not to worry because families were not like that. Whatever the federal treasurer took away, we'd always do our best to make up. Mum would work more overtime and he'd give up something or my little brother could go to his nanny's rather than to child-care each day.

But Daddy looked so sad ...

So that's why when I grow up I want to be a budgeteer. I want to make the numbers do good, and not bad, things.

Can I go now?

Plain words for hard times

Not everybody knows how well read I am; but first it may be better to speak of my studies this week.

While my mind's bibliography may be a thing to behold I am nonetheless lazy and idle-minded despite a strong social sense of what ails the world in which we dwell.

Furthermore, as a civil man addicted to plain speaking I read my newspapers with a critical eye. Pursuant of news and current affairs, I sometimes alight on the most extraordinary reports in the pages of my local daily.

This week my attention was drawn to the rich harvest from the studious mind of Mr Terry Black — a senior lecturer in that most essential of basic social institutions, the university business faculty.

True to his vocation, Black's short piece settled itself within the journal's business pages, a few column inches short of that day's report on movements in the All Ords. As I am a keen market analyst you'll understand why Black's commentary caught my eye. The day after the Nikkei closed at 20,385 he was in print addressing the proposed Common Youth Allowance:

"The application of the Government's new income test reflects the principle that parents are responsible for supporting their own children, but they are not responsible for supporting other parents' children. This principle is well established in Asia whereby the family looks after its own and its citizens are not burdened with taxes to pay for handouts to non-family members. However, the income test is sending out messages that low income earners are not responsible for supporting their children. Consequently, they have less incentive to restrict the size of their family since their costs are imposed on other Australians."

Similarly, Black goes on to write, a further incentive for parents to avoid supporting their children is the government's rental assistance for students in education or training.

"Consequently", writes he, with many more certificated academic honours than those accumulated during my own much shorter scholastic career, "these measures are anti-family. If they were removed, then parents and their children would no longer be placed in conflict. No longer would parents be given the opportunity to off-load their responsibilities onto others."

These are plain words for hard times; words whose syntax boldly assert what other lesser lights (I'm not naming names mind, not yet!) seem unwilling to. Here in Mr Black we have a man who, despite his board room savvy and market nous, has taken the time from his busy lecture schedule to find out what so many grassroots kitchen caucuses are plotting nationwide.

When not abed fornicating in an effort to help make more unwanted 16 and 17 year olds,

the nation's hefty share of irresponsible parents are off-loading their ready made offspring in the most devious of ways. Instead of paying their own, say, to rake up the leaves or take out the garbage, today's Aussie mum or dad seem to suffer from the misconception that it is someone else's responsibility to gainfully employ their youngsters.

I admit that I had similarly erred. Friends, I tell you this: my face is red. If not for the studied pen of such commentators as Terry Black, I'd still be under the misapprehension that the youth allowance scheme was all about fiddling the job figures. Now I know otherwise.

Our root problem isn't idle youth: it's their mums and dads!

The age of usury

Due to some blunder, some monstrous breach of faith — I'm not accusing anyone, not yet! — a report from the sturdy financial mind of Mr Stan Wallis has been released in Canberra without the customary endorsement of my office.

Mr Wallis and I are grown men, and since I detest fuss, I won't be demanding an inquiry this time, but I will be setting the record straight. Do I agree with Mr Wallis' report or not? Or more is the matter — do I care?

Well, Mr snotty-nosed Wallis, I'll have you know that I do care. What happens within the Australian banking and finance community concerns me a great deal.

I am a regular visitor to the ATM on the corner of Albert and Bage streets.

See if I'm not right. I, David J. Riley — pin number: ***** — rely on those financial encounters and the EFTPOS machine, checkout 4, at the local Coles New World supermarket. My life depends on those transactions, Mr Wallis. (Fat lot you care!) So why didn't you ask for my thoughts on banking?

Obviously, I'm not shifting a large amount of cash each week through these electronic machines, but by the end of it — when I'm down below my last \$20 — I'd like to be able to make a withdrawal without having to spend \$5 of it. Will further deregulation help me out there?

