



VICNEWS

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What you Didn't See on 4 Corners

Members who attended FABC's 2002 AGM and heard the excellent address of Julian Burnside QC on *The Importance of Public Broadcasting in these Troubled Times* expressed interest in viewing **Australia's Pacific Solution**, which Julian Burnside mentioned ABC 4 Corners had declined to screen.

Screened by the BBC, *Australia's Pacific Solution* covers the recent arrivals of refugees in Australia and surrounding events, and includes footage and interviews with refugees relocated to Nauru.

FABC members and friends are welcome to join with FABC Vic Committee to view

Australia's Pacific Solution
8pm Wednesday 11th December
at the Erwin Rado Theatre
211 Johnston Street, Fitzroy

No cost. RSVP to FABC office essential to ensure we have sufficient seats.

You can phone the FABC office to borrow a video of *Australia's Pacific Solution* or to obtain details of how to obtain videos to distribute more widely to other groups.

FABC is unable to provide speaker's notes on Julian Burnside's address. However, on Julian's website www.julianburnside.com you will find the poem he recited in part at the

ABC's Asia Pacific Program to be Slashed

Asia Pacific - Radio National's specialist Asian and Pacific affairs program - is presently broadcast on Radio National, Radio Australia and Newsradio. Next year the ABC plans to cut *Asia Pacific's* budget and move its evening RN broadcasts to 5.00 am.

In a recent media release, Terry Laidler, Friends of the ABC (Vic) President said: 'It is inexplicable that the ABC would cut a significant, unique program which provides invaluable information and important insights into our region. Recent events have brought home to all Australians the significance of Australia's location in the Asia-Pacific region. Never before has the community been so keenly interested in, and needed to understand more about, what is happening in our region.'

Radio National (and its previous incarnations) has a history of broadcasting on Asian and Pacific affairs which stretches back around 40 years. Indeed, for decades ABC radio was the only media outlet in Australia which provided consistent, dedicated coverage of regional events.

Call on the ABC to fulfil its Charter requirements to inform and educate the community. Insist the Federal Government ensures the ABC has the resources to

FABC Office Xmas Closure

As usual, we will be closing the office to save \$. If you need any material or merchandise from the office to use over this period, please contact Carolyn well before the date the office will close.



Carolyn Paulin, Admin Officer.

Photos of Carolyn and Mary by Claire Jones



Mary Murray, Thursday office volunteer, preparing merchandise for an order.

FABC Vic 2002 AGM

The team led by Terry Laidler and June Factor was re-elected to FABC's Committee of Management at FABC's 2002 AGM, and Terry has been reappointed President.

The proposed change to FABC's objectives was overwhelmingly



Whose Bias?

Prof Jack Clancy
former head of the Department of Communication Studies, RMIT

The issue of bias in news and current affairs reporting is probably the oldest arguing point in public broadcasting and has been so since Reith began at the BBC. It surfaces regularly at the ABC, and it seems that no compilation of rebuttal, no unanswered demand for evidence, no rehearsal of the now familiar arguments, will make the topic go away.

The most recent appearance of the 'bias' charge comes from that wonderfully open-hearted supporter of the Corporation, Minister for Communications Senator Richard Alston. The proposal is now that there should be yet a further layer of process for the handling of complaints, with yet more public show of independence and external supervision.

Charges of bias will continue to be made, not out of any concern for the health of public broadcasting, but as a political weapon. For those who hold the unshakable conviction that the ABC is a hotbed of anarchistic radicals, the presence of bias goes without saying, which is just as well for them because once there is any saying, that is, once actual analysis starts, paranoid fantasies dissolve into nothing.

For those to whom the very idea of public broadcasting is anathema, no argument or evidence of objectivity, impartiality or public interest will be entertained. (One wonders incidentally how Michael Kroger, the man with all the egg on his face from the Shier episode, could contain the contradiction of sitting on the board of a public broadcaster while being on record as a determined opponent of public sector activity. It's a little as though Josef Stalin had invested on the New York Stock Exchange.)

There are plenty of people prepared to use charges of bias, and anything else that comes to hand, to further their ideological or emotional opposition to the public broadcaster. What we need to look at are those areas where occasion arises. Analysing alleged bias in public broadcasting provides traps for the unwary and opportunities for the unscrupulous, so certain basic points need to be made.

First, any statement about bias is speculative. The bias charge alleges something which cannot be known, that is, a state of mind. You can check on, even quantify, inaccuracy; bias is not usually measurable. Coalition supporters tried to turn that observation around in the 'children thrown overboard' story. Their claim was not that the story as presented was inaccurate; it was rather that the story was run too often and for too long. It rather reminds one of the story of Bart Cummings, the famous racehorse trainer, who was told by an inspector that there were too many flies in his stables, to which his reply was 'How many am I

allowed?'

Radio and television forms can be misleading. In the spectator sport known as media interviewing – particularly in radio and television, less so in the press – there are rules and practices obvious even to the more naïve in the audience. An interviewer joins in unholy union with a public figure, let's say a politician, and tries to trap or entice that figure into making a statement of headline quality. The politician needs the media, and the interview, to get across a policy issue, or ideological position, or some other kind of viewpoint.

What we have then is something like what happens in a courtroom. The accused can stay silent and will not be cross-examined, or he/she can agree to speak, and in doing so submit to aggressive interviewing/questioning by counsel. It is when the interviewer insists on attempting to make the interviewee answer the question, and is prepared to be stubborn about it, that viewers and listeners cry 'foul!' Yet in making themselves obnoxious and being aggressive, interviewers are only sticking to their rules. It is for this reason that a Kerrie O'Brien attracts charges of bias.

The third site of bias allegations and misunderstandings comes in the direct interface between the media and the government of the day. If journalists – print or electronic – are doing their job, they will make life uncomfortable for members of parliament, particularly ministers and even more particularly, the Prime Minister.

Journalists in public broadcasting can reasonably be expected to adhere to the I. F. Stone school of journalism. That great iconoclast insisted that all governments tell lies and that it is the journalist's job to uncover those lies. In a sense, journalists *should* be biased – against the government of the day, no matter what its political persuasion. The most commonly made mistake is to confuse an aggressive attitude towards a government with an aggressive attitude towards a party. The press/media are called the fourth estate because they are part of the check on government.

One of the commonest bases for bias allegations come from what might be called class or lifestyle sources. Journalists generally come from an identifiable class, many or most of them sharing the views of that class on issues like refugees, welfare, race, abortion, funding for public education and health, war and peace, religion and many others. These views, never unanimous and often widely varied, nevertheless can seem monolithic, especially when taken in conjunction with other professional groups in that class (especially, it must be added, academics). All this comes to be seen as a conspiracy of the educated middle class.

What would we do without our *mailout* volunteers?

With thanks to all those who have helped aet the newsletter out to members. All the best for 2003.



L-R: Lynette Payne, Lillian McDonald, Jenny Lock



Above: Fiona McConnell, Davide Parkes.
Right: Keith Cathrow.
Photos by Carolyn Paulin

