

# Who Drives 4WDs?

***The Institute's report on the demographic and attitudinal characteristics of those who drive large 4WD vehicles sparked a passionate debate in September. Clive Hamilton, one of the authors, comments.***

Over the last few years more and more motorists, not to mention pedestrians and cyclists, have been venting their frustration in newspapers and over the airwaves at the growing numbers of 4WD vehicles on city roads. For a long time roads have been places of simmering tensions as commuters battle increasingly congested thoroughfares, so the arrival of oversized, seemingly aggressive vehicles was always going to cause controversy.

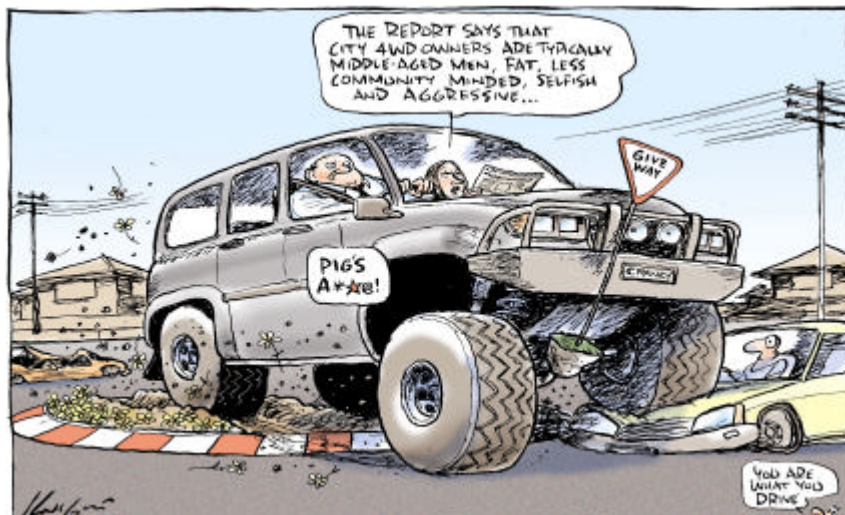
The rush to buy large 4WDs for use on city roads perhaps reflects the greater individualism and self-focus that characterises modern consumer society. Being cocooned in a two-tonne vehicle high above the rest of the traffic seems to reflect the same insecurities that have led to gated communities.

For many other motorists, 4WD owners seem to be putting their own safety ahead

of others and threatening an 'arms race' on city roads. The advertisers of these 'kings of the road' know their market, using words such as 'physical presence', 'indomitable', 'conquer', 'muscular' and 'dominate'.

According to Monash University's Accident Research Centre, large 4WD vehicles have the highest 'aggressivity' rating of all passenger vehicles, defined as the number of drivers killed or seriously injured per 100 involved in two-car, tow-away collisions.

The rapid growth in the numbers of 4WDs on city roads (in 2004 nearly one in five new cars was a 4WD) has given rise to certain stereotypes about the sort of people who decide to buy them, so the Institute set out to test the truth of these views. We used the very large data base compiled by Roy Morgan Research which includes information on the



Text: The Herald & Weekly Times.

Images: The Herald & Weekly Times Photographic Collection.

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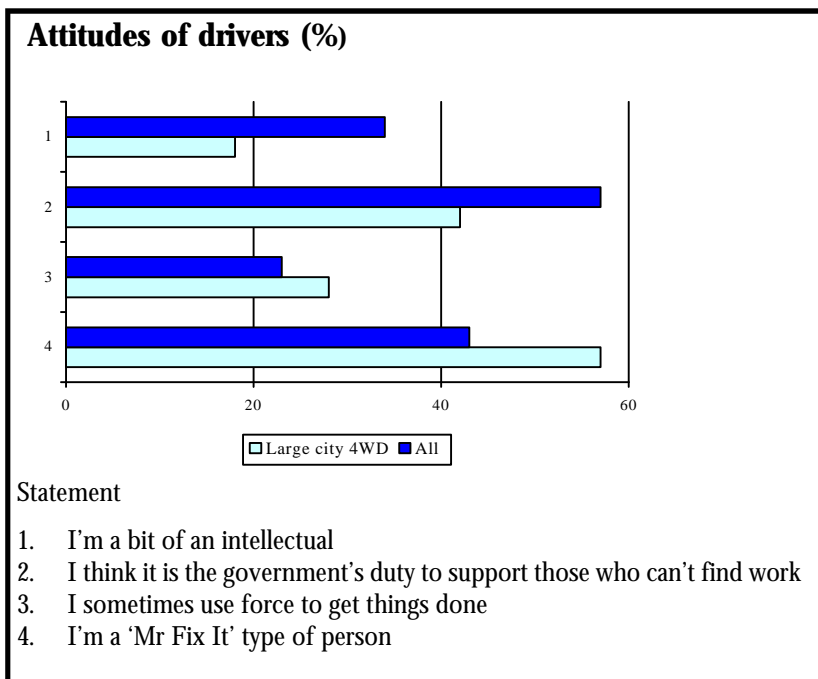
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attitudes of Australians to a range of issues along with a number of personal characteristics, including what sort of car respondents drive.

*"Get in or get out of the way." Ad for Toyota Hilux.*

The study compared those who live in the city and drive large 4WDs (such as the Toyota LandCruiser and Nissan Patrol) with the general population. We also compared them with all other city drivers, but found that the alternative comparison made no substantial difference to the results. The large size of the sample means the differences that do arise between drivers of 4WDs and others are statistically significant.