No. Not one of Mr Wallis' 115 recommendations addresses this question. The profane purpose of his report is the liberation of the finance sector from cants, superstitions, shibboleths and unclean financial creeds. There can thus be no such thing as a dynamic banking and finance establishment which is partisan to matters of mundane folly such as my own weekly problems with banking hardware.

What's more, tucked away in the Wallis report is a section that affects me greatly. No longer, says he, should fees and charges be controlled.

Excuse me! Am I hearing rightly? Whose money is it anyway? The trouble with modern banking is that while possession may be nine tenths of the law, self extraction of what is rightfully yours is sure to cost you. The bloody banks act as though my money is theirs!

Theirs! It's mine, I tell you — every dollar of it. Instead of storing it under my mattress, I let them have it for a time. That's all. I'm sharing what little wealth I have, but do they share theirs?

I'm perfectly serious about this. Don't laugh.

It's a poor state of affairs when such a suggestion is treated with derision. Yes, it's a fine sentiment and far more attractive to a person such as myself than anything in Wallis' report, which takes as its basic assumption that intolerably vulgar notion that banking should be more lucrative for more corporate players.

The bit what's left

In a standard working day of eight hours, it may take me four hours to produce the equivalent of my wages. If the time needed to cover my wage packet is reduced from four to two hours, then *the bit what's left* increases from four to six hours.

It is *the bit what's left* that makes free enterprise what it is today — exceedingly profitable.

Forget all the claptrap you hear. I'm telling you like it is: if you want to understand the free enterprise economy, just keep your eye on the movements of *the bit what's left*.

It is generally conceded that increases in the total amount of *the bit what's left* are good for us all. This is what makes productivity go up. And, as you no doubt recognise, we all should be keen on that.

But boosting the total amount of what's left — after we proletarians have had our portion — can be reached via many optional routes: (1) by cutting wages; (2) by lengthening the working day; and (3) by reducing the work force and forcing the remainder to work harder.

Given a choice, which one would you pick? Go on, be masochistic! As an upstanding citizen and bona fide Aussie battler, which would you prefer?

Of course, one further option exists: (4) Boss: "Work harder or I'll cut your wages, lengthen the shifts and lay you bludgers off!"

So when asked to offer an opinion on Saint Productivity ("I dedicate my labours to the love of thee. Amen.") don't go mouthing off about changes in work practices. It's to the nitty-gritty you should go. All this malarky about productivity ("Hosanna! It riseth, O Lord!") and world's best practice ("It beginneth with the deed and endeth with the greed!") is simply double-speak for working harder and longer for less.

Surely, you don't mean to tell me you're keen on that!

Instead, perhaps you have chosen to follow a gospel which urges you to struggle valiantly to realise a high ideal. With your course shaped by such a proud aim, you forbear and tolerate sacrifice in the hope that jobs for all will ensue.

But *the bit what's left* doesn't work like that. You have no say in what happens to it. Since compliance dictates that you work harder and longer for less, why would anyone else be needed (unless they worked longer and for less than you)? There would simply be less of what's left for those who reckon they own it.

And, by the way, that's not you.

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Offshore

The expensive hardware that visits your backyard

What would I be if I were 77 metres high, 344 metres long, 78 metres at my widest point and a full three metres taller than Brisbane's Story Bridge?

Give up? I'd be the *USS Ronald Reagan*, the world's largest aircraft carrier, come to Brisbane for some well deserved R&R.

This boat was surely the biggest thing ever to come to town — and park downstream from the CBD.

The local media pitched the ship's statistical attributes as the main story: a crew of 6000, a flight deck that covers 1.82 hectares, a total weight of 97,000 tonnes, its own newspaper, as well as a radio and television station ... The *USS Ronald Reagan* was its own live-in suburb and work station, which dropped by for five days to spend something in the order of \$5 million soaking up, as the ship's PR team would have it, "local culture".

