

## 9. The noise makers

John Howard did not seduce Australia all by himself. He could not have maintained the Australian people's infatuation for eleven years all by himself. He needed an elite army of noise makers working outside of government. This group makes so much noise about their pet issues that they distract us from what is really going on.

Rupert Murdoch has been a reliable supplier of such noise makers; he employs them as journalists. Some others are self-appointed, such as the director of the Sydney Institute, Gerard Henderson. One of the noise makers' key roles is to gloss over the manipulations of Howard, Textor and Crosby and to engineer the belief that there is a strong conservative majority supporting Howard's extreme policies.

Since most of the so-called conservative majority are aspirational, pursuing their own self-interests and engaging in high-level consumption, their sense of being conservatives can easily fade. The noise makers have the job of constantly reminding this conservative majority of the values they are supposed to hold, and who their class enemies are.

When Howard takes extreme action, such as joining an unprovoked war in Iraq, or removing rights from Australian working men and women, it is the noise makers' role to re-engineer public perceptions to make this behaviour appear perfectly normal and good.

Each of these social engineers is a proud conservative. Their job is propaganda. They are one of the marketing arms of the conservative political agenda, placing advertorials, which are never labelled as such, into the daily media. Advertorials are 'news items' or feature articles designed to sell a product but having the appearance of being a piece of

genuine journalism. Advertising standards regulators have required advertorials to be identified as such; but as media proprietors cut the number of journalists in order to become more competitive, the distinction between news, entertainment and advertising or propaganda is becoming increasingly blurred. This, of course, suits the propagandists.

Working from jointly held values, our noise makers identify Australian leaders, writers, academics and journalists who dare step out of line. Howard's neo-political correctness states: *Thou shalt not criticise the business/government project to reshape Australia into an even more efficient funnel of wealth to the ultra-rich.*

His extremist policies require enforcers to monitor the media and attack those showing the first signs of heresy.

Bold, intelligent and daring, this group of journalists write lucidly about every aspect of Australian society; except, of course, about the triumph of Big Business, the ultra-rich and their paid propagandists.

### **Gerard Henderson**

Former Howard staffer, current columnist for the *Sydney Morning Herald* and executive director of conservative think tank the Sydney Institute, Gerard Henderson is probably the smartest propagandist of the Right. After years of experience, the advertorial has become his stock in trade. Few would dispute his intelligence and skill. Sometimes, when the rest of the journalist pack is heading in a single direction, he reports the other side. In this way he adds value. He is, however, clearly partisan, often writing more lucid explanations of Howard government policy than the government itself produces. But many of his pieces seem merely to provide a context for 'The Message'. He is paid, through the Sydney Institute, by some of the wealthiest organisations to re-engineer public perceptions. It seems his goal is to sell government policies that make it easier for Big Business and the ultra-rich to get richer even quicker.

One of his favourite targets is any public figure that might promote the smallest degree of independence in our relationship with the United States. If Gerard is not paid by American interests, he should be! He acts as an American attack dog, with an agenda to sniff out any small outbreak of Australian independent thought, which he conveniently reframes as anti-American or left-wing.

So it is curious when Gerard, whose journalism seems but a thin veneer for propaganda, is one to lead the fight against bias in the ABC! Has the man no scruples?

In a revealing talk, ‘The Howard Government and the Culture Wars’,<sup>1</sup> Gerard identifies the real threats to the current state of perfection in Australian values. They include Margaret and David from ‘The Movie Show’! In fact, according to Gerard, the whole of the ABC is part of the Vast Left Wing Conspiracy. You and I might regard Margaret and David as independent thinkers living in a free country that cherishes plurality of views. But not Gerard! He has identified them as part of the rot that is undermining Australian values and needs to be exposed and resisted.

One of Gerard’s favourite targets is the so-called left-wing profession of journalism. He and his fellow noise makers, with a petulant air of ‘it’s not fair’, frequently ask:

- Where are the right-wing journalists?
- Why is the profession dominated by left-wingers?
- Why are there no right-wing staff at the ABC to balance all the lefties?

They probably know the answers; they are probably just stirring. It is obvious when you think about the process of becoming a journalist. Imagine a fervent budding right-winger at university with their economic fundamentalist baggage and their neo-politically correct beliefs that tell them: *Self-interest is the crowning virtue, the highest value of all.*

What career choices does such a young go-getter consider? Journalism? Hardly.