**Testing stereotypes**

In some respects, the profile of city drivers of large 4WDs differs markedly from the general population and other road users. While 4WD owners are quite diverse, the 'typical' city driver of a large 4WD is a male in his forties or fifties, in full-time work with a higher than average income, but not in the upper reaches of the income scale. City drivers of 4WDs also tend to be more obese, with two thirds (66 per cent) being overweight or obese compared to 57 per cent of the population overall.

In their attitudes, city drivers of large 4WDs are morally more conservative

and somewhat less community orientated than other drivers. They are, for example, more likely to believe that homosexuality is immoral, 51 per cent compared to 43 per cent among men in general. They also have lower regard for Indigenous culture, with only 54 per cent agreeing that 'Aboriginal culture is an essential component of Australian society' compared to 68 per cent of the population overall.

They are less sympathetic to public and charitable support for disadvantaged people. While over half (57 per cent) of all Australians agree that it is the government's duty to support those who cannot find work, only 42 per cent of city drivers of large 4WDs concur.

*"Conquer any surface". Ad for Jeep Cherokee*

Consistent with the advertising image, 4WD owners tend to see themselves as rugged individualists who like physical activity. Perhaps with implications for how they drive, they are more inclined to say they sometimes use force to get their way. They see themselves as being able to fix things when they break down but also admit to being technophobes.

**Strong reactions**

Not surprisingly, given the profile just described, the Institute's report attracted a hostile reaction from some 4WD

owners, including a fair bit of abuse and a number of threats. But it also unleashed a wave of complaints from other motorists about 4WD bullies, 'Mosman blondes', and gas-guzzling Urban Assault Vehicles.

It seems that public opinion has turned strongly against large 4WDs in the city and any new purchaser will need to have a thick skin to deflect the opprobrium. Whether governments have the courage to take measures such as special licences to reduce the elevated death rate due to 4WDs is another matter.

**Les Dégonflés**

In Paris a group of young activists has gained notoriety for night-time forays to let down the tires of any SUVs parked on the streets. Les Dégonflés (The Deflated Ones), as they call themselves, sometimes smear mud on the panels of expensive SUVs. As Sous-Adjudant Marrant (Sub-Warrant Office Joker), the group's leader, explains: "...if the owners will not take the four-wheel drives to the countryside, we will bring the countryside to the four-wheel-drives".

*"They dominate the sand dunes as easily as the city streets." Ad for Nissan Patrol.*

The police have adopted a light-handed approach, releasing without charge any activists caught in the act of deflation. Unsurprisingly, owners of SUVs have reacted angrily arguing that official disapproval of SUVs on Parisian streets encourages antisocial attacks and incites hatred of SUV owners.

Meanwhile in the US, car-makers are planning to put petrol-electric hybrid engines in some SUVs "so that, whatever else may be said of them, at least they will no longer be accused of being 'gas-guzzlers'".

And in Melbourne, newspapers are reporting a new group known as the Urban Liberation Front whose MO is to place bogus parking tickets on the windscreens of large 4WDs, imposing 'fines' of up to \$17,000 for 'offences' ranging from contributing to global warming to causing accidents. ■

# The Nationals' Telstra Deal

***The deal struck by the National Party with the Government over the privatisation of Telstra looks suspiciously like the Democrat's GST deal, and the political consequences for the Nationals may be the same. Deb Wilkinson and Andrew Macintosh compared the two in a recent Institute paper.***

One would have thought the Democrats GST deal might have taught all independent-minded politicians about the pitfalls of exchanging votes on controversial legislation for promises of large amounts of money. But it appears the Nationals and their current media darling, Senator Barnaby Joyce, may be slow learners.



The agreement the National Party brokered over the Telstra legislation has many of the hallmarks of the now infamous GST deal of the Democrats. For starters, just like the GST deal, the Nationals' core constituency appears to have opposed the agreement. Similarly, as in the case of the GST deal, the Telstra legislation was rushed through Parliament with little or no scrutiny.

Most importantly though, both agreements revolve around a promise given by the Government to spend a significant amount of money over a timeframe that extends beyond the next election and in circumstances where it will be extremely difficult to monitor how, when and where the money is invested.

The political consequences of the GST deal for the Democrats are well known. It fractured the party's supporter base, pushing many across to the Greens. The resulting instability contributed to the toppling of Meg Lees as leader, which triggered a chain of events that culminated in the 2004 election result where no Democrats were elected in the Senate.

The policy outcomes of the agreement are less well known but just as significant. One of the central pillars of the GST deal was a promise given by the Government to spend around \$900 million over four years on a range of initiatives that were supposed to offset the environmental impact of the new tax system. By the end of the four years, the Government had failed to spend approximately \$630 million of the

promised funds. Many of the programs have now been extended.

Yet by 2008/09, spending is still projected to fall short of the promised amount by over \$360 million. Further, where the money has been spent, it has been frittered away on inefficient and ineffective programs that have resulted in few notable environmental improvements. In all, the so-called 'Measures for a Better Environment' package has proven to be one of the more startling environmental policy failures in recent times.

Could a similar outcome await the Nationals' Telstra agreement? History suggests at least some parts of the story are likely to be repeated.

The collapse in Telstra's share price is likely to delay the sale, which will lead to a postponement of spending under some of the rural and regional telecommunications initiatives. Media reports also indicate that details of a number of the spending programs have not yet been finalised, months after the legislation was passed. The current signs suggest the Nationals' \$3 billion Telstra deal will shrink as time goes by.