Brisbane residents were told how lucky they were to have so many sailors in port. We learned that a local committee generated by the business community had been working for some time to encourage the US Seventh Fleet — which comprises 50 ships and 20,000 sailors and marines — to schedule the port of Brisbane as a routine stop-over for the fleet's R&R.

With potentially so many in port — think of all the money they'll spend!

But there was to be a trade off. Squeezed in among all the data about this very big boat was a note to the effect that the vessel is powered by two nuclear reactors and, as the *Courier Mail* newspaper put it as an aside, "The reactors will remain in operation even while the ship is docked just kilometres from the inner city".

If you were thinking that you don't much care for that kind of thing ticking over in your own backyard, don't complain ... this visit was supposed to be a win-win for all concerned. (And don't forget about all that money!)

As far as the news coverage went, a great time was had by all for the US dollars spent, before the ship set sail to join the fleet.

But not long after the *Ronald Reagan* had "fissioned" (as distinct from "steamed") out of port it lost one of its planes overboard — a \$37 million FA-18 Hornet strike fighter that crashed while attempting to land on the carrier's deck.

Suddenly the nuclear attributes of the ship became an issue, such that Lieutenant-Commander Gary Ross was very keen to point out: "I can assure you it was not carrying nuclear weapons". With this piece of unrecoverable hardware sitting in 4000 metres of water off the continental shelf, who's to know?

But the loss of the plane sure soured the good PR the visit was getting. While the crash served to highlight the nuclear issue and the prospect that this ship wasn't error-proof, the price tag on the Hornet drew attention to the amount of capital tied up in instruments of

war.

The USS Ronald Reagan cost \$5 billion to build and requires about \$3.68 million per day to operate. While gargantuan boats such as this are sure to come with a hefty price tag, that's a lot of money to spend on an enterprise whose primary function is to kill people.

With such costs involved, it is tempting to consider how else the money could be spent. Five billion dollars would go a long way if stretched for education or health or housing.

Billions of dollars worth of hardware are floating the Western Pacific and Indian Ocean as part of US Seventh Fleet on the off chance there's some killing or bullying to do.

Surely there's better and more humane things to spend the money on.

An excuse for butchery

Do you know what the quintessence of sheephood is? Shearin' and slaughterin' — that's what it is. In a word: sacrifice.

We're sentenced to live our lives for the sake of others.

For many, the meaning of our existence is only fulfilled when our throat is slit. That's our function: the lot of a sheep is to bleed. We are then disembowelled, limbs and head are hacked from the torso, the skin flayed off and our flesh portioned into morsels. Chopped into still smaller pieces, our bodies are grilled, roasted, fried or stewed.

Then someone eats us.

[General outbreak of bleating.]

That's right! Our bodies — ourselves — are mixed with saliva, masticated and set upon by intestinal villi!

[Outbreak of angry baa-ing.]

That's what sheephood is. That's all they reckon sheep are good for: a lamb roast, grilled chops, shish kebab, or *qouzi mahshi aw kharouf mahshi*.

[Cry of: Not roasted baaaa-by milk-fed lamb!]

Yes, I'm afraid it is. Disembowelled and stuffed with pistachios, almonds, walnuts, raisins and saffron; lightly spiced and then the dear little baby lamb, just weaned from its mother's breast, is baked for two hours ... in a slow gas oven!

[Baa. Baa. Baa.(Yum!)]

But now fortune smiles on the sheep. Revenge is nigh.

Iraq, a country whose cuisine rests on dead sheep, is to be dealt with. For crimes against sheep, Iraq is to be bombed, perhaps invaded, have its economy crippled and its citizens punished for their dietary preferences. There'll be blood in the gutter, I assure you, but it won't be sheep's blood!

So rejoice. This year is the year we get our own back. This year is the year we begin the crusade. This year, lamb is coming off the menu!

[Rapturous bleating.]

And we don't care how many we have to kill to do it! This year, my friends, is the year

that we can do what we like because we are mean arsed enough to get the US of A to do it for us.

So when our butchers go after Iraqi butchers, we can sit smugly back and laugh because their butchers were taught butchery by our butchers (because, once upon a time, their butchers were our butchers).

