



## A Year to Forget

For the Aboriginal people, the end of 1988, the much-vaunted "year of reconciliation", seemed much like the beginning, with an infant mortality rate still three times higher, unemployment four times higher, imprisonment rates up to sixteen times higher, and life expectancy twenty years less, than the national average.

The inspiration of Sydney's January 26 march raised hopes of a better future. But where the year's beginning had at least seen some attempt at progress, its close saw the government in hasty retreat behind a



Photo: Rappori

conservative onslaught against Aboriginal self-determination and Aboriginal programs. In NSW, "mainstreaming" (read "assimilation") became the buzzword. And in Canberra the furore in the Department of Aboriginal Affairs saw the government in abject retreat once more.

But a question mark remained. Were Gerry Hand's actions a capitulation to the right's anti-black vendetta, or was the demise of the unloved Charles Perkins and friends a case of the Aboriginal movement choosing the moment to put its own house in order?

DB

## Shady Lanes and Dark Alleys

**T**he Fitzgerald Inquiry into Queensland corruption was one of the great pieces of political theatre of 1988. And, like any other good drama, it came to a climax shortly before the year's curtain-fall.

By the time this gets into print dramatic events may already have resulted from former Senior Minister, Don "Shady" Lane's confessions to the inquiry in November. As one allegedly reliable National Party source was quoted as saying on ABC local radio: "this could be the straw that breaks the

donkey's back". This is no way to talk about your own party and government, and why a donkey rather than a camel is not clear. What is clear, however, is that the ambit of the inquiry is now firmly, rather than "allegedly" within the political arena. Don Lane's confessions that he had rorted both the taxation department and the ministerial expenses system (allegedly along with many of his ministerial colleagues) to the extent of a combined sum of \$130,000 may pale into insignificance against the wide implications of his confessions in relation to the amassed evidence

that the inquiry already has at its disposal.

Two senior ministers, a Supreme Court Judge (Angelo Vasta), a District Court Judge (Eric Pratt), a Police Commissioner (Sir Terence Lewis), several other senior and some lower-ranking officers, all now either stood down or aside, or confessedly corrupt, is not bad going for just over a year's work. But these have been only the most public figures and events in the inquiry. What is clear is that Tony Fitzgerald QC has been slowly building up a database of intelligence, occasionally introducing a "key operator" to

enable the database to form into distinctive patterns. The slow sweep through the networks of prostitution, illegal casinos, and SP betting, producing some rather flat and uneventful moments in the life of the inquiry, have nonetheless provided the inquiry team with an invaluable system of cross-references which swing into action as key witnesses appear. The fact that this has all been done in public, and that the public can — and does — make cross references too, gives it political implications far beyond those of any previous inquiry in Queensland and probably in the whole of Australia.

Jack "The Bagman" Herbert, former Head of the Licensing Squad, and star witness for the inquiry, turned out to be a bit of a disappointment in terms of sensational revelations, and stood-down Police Commissioner Sir Terence Lewis suffered from 18 days of non-recall, but both of these key figures were clearly made uncomfortable by pieces of evidence produced by the inquiry's elephantine memory-bank of Queensland's network of both alleged and confessed corruption. In both cases, this discomfort enabled the inquiry to make at least tentative connections with the sphere of government in Queensland.

The tentative connections appeared to become firmer as the inquiry moved into its "political season" initiated by Don Lane's confessions and allegations about his cabinet colleagues, though the former minister has denied being the "Big Don" who advised Herbert to leave the country in 1987 and has denied any alleged connections with illegal out-of-hours hotel openings and electoral irregularities raised in previous evidence. The big step into the arena of government has been made, however, and it remains to be seen what effects this may have in the run-up to the inquiry's final report, scheduled for mid-1989. The next state election is scheduled, according to an unusually pre-emptive announcement by Premier Mike Ahern, for December 1989. Could be another interesting year in Queensland ....

CM

# Howard Plays the Wild Card



Photo: Rapport

1988 was the year racism came back into fashion. The FitzGerald Report opened up a "debate" over multiculturalism even as a sanitised version was doing service as the official representation of nationhood in the Bicentennial year. And "social cohesion" became the racists' catchcry.

Not for the first time, John Howard found himself exchanging Menziesite conservatism for the lexicon of the populist right. Meanwhile, the left found itself in a familiar dilemma: how to support the multicultural principle while remaining critical of the practice?

## Bushed

**The world recently experienced two major American events: the election of George Bush as President, and the twenty-fifth anniversary of President Kennedy's assassination. While history sees the latter presidency as *Camelot*; we can predict with certainty that the former falls into the *Father Knows Best* category.**

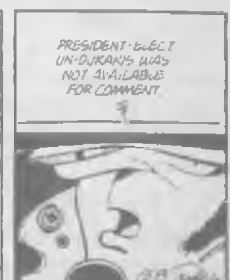
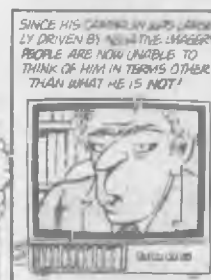
With a Bush administration we are assured of four more years of extreme conservatism, despite the fact that political commentators, scrambling for a label, suggest he is

more "moderate" than Reagan.

Bush will probably wish to continue Reagan's kudos-winning disarmament initiatives. But he is still a hawk. He supports Star Wars as vigorously as Reagan. And defence expenditure will only be affected by the ability to squeeze other sectors, do deals with Congress, and the pressures of the general economic malaise.

We know Bush supports Reagan's "freedom fighters", the Contras: his exact role in the Iran/Contragate scandal has yet to be spelled out in court (if it gets that far).

Where Bush does differ from Reagan is in the "charisma" stakes.