The nature of the programs also indicates that they are unlikely to be an efficient method of guaranteeing 'parity of service and price' to rural and regional areas. Many of the initiatives involve telecommunication providers bidding for government subsidies to provide services to non-metropolitan areas. The imbalance of information between the providers and the Government is likely

to lead to the providers using the subsidies to support services in areas that would already have been profitable while ignoring the areas of greatest need.

In addition, the laggard state of Telstra's share price may provide an incentive for the Howard Government to ease the regulatory restraints on the company's operations. This could spark a recovery in the share price, lifting it to a position that would make selling the remainder of the Government's stake both financially and politically viable. The trade off would likely be a decline in telecommunication services, as well as a decrease in the level of competition in the telecommunications market. This could lead to an increase in prices and the cessation of services (or non-rollout of services) to a number of areas.

The Howard Government's promises should be viewed with scepticism.

The future of the Nationals will depend on more than just the outcomes of the Telstra agreement. But it is likely that many National voters are already feeling disenfranchised as a result of the Telstra agreement. If the privatisation is mismanaged, promises go unfulfilled, and other issues turn against the Government, the agreement could act as one of the catalysts that motivate National voters to look for alternatives, the most obvious contenders being Independents and the ALP.

Time will tell whether any of these predictions come to fruition. The moral of the story though is that the Howard Government's promises should be viewed with scepticism; subsidy-based policy is inherently unreliable and politicians should be hesitant to enter into agreements that they have little chance of policing. ■



# New Climate Institute

***In September, Institute Executive Director Clive Hamilton launched the Climate Institute (Australia), a new organisation designed to shift public opinion on climate change and thereby pressure Australian governments to take much stronger measures to cut greenhouse gases.***

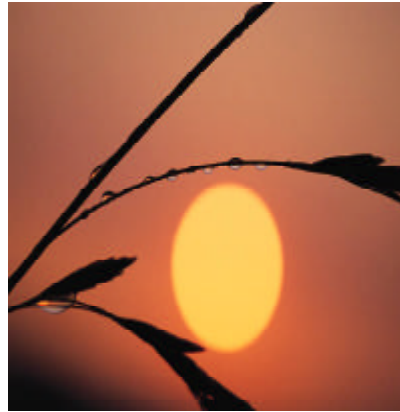
The Climate Institute is being established in response to the backward-looking stance on climate change taken by the Australian Government. Those involved believe that climate change is the gravest threat facing humanity in the 21<sup>st</sup> century and that urgent action is needed to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

The objective of the Climate Institute is to shift public opinion on climate change to the point where leaders of federal and state governments feel compelled to implement policies that will begin to reduce Australia's burgeoning greenhouse gas emissions.

Greenhouse policy is principally a federal government responsibility yet the Howard Government has conspicuously failed to act. Emissions from the major sources of greenhouse gases – electricity generation, transport and industry – have been rising at a frightening rate, reflecting the complete absence of any successful policies to restrain their growth.

The Government's repudiation of the Kyoto Protocol, the only effective international agreement on climate change, has helped to undermine international efforts to tackle the most serious problem facing humankind in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

The new Asia-Pacific Partnership on Climate Change is an agreement cobbled together by the US and Australia in order to undermine the momentum of the Gleneagles meeting of the G8.



The Partnership has set no targets for reducing emissions; there are no timetables, no agreed mechanisms, and no decision-making structure. Indeed, there is virtually nothing on paper and, despite bold declarations, the Howard Government has been unable to follow through with its promise to get the parties to meet in Australia in November.

While the Australian Environment Minister declared that the new partnership is an "alternative" to Kyoto, four of the six members (China, India, Japan and South Korea) have ratified and are implementing the Kyoto Protocol. They have made it clear that they do not seek an alternative to Kyoto but want to build on it.

In this context, the Climate Institute has been awarded a \$10 million grant to develop and implement a five-year campaign to raise public awareness about the dangers to Australia and the world as a result of global warming. The funding for the new Institute comes through Eve Kantor and her husband

Mark Wootton of the Poola Charitable Foundation. The donation is made in the memory of, and from the funds of, the late Tom Kantor. Tom was Eve's middle brother and both are part of the extended Murdoch family. After his death in 2001, the responsibility for disbursing the bulk of Tom's funds was given to Eve and Mark.

The Climate Institute will be a national organisation with its head office in Sydney. In addition to its Board, chaired by Clive Hamilton, the Institute will be assisted by an Advisory Council of eminent persons chaired by former NSW Premier, Bob Carr. A CEO will be selected in time for the Institute office to open in early 2006. The CEO will head a small staff.

Climate change is the gravest threat facing humanity in the 21st century.

The Institute expects to work collaboratively with environment, business and trade union groups concerned about climate change. It will offer a range of interested parties the opportunity to submit proposals for projects aimed at shifting public debate on climate change, and a substantial part of the Institute's budget will be used to fund such projects.

As well as its active campaign work, the Institute will host seminars, organise lectures, disseminate information relating to climate change, and ensure that Australians are provided with the latest scientific studies on global warming. It will also actively lobby governments to take a more responsible stance on the issue and support those that do. ■

The objective of the Climate Institute is to shift public opinion on climate change and persuade federal and state governments to implement policies that will begin to reduce Australia's burgeoning greenhouse gas emissions.

# Can We Withdraw from Iraq?

***A viable future for Iraq cannot be as a client state of the US and a model neo-liberal paradise in the Middle East, argues Barry Naughten.***

It is clear that all or most of the 'metrics' in Iraq are going from bad to worse. The only just and viable solution is an immediate negotiated end to the US military occupation and withdrawal of its troops and bases, as well as those of its allies. Much, if not all, of the motivation for the Iraqi resistance movement will only be reduced or ended by a negotiated end to the foreign occupation.