When it pleases me

Chair!

Chair!

Get a chair!

Yes, Sir.

What's happening?

I'll just check.

Well?

There are no chairs.

"Sir!" How dare you address me without calling me "Sir"?

Yes, Sir! There are no chairs, Sir!

No chairs! This is monstrous! Have someone crouch so that I can sit on them!

Sit on them, Sir?

Why yes.

Like this, Sir?

Ah, yes. (Sits) That's much better. Now, what's this business about?

Business, Sir?

Don't act dumb with me.

Oh no, Sir!

Good then. When I ask questions I want straight answers. What are we here for?

To grant East Timor independence.

What did I tell you?

Sorry, Sir. To grant independence to East Timor, Sir!

Who told you that?

Why, you did, Sir.

Oh, did I? And when was this "independence" to be granted?

At your pleasure, Sir!

And if it doesn't please me?

Sir?

If it does not please me, what then?

Then, I suppose ...

Come on. Out with it!

It won't happen, Sir!

Exactly! It won't happen. But today it pleases me.

Yes, Sir!

Unless, of course, I was to change my mind. (Rises).

Yes, Sir.

Then it wouldn't.

Details

Why didn't anyone tell me that the line had been changed? I just made a complete fool of myself in front of everyone!

What are you talking about?

Haven't you heard? An independent East Timor is now OK.

It isn't, is it?

It is. Just don't tell anyone.

Tell anyone what?

The details.

But I don't know any.

Well, that's OK, because there aren't any. All parties , including our own, are "considering their options".

Which are?

That's where the details kick in.

Ah.

They're optional.

But the line has changed?

Definitely.

And it's OK to mention independence?

Mention? Yes. But don't go on about it.

By supplying details?

Just refer to it in passing: "Independence" ... yakety-yak ... "self determination"... blah, blah.

"Process?"

Now you're talking. "Process", I must remember that one.

"Process of consultation ..."

Excellent!

"... with an understanding Indonesia."

Oh, I must write that down!

Hold on! "... with the new Indonesia."

The "new Indonesia" ... Oh, I like it!

It's historic.

You bet it is!

"A historic process of consultation with the new Indonesia."

Don't you think within "the new Indonesia" is more appropriate?

I get it. Nothing's foregone.

Now you're talking.

Thwack!

'ello. 'ello. 'ello. What's this then? Been up to something I bet. Oh don't go actin' the little angle with me my lad. I know a villain when I see one. Come on. Come on. Show me your hands. Just as I thought. I wonder how that stone got there? Been grinding our own tahina muck have we? Golly I don't know how you A-rabs stomach the stuff. Looks like baby poo to me. Been making our own little plop plop for din din, eh? What's that I hear? Speak up.

— Palestine.

Getting foul mouthed are we? [THWACK!] Dirty words won't get you far with me. I don't like hearing dirty words this side of the Jordan. Upsets the locals no end. You cocky West Bank types think you are the ant's pants, coming over here and yelling "Palestine". [THWACK!] Well, matey, there ain't no such thing as Palestine. Not any more, anyway. This here land belongs to the children of Jacob. And, matey, that ain't you. Savvy? I'm chosen. You're not. End of story. There's a line in the sand and you can't cross it. And you know what that means? [THWACK!] What was that? I can't hear you?

— Palestine.

There you go again. [THWACK!] You pick up a stone and you think you can play at being David. That's not how it goes. After me — say it — Israel!

— Palestine.

[THWACK!]. No. No. Maybe you didn't hear me right. IS ... [THWACK!] ... RAY ... [THWACK!] ... ELLE ... [THWACK!].

— Palestine.

What we have here is a failure of communication. Don't mess with me. See this strong right arm and this big stick? [THWACK!] Listen. [THWACK!] Hear it. [THWACK!] What does it say?

— Palestine.

No. No. Shhhhh. Listen. [THWACK!] That doesn't sound like Palestine to me. No. That [THWACK!], my boy, is the voice of Israel.