Cartoon: Garry Trudeau

The chances are that he will be best remembered by history in Gerry Trudeau's *Doonesbury* strip caricature: no body, just a weak voice on the page.

And the American voters (those who bothered) gave him to us.

The Democratic Party gave him to us, too. They are, as commentators say, a party with "vision". (An odd term, conjuring up an image of an entire party leadership hallucinating. On second thoughts, perhaps it is appropriate.)

In any case, for the next four years, while the Democratic Party leadership searches for that vision (or a different TV series on which to model their prospective presidency), anyone in the US who thinks they might be labelled a "liberal" had better keep her or his head down.

And the rest of the world? Well, we in Australia will have to deal with all that visioning going on in Canberra with the major political parties. JI

## Back to Basics

Former premier Barrie Unsworth had pledged "back to basics", and back to basics is certainly what NSW electors got. The fall of the twelve-year old Labor government in March was the cause of little mourning, but it did usher in one of Australia's most dangerous recent experiments in conservatism.

By the end of 1988, the Greiner government had undermined the state school system, threatened to abolish Aboriginal land councils and "mainstream" their funds, moved to privatise a swathe of government services, and wielded a hatchet through women's programs. After years of corruption and complacency Labor received a newer, cleaner face with reluctant leader Bob Carr. Yet it offered little resistance to many of the new government's assaults.

And while some of education minister Terry Metherell's plans probably have a touch of merit, the overall effect of the Greiner moral

## Glasnost's Year of Trials

1988 was the Year of Glasnost. Almost daily, the limits of the possible were pushed back by Soviet journalists and intellectuals.

Today, Gorbachev is himself criticised, in particular because of his proposal to take the two top positions in the country into his hands.

And now it is the armed forces who must answer for their huge consumption of the nation's wealth. The restructuring of the armed forces is finally being debated — including among the military themselves. Andrei Nuikin, a commentator known for his outspoken views, recently even asked if the military may not take part in a *coup d'état* against perestroika and glasnost ...

But if glasnost continues to chalk up new victories, perestroika, particularly in the economic field, is sadly lacking. It is here that the resistance of the bureaucracy at all



Photo: Rex Features

levels is more obstinate and ferocious. Often it seems almost conscious sabotage.

Ordinary working people see the queues grow longer, prices rise, and the bureaucrats cynically defy their own slogans. Yet the worst is still to come: price reform is essential to get some rationality back into the economy, but will involve inflation, speculation and hardship. In China, after ten years of rising living standards, it is still difficult to "sell" such reform. In the USSR it will be much more difficult.

The hope is that greater democratisation will enable the people themselves to decide such reform is unavoidable, as are the problems it will bring. The tragedy is that the \$80 billion the USSR received in hard currency during the oil boom in the 'seventies was squandered by the Brezhnev apparatchiks. That could have softened the pain of reform. Today there is little left.

1988 solved nothing for the Soviet Union, but the hope remains that glasnost and democratisation will allow fundamental change in the economy and society as a whole to begin in 1989. But nothing is certain: a neo-stalinist coup is certainly not excluded, although the resistance would be enormous. DF



agenda was to push the conservative focus nationally from the "hip pocket nerve" to John Howard's new fascination with "conservative values". Is Greinerism the face of the Liberals' future?

## Paying the Bill

1988 saw the curtain fall on one of the most contradictory careers in Australian politics, that of William George Hayden. A man reputedly loved by the party which ultimately didn't really seem to want him as leader; a self-professed "democratic socialist" who ended his political days as an acolyte of Paul Keating, and who instigated perhaps the first "Keating budget" back in 1975; Hayden's career was a maze of ambiguities.

His foreign policy record, too, was fraught with paradox: strong on Indochina but spineless on East Timor; never quite happy with the Americophilic tendency of his government, yet unwilling or unable to buck it. His final flourish produced similar spasms of ambivalence: was it just a "job for Bill", or was it a genuine way of removing the spectre of 1975?

Probably the most fitting epitaph to his career is the faction formed in his image, the ALP Centre Left: a "conscience" of the party which always seemed to deliver to the right, and an "alternative to the factions" which coincided with the deepest institutionalisation of



factions in the ALP's history. In the crunch, like its mentor, it was squeezed by left and right

simultaneously. No drover's dog, perhaps, Bill Hayden, but neither a shepherd of the flock .... DB

## Faded Dreams

**I**f "les evenements" of May 1968 marked the imminent departure of President de Gaulle, May of this year saw the resuscitation of the only politician capable of rivalling the general's dominance over the shape of French Fifth Republic politics. The re-election of Mitterrand to the presidency seems to have finally broken the political mould cast by de Gaulle.

And this is not surprising. After asserting the political role of the presidency, de Gaulle was sufficiently immodest to believe the political structures he had put in place would have precisely the same

longevity as himself. In fact, it has taken twenty years for any substance to be found in his terse prophecy that *apres moi le deluge*.

Indeed, the flood of radicalism most feared by the general could have just floated ashore this May in the shape of the avuncular Mitterrand and the apparent consolidation of a left/centre formation in French politics. And this must be what we're excited about: against the backdrops of Kohl, Thatcher and Bush, Mitterrand does indeed look rather welcoming.

And yet there's something despondent about all this. Although the political structures being put in place by Mitterrand are an advance

on those of de Gaulle, in the exchange there has been a loss of both political perspective and expectations. Whereas, twenty years ago *autogestion* meant a saner world where people had control over their workplaces, the idea of workers' control has now slipped, via the path of economic rationalism, to the hope of buying a share in a recently privatised national airline.

On reflection, maybe the general was right about the deluge: he just had the direction wrong.

PMcN

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