The irony is that the Bush-Cheney-Rumsfeld Administration's material and political capacity to extend the occupation is virtually exhausted. It is now desperately looking for an early way out.

The kicker is that such a 'rational' withdrawal would also mean a decisive abandonment of the central objectives laid out by this neo-conservative grouping dominating US foreign policy under George W. Bush and encapsulated in his *National Security Strategy Statement* of September 2002.

Given the continued overwhelming influence of this failed line of thinking within the Administration, the Bush Administration is unlikely to be able to manage this task of withdrawal any better than it has been able to manage the occupation itself.

## **Saner US voices**

Commentators critical of the neo-conservative or ultra-unilateralist



position, especially from within the US itself, have been calling for an early negotiated withdrawal virtually from the outset.

These voices have also demolished the proposition that a project of 'state-building', along the lines of post-WWII Germany or Japan, has any resemblance or relevance to the case of Iraq. Instead, the case has more resemblances to Vietnam, including with respect to economic cost and troop commitments, as argued in a recent paper by Phyllis Bennis and others in *Foreign Policy In Focus*.

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As in the case of Nixon and Kissinger's prolongation of the Vietnam war, doubling the eventual loss of life on all sides, the last ditch argument of the war's supporters is that withdrawal will mean a loss of US 'prestige'. The fact is, once again, US prestige has *already* been seriously damaged as a result of the Iraq war and occupation.

The parallel argument, especially from liberals 'opposed' to that earlier war in Vietnam, was that withdrawal would mean a 'bloodbath', as if the continued US presence does not!

## **Why a 'negotiated' withdrawal?**

Edward Luttwak has recently argued in *Foreign Affairs* that the US negotiating position is enhanced by the fact that the states in the Middle East adjoining Iraq have a greater interest in the region's stability than does the US itself. On this assumption, the key bargaining weapon available to the US then is not a threat

to continue the occupation indefinitely – as noted above, such a threat by now has no credibility – but the more realistic threat to leave without negotiating a solution that will address legitimate interests of the key parties, both within Iraq and in the region more generally.

This regional interest in stability applies especially to Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Iran and Syria. Despite the pro-Likud affiliations of the US neo-cons, even Israel cannot gain in the longer term from continued US occupation of Iraq if that occupation means a growth in the pan-Islamist terrorist movements.

While all this gives the US some serious bargaining power, it undermines the clout of the neo-cons who are implacably opposed to reasonable negotiation with states such as Iran or Syria and with Iraqi groupings such as ex-Ba'athist Party members. The neo-cons are especially opposed to multilateralism, international law and the UN in particular, all of which should play a constructive part in a negotiated settlement.

Withdrawal from Iraq will allow the global terrorist problem to be addressed more effectively. This will, of course, require addressing the other roots of terrorism, for example the diversion of oil revenues to fund militant pan-Islamism movements.

Again, this can only be done if multilateral negotiations and actions occur with other states so threatened, including in the Middle East. Given that some of the more autocratic states are also 'part of the problem' by contributing to these root causes, basic issues of social equity, if not 'democracy', will indeed have to be addressed – but not in the cynical, self-serving and selective manner proclaimed so loudly by the neo-cons. ■

*Barry Naughten is currently a PhD scholar in the Centre for Arab and Islamic Studies, ANU. His special interest is in the international political economy of energy.*

# Beyond Right and Left

**Why has the Right gained the ascendancy in political ideas and values? David McKnight offers new insight into Australia's changing political culture in his latest book *Beyond Right and Left: New Politics and the Culture Wars (Allen and Unwin, 2005)*. This is an edited extract of a talk given by David at the Australian National University on 22 September 2005.**

I'd like to begin by posing one of the questions that inspired my passion for the book. Why has the Right gained ascendancy in political ideas and values in Australia? In the short term there are two major reasons why John Howard has won recent elections – one is the steady performance of the economy and the other is the threat of terrorism.

But I'd like to look at some deeper reasons. The first is the observation that the possibility of adequately fitting contemporary politics into a Right-Left spectrum is disappearing. We all routinely describe John Howard's Liberal-National coalition government as Right and Labor as representing a broad Left.

But is this accurate? The meaning of these terms, like the ideas of those parties, has been transformed in recent times. When Kim Beazley was elected ALP leader in 2005, the former Liberal PM, Malcolm Fraser, said there was not a single issue on which Kim Beazley 'is on the Left of me'. This says something about the deeper forces at work in our political system.

Moreover, the Right-Left model assumes that all the big questions of the day can be fitted on this spectrum. Is alarm about climate change a 'left wing' response? Is it 'right wing' to make the family central to a political vision? I don't think these assumptions make any sense any more.

## The neo-liberal revolution

Part of the key to understanding the current ascendancy of the Right is that in the 1980s the Right underwent an intellectual revolution. The Right became a force centrally based on militant economic liberalism. The price of this liberal renewal was the destruction of the older kind of Right.

The neo-liberal Right is *radically* transforming Australian society. If you

set the market mechanism in place not only in the economy but in the wider society, it leads to a constant and swift evolution. For example, the old Right stood for both the family and a patriotic idea of the nation. Yet free market policies undermine both these institutions. The family is being undermined by the needs of the economy in the shape of long hours of work by both parents. The national economy (in the sense of sovereignty) is being undermined by the global economy.

If the neo-liberal Right today is a radical force, radically changing social institutions and civil society then, in terms of politics, two things flow from this. First, the most effective critique of neo-liberalism can be based on these radical social effects, rather than the traditional Left critique based on inequalities of wealth. Second, given that neo-liberals have reversed the meaning of Right and Left as conservative and radical, then the most effective ground for the Left is as a conservative force – with conservative defined in a particular way.