Dot-dot-dot-dash-dash-dash-dot-dot-dot

The message from Asia has said it plain enough: "SOS. SOS. This is Asia. Position 45 N 150 E 90 W. Stop engine. We need assistance."

Of course you heard it. It was everywhere! Dot-dot-dot-dash-dash-dash-dot-dot-dot.

On the tellie. Help!

In all the papers. HELP!

All over the place. Brnnng! "Hello. This is Asia calling."

And what does this particular region of the global economy hope to gain by coming to us cap in hand?

Asia: Aid, please, sir.

Aid!

Asia: Yes, sir. We've run out and would like some more.

What happened to the last lot we sent you?

Asia: Gone, sir.

Gone?

Asia: Yes, sir. All spent keeping Asia safe from godless communism.

Ah, the good fight. Them were the days.

Asia: Yes indeed, sir.

Back then, you really knew two wongs didn't make a white. I tell you when yellow peril got together with red menace, it was as if all our Christmases had come at once.

Asia: Better dead than red, sir.

Yes indeed. "Better dead than red." Golly, that takes me back ... We won in the end, you know.

Asia: That's what they say.

We kicked their little yellow commie behinds real good.

Asia: We soon learned to love the smell of napalm in the morning.

Of course you did.

Asia: Gee, but it's great to be Asian.

And free! Don't forget that. Free.

Asia: But freed Asia's got a slight problem.

Who hasn't these days?

Asia: I'm afraid the news is good and bad.

Well, don't hold back, tell me the good news.

Asia: The good news is that we're still beholden to you.

And so you should be. Still making a poor fist of things, I dare say. And the bad news?

Asia: The bad news is that if you don't help us, we'll take you down with us when we go.

When your world's in a dither

Hello. I am the New World Order representative assigned to attend to you. We are here to assist you in any way we can. How can we help?

Are you seeking the services of our (a) military or (b) finance division?

Unfortunately, here at New World Order we can only authorise interventions which bail out or blow up at their point of contact. So which is it to be? Whether money or missiles, we're sure to have a New World Order module that will suit your needs. Our skilled personnel are ready, anywhere, anytime, to design a package that's just right for you.

Before we discuss targets — whether they be civilian, military or current accounting — please have ready your UN resolution number if you were planning on a course of action that could possibly require the death of anyone. You should understand that while New World Order is a bona fide service provider, there are some minor protocols which we must comply with. So if you require us to, say, bomb Baghdad, we'll have to ask you to fill in these forms (preferably now rather than later).

New World Order's mission statement is to shield the world from greed. As a major exponent of the free market, our corporate objective is to protect that market from too much of a good thing. When deregulation gets out of hand — as it is wont to sometimes — we work to protect our clients from that which can do the most harm, their own greed.

At New World Order your interest is our interest. We get you your money back — and then some. That's what a New World Order *loan/bomb/other* can do for you.

Unfortunately, our military division is currently unavailable for interview, but if you leave your name and telephone number a consultant from RAW (Rent A War) will get back to you as soon as circumstances in the Persian Gulf (etcetera) permit.

Let me say how pleased we are that you have chosen New World Order as your service provider. New World Order always stands by its motto:

"When your world's in a dither

We're sure to deliver

A New World Order".

Out of sight, out of mind

I have deep and abiding convictions concerning social action. Indeed, I am certain that I

can perhaps do something to alleviate the world's misery. I cannot abide those who would act cowardly in the face of social injustice. I believe in a bold and shattering commitment to the problems of our times — of which, I am sorry to say, there are far too many.

As you may well know, I had spent my youth in seclusion, meditation and private study in order to deepen my general comprehension of our place in the cosmos and especially my role in it.

Now, after stepping forth, I am unfortunate to be suffering from a state of flux as I am still in the process of adapting myself to the tensions of this all too modern and complex social universe. These minor setbacks are sure to pass as I train myself to approach the itinerary of my crusade with ever increasing doses of mental vigour.

Rather than deal directly with issues close to hand, I thought that my best course of action was to initially choose a complicated topic that I could wrestle with at some distance. I am therefore pleased to announce that the problem of East Timor has occupied my waking moments for the last five and three-quarter hours.

Do I note a certain ripple of excitement in response to my declaration? Isn't the problem of East Timor the most ponderable of problems to challenge us for all of these last twenty-three years? And I, seemingly, in a twinkling of an eye, can solve it like that.

If only my dear old grey-haired mother could see me now. Her little boy is now out and about, ministering to the wretched of the earth. Mum, this one's for you!

East Timor — the final solution: In order that a sophisticated evaluation of the topic is possible, one needs a realistic and pragmatic approach. Such a tactical orientation lends itself to a range of hypotheses many of which have been considered by various agencies in the past — an unfortunate recourse to a policy of genocide being one of them. The significance of the approach outlined herein is that it relies on a praxis afforded by a simple act of denial sometimes referred to euphemistically as "out of sight, out of mind".

The problem of East Timor is one primarily of our own making. It festers so close to our own borders with the rest of the world, thereby acting as a blight on our horizon. An easy resolution is afforded by the removal of the cause of much of our anguish. I therefore propose that both ourselves and the indigenous inhabitants of East Timor be afforded a respite from their proximity to one another.

As East Timor occupies a position slightly under 10 degrees south of the Equator, within a region often referred to as the East Indies, I propose that the issue be resolved by transferring that portion in dispute of the island of Timor from the East to the West Indies, there to occupy an isolated segment of the Caribbean Sea 300 kilometres off the coast of Costa Rica and 10 degrees *north* of the equator.

You'll have to give me a few moments while I work out how we can tow such a land mass around Cape Horn without the passengers being the worse for the journey.

That's the point

It is right and proper that the PM should advise caution. After all, we don't want a bloodbath on our doorstep. It wouldn't do, would it? Here we are proffering the hand of friendship, with a tidy sum in it, and that Suharto fellow starts knocking off the locals.

— It would be shameful.

Mind you, I'm not saying that's what he'll do. But he might, that's the point.

— And he's done it before.

He has. Yes. We'd look pretty darn silly spattered with blood like that.

— Knocked off a million or so back in the sixties.

Who?

— Suharto. That's how he got where he is today.

That's the point, isn't it. You don't know with these people. They run a pretty tight ship over there. It's their way I suppose. But when it turns nasty like this ...

— You want to be able to run for cover.

Exactly! Let them sort it out among themselves.

[Conversational lull. A stillness engulfs the speakers. Then ...]

But it must be hard for your ordinary, run-of-the-mill Indo', mustn't it? I mean, all you want out of life is three square meals a day and a roof over your head.

— It's the same for them.

That's the point. And those special measures insisted on by that World Bank thingy ... I mean, how'd you like it if it was you?

— I wouldn't.

That's the point. I wouldn't either. I reckon I'd be pretty mad.

— You'd riot.

I don't know if I'd go that far. I don't go in much for burning cars and ransacking shops. Let's just say that I'd be pretty darn choosy come election time.

— You'd be thinking of your hip pocket.

Exactly.

— Looking for change.

True.

— Desperately searching for a way out.

Yeah.

— Without taking to the streets.

Of course.

— And all that Suharto fella does is give you the finger.

Well ... put like that, I'd have to consider my options.

— And they are?

Hang on. Don't rush me.

— But whose side would you be on?

Let's see ...

— Not his surely?

No, not his. I couldn't bring myself to be on his side.

— Theirs then?

You mean the people? The rioters? Well ... I suppose I'd have to be.

— That's the point, isn't it?

So it is.

Oink! Oink!

B.J. Habibie: It is unfortunately true that today in Indonesia the people have forfeited the confidence of the government. The recent spate of street heat during the meeting of the Consultative Assembly has only served to distance the population from its elected representatives.

As if that wasn't enough, calling members of the people's army, blind pigs (*babi buta*)— and in a Muslim country! — has added insult to injury. I'm afraid that the people will have to redouble their efforts if they want to regain our respect.