The possibility of adequately fitting contemporary politics into a Right-Left spectrum is disappearing.

## The collapse of socialism

The other reason that the Right-Left spectrum is becoming irrelevant is that the ideas of radical socialism, as a framework for Left politics, have definitively collapsed. There are many reasons for stating this but I will focus on the passing of social class as a central explanatory mechanism.

The fact of social class is still important in understanding Australia, and indeed any advanced industrial society. The

social power and privilege conferred by wealth on a small elite is a central feature of such societies. But my point is not to deny this. Rather it's to say that a *world view* based on class presumed that workers would develop a collective interest and that this would be expressed in trade unions and labor parties.

In the 1980s the Right became a force centrally based on militant economic liberalism.

With this class consciousness the working class was to drive social change. But this has not happened and will not happen, in my view. Moreover, the great issues of our time concerning race, gender and the environment cannot be explained in terms of class except by the most extreme economic determinism.

## The culture war

I now want to turn to what is usually called – at least by the Right – the culture war over values. If the free market revolution is one of the broad forces shaping political discourse in contemporary Australia, the other is the backlash against the cultural revolution of the 1970s. And the Right is winning this war too.

Broadly speaking, the reason for this, I think, is the fact that while many people experienced the cultural change of the 1970s and 80s as liberation from religious and conservative restrictions, others experienced it (and still experience it) quite differently – particularly as changes occurred in the family and as the effects of economic globalisation began to take hold. Rather than experiencing liberation, some began to experience disintegration.

All the while the economic policies of the Right are destroying the institutional bases of the egalitarianism of 'old Australia'.

Rather than feeling free, they felt fractured. Instead of gains, many felt the loss of stable families and stable jobs and the ebbing of familiar truths. Nor was this merely imagined. Divorce did rise, the incidence of certain crimes did increase, social change occurred rapidly. And progressive ideas with their emphasis on liberation and personal change were blamed for this.

These concerns are often dismissed with a wave of the postmodern hand. They are mere 'moral panics' and 'anxieties'. Such phrases often amount to an evasion of genuine moral issues. Unless everyone celebrates every social change, it seems, they are conservative. While intellectuals may revel in unstable identities and blurred boundaries most people don't.

### Diversity and the common good

I now want to turn to a related aspect of all this which is a notion of cultural diversity – and discuss how it has played out in national politics

I begin by noting that this notion marks a significant break from the traditional Left's adherence to social justice, equality and to socialism in various forms, which was based on a *philosophical universalism*. It saw all people as equal without significant difference. In this older framework 'diversity' usually meant some kind of inequality.

At the high water mark of the new cultural Left, the idea of *cultural diversity* was made into a kind of fetish. While it legitimately celebrated the variety of cultures, it tended to romanticize such feelings and saw them as laudably 'oppositional' to the dominant culture. The consequence of this has been a deep *alienation* of the cultural Left from the mainstream culture – not surprisingly, since this is seen to be the oppressive norm – and a cultivation of marginality.

This loss of the universalist component of the Left has meant that the approach emphasizing cultural diversity often finds it hard to talk about issues in terms

of an overall vision, in terms of a national interest or a common good. It has little to say to society as a whole but, in its own fragmentation, addresses a series of separate constituencies.

By contrast, from the 1990s onwards, the intellectual Right in the Liberal Party increasingly began to articulate their politics in new terms by a new kind of common good. This was a *culturally-defined* common good revolving around a national identity of 'Australian values'.

This meant that John Howard and the Liberal Party talked about egalitarianism and the 'battlers', which is a bold form of cultural politics since it is code for making an appeal to the Anglo-Celtic working class Australians. (All the while their economic policies are destroying the institutional bases of the egalitarianism of 'old Australia'.)

### Family values

I want to deal with one example of how the usual Right-Left framework can be re-thought and thereby offer hope to defeat the Right. The Left has not been associated with deep concern for the family as a central political issue. Rather, the discourse of *family values* has been the territory of the Right. And this is taken by all sides to mean, for example, shunning gay love and advocating conservative moral values.

The Left needs to re-think its view of the family – indeed I think it is central to the revival of its fortunes. The reason for this is that even though the Right talks in *the same breath* about supporting the free market and supporting family values, in fact these two things pull in opposite directions.

This was the surprising message recently from the new Senator Fielding from Family First. And he drew the logical conclusion – that John Howard's new industrial relations laws are *market-friendly* and not *family-friendly* – particularly when it is likely that ordinary workers will be forced to bargain away

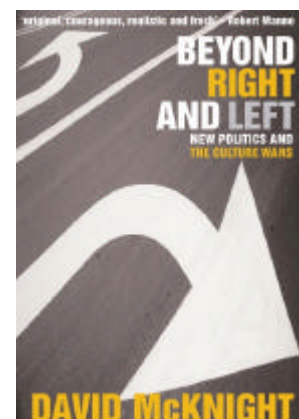
weeks of annual leave, to work longer hours and unsociable hours.

For too long the Left and supporters of feminism have damned the phrase 'family values' as simply a code for intolerance and discrimination. Rather than challenging the meaning of 'family values', they have allowed themselves to be positioned as opponents of something with which most people sympathise. Ceding the terrain of 'the family' to the Right allows it to speak in the names of many millions of people who are themselves not necessarily prejudiced or intolerant but who are worried by rapid social change and dislocation.

The Left needs to re-think its view of the family.

Yet the real forces undermining families are the forces of the market, of rampant consumerism, of low pay and of long and inflexible working hours. Rethinking family values means focusing on the private and the social meaning of care – and how care will be paid for. Will it be resolved in the marketplace with what Ann Manne calls the industrialization of child care? Or will we try to retain care outside the formal economy? This is a theme I develop in my book.

The paradox and challenge to those who identified with the original values of the Left, but whose intellectual framework has collapsed, is to re-frame their values and create a new political discourse which has a particular kind of humanistic conservatism at its heart. ■



# A Sick Economy?

Clive Hamilton

One of the baleful consequences of the spread of economic rationalism in Canberra is that every lobby group now believes that the Government will take notice of them only if they can put a dollar value on whatever it is they lobby for.

Access Economics has turned the belief that 'if you can't count it, it doesn't count' into a nice little earner. It specialises, for example, in calculating how much various diseases 'cost the economy'. Health lobby groups have beaten a path to Access' door, clutching cheques for perhaps \$100,000, hoping to get a big number that will scare the Health Minister.

The table shows Access Economics' estimates of the direct and indirect costs of seven conditions. The numbers are much bigger if estimates of the costs

Condition	Direct cost	Indirect cost
Dementia	\$5.6 b	\$1.0 b
Vision loss	\$1.8 b	\$3.2 b
Arthritis	\$3.5 b	\$7.7 b
Cardiovascular	\$7.6 b	\$6.6 b
Alzheimer's	\$3.6 b	
Bipolar	\$1.6 b	
Schizophrenia	\$1.9 b	
Total	\$25.5 b	\$18.5 b

of suffering are included. The cost of suffering for arthritis, for instance, is estimated by Access at \$8 billion.

Access describes the costs of schizophrenia as 'enormous', but poor old bi-polar only rates a 'substantial',

even though \$1.6 billion isn't too much less than \$1.9 billion. Vision impairment is 'a huge and vastly under-treated problem', and 'the enormity and priority of the dementia epidemic have not yet been acknowledged'. Of course, every report demands much more investment by the Commonwealth.

We calculate that, adding in some of the estimated costs of suffering (\$94 billion for cardiovascular and \$4.6 billion for vision loss), Access Economics' estimates of the costs of just these seven conditions account for 20 per cent of Australia's GDP. If Access were commissioned by some of the other health biggies, depression, cancer, alcoholism, it wouldn't be long before the whole economy was soaked up, with nothing left over in the national accounts for 'consulting services'. ■



## DEPUTY DIRECTOR

The Institute is seeking a Deputy Director. The position is full-time and is located at the Institute's offices on the campus of the Australian National University.

Applicants should have a strong background in social science research. The position involves a range of duties including conducting and supervising research as well as some management functions. The salary range is from \$75,000 to \$90,000 depending on qualifications and experience.

The Institute is also recruiting a Research Fellow to join its team of researchers.

**More details including Selection Criteria and Duty Statements can be found on the website, [www.tai.org.au](http://www.tai.org.au), or by emailing [mail@tai.org.au](mailto:mail@tai.org.au). For further information please contact the Institute's Executive Director, Dr Clive Hamilton, on 02 6125 1270.**

**The closing date for applications is 12<sup>th</sup> January 2006.**

## The Australia Institute

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# The Senate: Now and Then

***On the eve of the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the dismissal of the Whitlam government, the Australia Institute hosted a forum focusing on the Senate – the key to the dismissal. Emma Rush reports.***

In the gracious Members' Dining Room at Old Parliament House, Institute members and interested members of the public heard the views of two prominent Senators on the history and future of the Senate in Australia.

Opposition Leader in the Senate, Chris Evans, presented a strong case that a number of the Senate procedures and mechanisms which were developed over the years 1983-2005 had enabled a more

The new Coalition-controlled Senate has already 'trashed every check and balance'.

open and transparent review of Federal executive power. The resulting 'debate and contest of ideas in the public arena has been good for Australian democracy – far better than the unfettered exercise of executive power ... [this] process has been beneficial and both the process and outcomes have been largely accepted by the Australian people.'

But the new Coalition-controlled Senate has already 'trashed every check and balance': the number of questions allowed to non-government Senators in Question Time has been reduced; the Senate cut-off, which ensured time for Senators to read Bills under debate, has been overturned; debate has been gagged more frequently; and Senate inquiries have become 'a fig leaf for a power drunk and arrogant government', with 'limited terms of reference, limited times for inquiry, Canberra-centric hearings and reporting dates that prevent effective scrutiny, community participation and proper analysis and reporting'. In short, the Senate has been reduced to a 'sausage factory' as all 'normal Senate processes have been smashed in order to ram through the ideological agenda of the Howard Government'.

Lest Evans' overall argument, that Australian democracy has been seriously impoverished by changes to Senate operations since July this year, overly depress the audience, he closed with the hope that the Australian people would not again allow the Coalition a majority in both houses: 'The people smell the arrogance and they don't like it!'

In contrast to Senator Evans' focus on current developments in the Senate, senior Liberal Senator George Brandis treated the audience to a provocative overview of the events of 1975 in historical perspective. With a lively delivery that clearly drew on his past as a barrister, Brandis argued that the outrage expressed by the Left at the Senate refusal to pass the Appropriation Bills for the 1975 Budget is vulnerable to 'the plainest charge of hypocrisy'. The ALP in Opposition had tried to do the very same thing in 1970, but had been defeated by the Democratic Labor Party refusing to align with them. In this light, the Left's romanticization of the denouement of the Whitlam Government is 'hypocritical, historically ignorant, [and] constitutionally inaccurate' – although it did serve to satiate 'the Left's craving for victimhood'.