Deeply hurt as we are by these recent events, the strident calls for the assembly to be dissolved only serve the subversive aims of the communists.

Similarly, where would the Indonesian nation be today without the loyalty and sacrifice of its armed forces? Who better to sustain unity in diversity than our very own khaki warriors? They stand as a bastion against our enemies, upholding the cherished five principles of *Pancasila* — principles rooted in the very soil at our feet.

Would "blind pigs" do that? No.

We all know we are facing difficult times. We all know that the tasks that confront us don't lend themselves to an easy resolution. But life wasn't meant to be easy, was it now?

As for these impatient calls for fresh elections and sundry other reforms ... all I can say is that we hear you. We're not deaf. I say this to you: Watch my lips — everything comes to him who waits. Patience, my friends, patience is really the hidden sixth principle of *Pancasila* — and patience has its own reward.

If this civic unrest persists, I feel it is my duty to warn you that we will take measures to protect the nation from itself. If this civic unrest continues in the form that it has recently taken, my government is determined to meet unrest with resolve. I kid you not: even a "blind pig" knows how determined we can be.

(Ha ha. Please excuse my little joke. I know how much General Wiranto likes my little jokes.)

Reform? No way! Pigs might fly!

I therefore issue this warning: unless the people begin to behave themselves, we will dissolve the people and elect another in its place.

(Sounds of: Oink! Oink! Oink!)

Playing by the rules

Now there's something you don't read about every day.

— What's that?

A shootin', tootin', bang up war.

— A war?

Yep. This time with Iraq.

— But we had a war with Iraq last time, didn't we?

Sure did. This time it's different. This time it's a war to end all wars. We're gonna teach them Iraqi bastards that we're not to be messed about with.

— We're gonna whip their behinds real good, eh?

You bet. We're gonna teach them Iraqis to play by the rules. *Our* rules.

— Oooweee! I love it when we talk like that.

Yeah. Ain't it great.

— So what they done this time?

Done? Does it matter? All we have to know is that we gonna kick arse.

— You bet! But does it say there what they done wrong?

It says here that them Iraqis ain't been playing hide-and-seek the way they s'posed to.

— They been cheatin'?

Yep. Been cheatin' all the time. Won't let ya look where ya want. So we gonna make 'em let us.

— Oooweee! We're gonna make 'em all right. But what we lookin' for?

Stuff. Secret stuff.

— But how we supposed to know when we find it?

Gee. I dunno. All I know is we gotta keep on lookin' till we get warm.

— Then what?

Gee. I dunno. I just know them Iraqis gotta do what we say or we'll ...

— Bomb 'em back to kingdom come.

Yeah, that ... and the sanctions.

— Sanctions?

Says here that over a million people have died there because of them already.

— Jesus. A million, eh?

That's what it says. One million people at the rate of 250 to 300 a day.

— So why we wanna go in there and kick 'em good when they're droppin' like flies already?

Beats me. Guess it's 'cause they deserve it.

— Deserve it! Jesus! They must be gluttons for punishment. How bad you gotta be at hide-and-seek to get into that much trouble?

Beats me. Guess it's 'cause we like dishin' it out.

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About the author



Dave Riley is a blogger and occasional podcaster based in the seaside township of Beachmere, near Brisbane , Queensland, Australia. He wrote the *Life of Riley* columns for *Green Left Weekly* during the 1990s. As well as writing satire he has written journalism and short plays. In the 1970s and again in the 1990s he formed and ran street theatre troupes. He has also written and performed cabaret and experimented with online media. During a puppetry phase, he created and toured a Punch and Judy show as 'Professor Ratbaggy's Red Cordial Show' before audiences of disapproving adults and rioting under twelves. Over his working life he has worked as a nurse, political organiser, laborer, process worker, community artist, mask maker and writer. Dave sees himself primarily as a satirist --albeit one with a dark and mordant POV -- and will offer an opinion on anything you care to mention. He grows vegetables, takes terriers for walks and sails a canoe in the shallow waters of Deception Bay.

Discover other titles by Dave Riley at Smashwords.com:

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