Brandis did, however, obliquely admit that current developments in the Senate are a matter for political concern:

'The idea of the Senate as a balancing chamber has become an accepted part of our political culture. An opinion poll taken in February this year revealed that only 39 per cent of people were happy that the Government had won a majority in the Senate, although 45.1 per cent of electors in fact cast a first preference vote for the Coalition at the 2004 Senate election. Forty seven per cent thought it would be better if the Senate were not controlled by the Government of the day; almost



**Senator Evans, Clive Hamilton and Senator Brandis at the Institute's Dismissal Forum**

a quarter of Coalition voters shared that view.'

Brandis closed with a personal anecdote from his friendship with Sir John Kerr.

The Senators' full speeches are available from the 'What's New' section of the Institute website. ■



Seasons Greetings



The Australia Institute wishes all its members a very happy Christmas and a wonderful New Year

## Corporate Control of Child Care

***Corporate child care chains in Australia have reported large profits over the last couple of years. Many have questioned whether the extraction of such large profits compromises the capacity of child care centres to provide high quality care for children. So exactly what is going on in child care in Australia? Emma Rush provides a preview of Institute research to be released early in 2006.***

The provision made by industrialized societies for child care is central to a range of social policy issues including family and community relationships, workforce participation rates, and gender equity. Moreover, children's early development can be negatively affected by inadequate provision for 'early childhood education and care' (the more adequate term for child care used by early childhood professionals). Inadequate provision therefore has potentially enormous long-term social policy costs.

By far the most common type of institutional child care currently provided for Australian children under school age is centre-based long day care. According to the 2004 Child Care Census carried out by the Department of Family and Community Services, in 2004 approximately 300,000 children (including about 120,000 aged under two) used this form of care each week. Most were not enrolled full-time, with approximately 80 per cent using such care for less than 30 hours each week.

At the same time, only one third of child care 'places' (equivalent to a child in full-time care) were provided by community-based centres, while private-for-profit centres catered for the remaining two thirds. Traditionally these private-for-profit centres were small owner-operator organizations, but recent years have seen the rise of corporate child care chains, foremost amongst which is ABC Developmental Learning Centres, henceforth ABC.

A great deal of media coverage has been given to the increasing market power of ABC, particularly since a merger in late 2004 when ABC came into control of approximately 20 per cent of all long day care places in Australia. The owner of ABC, Eddie Groves, is tipped to become the richest young (under 40)

person in Australia in 2006. Commercially, ABC is an unprecedented success. But the reports of commercial success have appeared simultaneously with reports of concern about the quality of care provided by corporate child care chains. These concerns are reinforced by the fact that long day care is quite heavily subsidised by the Commonwealth Government via the Child Care Benefit paid to parents. According to one recent media source, 44 per cent of the revenue of ABC comes from the Commonwealth Government.

The potential conflict between the provision of quality care and profit maximisation in any private-for-profit centre, whether corporate or individual owner-operated, is far from the only problem in the child care industry. Community-based not-for-profit centres report struggling with inadequate funds for new equipment and other infrastructure.

All child care centres, community-based and privately-owned, face an undersupply of qualified staff, and it is widely recognised that this undersupply is at least partly due to low wages and status for a demanding and important career. In inner metropolitan areas demand for child care tends to exceed supply, whereas in outer metropolitan areas, where land is cheaper, the reverse is the case.

This has further implications for quality of care – in inner metropolitan areas there is no market incentive for providers to improve quality of care (their centres will be full regardless) and in outer metropolitan areas centres with vacancies must find ways to cut costs to remain viable.

Concerns about the quality of care that can be provided across the long day care



sector under these circumstances have, to some degree, been held in check by the government accreditation system of long day care centres – over 95 per cent of centres are accredited. But alongside reporting of anecdotal 'horror stories' about the lack of quality of care provided in some centres, the media have also reported child care professionals querying the capacity of the government accreditation system to enforce quality goals effectively.

Whether the 'horror' anecdotes are representative of a significant problem with the government accreditation system, however, has until now been impossible to assess, since there has been no data collected independent of government.

In recognition of this research gap in an important policy area, the Institute has undertaken its own national survey of child care workers' perceptions of quality of care during October-December 2005. This independent data collection and analysis has been welcomed by child care professionals, and a discussion paper incorporating the results of the survey will be released early in 2006. ■

# Fear and Politics

Andrew Macintosh

Fear has always played a central role in Australian politics. In the years following Federation, it was the fear of the 'Yellow Peril' that dominated. Later, the twin forces of communism and the bomb emerged. In modern times, the focus has shifted to a myriad of issues, including theft, assault, gangs, drugs, refugees and, above all, terrorism.

That fear is prominent in politics is hardly surprising. The problem exists when community apprehension is manipulated for political purposes.

There is little doubt that the Howard Government is guilty of fanning the flames of fear to advance its political prospects. This was demonstrated most vividly in 2001 when it depicted a trickle of asylum seekers as a horde of illegal immigrants who were threatening Australia's borders and sovereignty. The resulting commotion swayed many voters and helped secure the Howard Government its third term in office.

The price paid for the Government's demonisation of asylum seekers has been the callous treatment of hundreds of individuals and a department that views civil rights and human decency as optional extras. To this human cost must be added the hundreds of millions of dollars expended on the 'Pacific Solution' and the operation of domestic detention facilities.

The combination of fear and apathy among Australians has created an environment that is ripe for political exploitation.

More recently, the Howard Government's attention has turned to the threat of terrorism. The response has been a series of draconian laws that have curtailed civil liberties and armed police and security agencies with powers befitting a radically right-wing regime.

No evidence or logical argument has been presented as to why these laws are necessary. Existing laws have proven to be sufficient to deal with a range of threats (including terrorism) and they strike an acceptable balance between the needs of security and those of liberty. Should the threat of terrorism intensify, there may be a need to review the executive's powers. But the domestic terror threat level has remained at medium since 2001 and there is no evidence that the risk is of a sufficient magnitude to warrant the wholesale sacrifice of civil rights.

And what has the political return been for the Howard Government on its investment in terrorism? Time will tell, but the Morgan Polls showed the Howard Government's support jumped by five per cent in the week after the dramatic terror arrests in Sydney and Melbourne in early November.

The state and territory Labor governments are not innocent of politicising terrorism. With the exception of the ACT Government, they almost tripped over one another in their rush to support the Howard Government's latest terror laws. The Queensland Government has even announced that it will run its own anti-terror advertising campaign that will reinforce the message that we should all be 'alert but not alarmed'.

State Labor governments have also been devotees of 'law and order' election campaigns, where promises of harsher laws to confront the fear of rising crime have been placed at the centre of re-election strategies. This has resulted in the creation of laws that cut across long-established legal principles in areas ranging from illicit drugs and anti-social behaviour to police powers and mandatory sentences.

Why does the Australian public put up with fear-driven politics? Two reasons stand out.

Firstly, there is the tendency for people to be afraid of the unknown. Secondly, as Malcolm Fraser recently pointed out,



there is indifference in Australian society towards due process and the rule of law. The material prosperity, security and political stability enjoyed by most Australians over the past 20 years appear to have blinded people to the importance of established legal and democratic principles. Where other communities have fought for these rights and liberties, Australia seems content to relinquish them with a minimum of fuss.

There is indifference in Australian society towards due process and the rule of law.

The combination of fear and apathy has created an environment that is ripe for political exploitation. Governments are using it to win elections, while the police and security agencies are seizing the moment to expand their powers.

The resulting erosion of civil rights has highlighted the urgent need for a US-style constitutional Bill of Rights, or a federal Human Rights Act in the mould of those that currently apply in the United Kingdom and the ACT. Yet, for either of these options to have a chance, one of the major parties must be willing to turn its back on the politics of fear. However, to date, neither the Federal Parties nor the state and territory Parties have shown a willingness to display such courage. Until they do, our civil and political rights will continue to be eroded in an incremental process driven by political expediency. ■

# Institute notes

## New Publications

A Macintosh and D Wilkinson, *Why the Telstra agreement will haunt the National Party: Lessons from the Democrats' GST Deal*, Discussion Paper 81, September 2005.

C Hamilton and C Barbato, *Who Drives 4WDs?* Web Paper, September 2005.

## Forthcoming Publications

\* Drug law reform

\* Biases in heritage listing

\* Border tax adjustments for greenhouse taxes

\* Quality of childcare

The Australia Institute was very sad to say goodbye to Claire Barbato, our part-time researcher, in mid October. All the best to you Claire and good luck with your new position.

The Institute is currently advertising for a deputy director and a research fellow; you can see the advertisement on page 8.

## The Aboriginal Tent Embassy

Andrew Macintosh

The recent decision of the Federal Minister for the Environment and Heritage not to include the Aboriginal Tent Embassy on the Commonwealth Heritage List has shown that the so-called 'culture wars' are very much alive and kicking. It has also highlighted again the pitfalls of a heritage regime that places listing decisions in the hands of a politician.

In this case, the new heritage advisory body, the Australian Heritage Council, found that the Tent Embassy met five of the eight listing criteria. Importantly, the Council agreed that the initial protest action in 1972, sparked by Prime Minister Billy McMahon's refusal to recognise Aboriginal land rights, was a 'defining event in the evolution of Australia's democracy'.

Despite the Council's unequivocal findings regarding the significance of the site, the Minister rejected the nomination. Worse still, it appears he tried to bury his decision in the hope of avoiding unwanted publicity.

The Minister failed both to make the decision and to publish details of the decision in accordance with the statutory timelines outlined in the *Environment*

*Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* (EPBC Act). The reasons were not published until almost two months after the listing decision was made. It even appears the Minister and the Department failed to notify the current residents of the site about his decision.

There are pitfalls in a heritage regime that places listing decisions in the hands of a politician.

The Minister's apparent desire to avoid public scrutiny may stem from the many flaws in the reasoning he eventually provided. For example, the Minister uses the argument that some Indigenous people express shame and embarrassment about the appearance of the site to question whether the Embassy meets certain historic listing criteria that are unrelated to aesthetic issues.

Similarly, the Minister's reasons cite the fact that the Minister for Local Government, Territories and Roads is

undertaking a 'nation-wide consultation' as grounds for questioning whether the Embassy meets the listing criteria, notwithstanding that the Council has already concluded that the place has historical significance to both Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians.

Another startling aspect about the Minister's decision is that listing the Embassy on the Commonwealth Heritage List would not mean that it would have to continue in its current form indefinitely. Changes could be made to the site but the Environment Minister would have to approve those that might have a significant adverse impact on the values of the site.

The Australia Institute drew the media's attention to the Minister's decision after requesting a copy of the Council's assessment in accordance with the freedom of information provisions of the EPBC Act. We intend to continue to monitor the Government's administration of the new Federal Heritage lists to ensure they provide an accurate record of Australia's natural and cultural history. A discussion paper on this issue is due out early in 2006. ■