Why would an ambitious young person who wants to become a millionaire by the age of thirty choose journalism? Self-interest would demand a career in a more lucrative field, such as business or finance. What seriously self-interested go-getter would actually consider a job at the ABC?

In addition, right-wing propagandists would find the ABC requirement to present a balanced story far too constraining. If they were going to be journalists at all, it is far more likely to be with the Murdoch press.

Many criticisms can be made of journalism in the twenty-first century, but to try to suggest they all boil down to a Vast Left Wing Conspiracy fails to deal with the complexity of the pressures upon working journalists today. The right-wing drive for neo-political correctness, economic fundamentalism and electoral manipulation is a far more significant influence.

I don't know when Gerard last checked his conspiracy theory, but the Left is so fragmented it could not organise itself out of a wet paper bag. There are individuals with left-wing ideas, but they are not organised into any sort of conspiracy. Gerard's problem is that despite his best efforts to convince us otherwise, he does not speak for the majority. People in Australia are free to make their own judgments on issues like Iraq and George Bush. And they typically do not agree with Gerard.

Undeterred, he beavers away at building the impression of a conservative majority that shares his and Howard's extremist views. When you are at the North Pole, whichever direction you look, you are facing south. When you live out on the far reaches of right-wing extremism, everything else is Left.

### **Andrew Bolt**

Andrew Bolt, from Melbourne's *Herald Sun*, is a clear example of a journalist peddling propaganda. Take a look at the *Herald Sun*.

Bolt seems unaware that we once had a White Australia policy or that Aboriginal people were once excluded from the Australian Population Census. He does not seem to know that each state had its own draconian Aboriginal Protection Act.

In the piece below, one can only assume he wants to attack the ‘especially favourable’ treatment given to Indigenous Australians, compared to what he himself has suffered:

The Australia I have long loved didn’t judge people by the colour of their skin. Until now.

The Australia I have long loved didn’t judge people by their race, their ancestors, or the date their family first trod on this wonderful land. Until now.

We were born here – or settled here – as equals, and we were judged as individuals. No law presumed otherwise. Until now ...

No, they were judged as we have long wanted to judge everyone – not by their race or origin, but by what they did.

And that is what has made Australia so welcoming, so liberating, so fresh, so free. Until now.

Australia didn’t judge people by the colour of their skin – until now.<sup>2</sup>

What about the White Australia policy? Talk to any black person and ask them if Australia judges people by the colour of their skin – even today. Why did we have the federal referendum in 1967?

If such an extreme denial of history is intended to denigrate the Aboriginal race, is this not racism?

Bolt represents the white-armband version of Australian history that is promoted so strongly by the extreme right. Make up the history that suits your preconceptions. Deny what is unpleasant.

What is the role of the journalists’ association here? What is the role of his newspaper editor and its proprietor? How is a person peddling such an emotionally laden untruthful attack on Aboriginal history allowed to continue practising journalism?

It appears that Bolt lies about Australian history ('Australia didn't judge people by the colour of their skin') in order to vilify Indigenous Australians, in an attempt to invalidate the claims of Aboriginal people for special recognition. If a journalist attacks and tells lies about an individual, he or she can be prosecuted for libel. Why then, is it allowable to attack and tell lies about a particular group?

This so-called journalism seems to be an attempt to create an entirely fictional history of black–white relations, with the intention of weakening any claims that Aboriginal people may have as original owners of this land. It is an attack on the democratic efforts and self-determination of Aboriginal people. Propaganda that aims to deceive large numbers of citizens on issues that are being democratically contested, is an attack on democracy itself.

### **Christopher Pearson**

Murdoch's Christopher Pearson, a former Maoist, has become a conservative cultural warrior fighting against the imagined Vast Left Wing Conspiracy:

There are, proverbially, 'none so blind as them who will not see'. Strangely, the totalitarian Left has been able to rely on that sort of willed ignorance during most of its active life in Australian politics. Solidarity and party discipline, for those amenable to the yoke, are not to be underestimated.<sup>3</sup>

You really have to wonder where Pearson has lived for the past 20 years! Where is this totalitarian Left of which he speaks? When did you last hear of secretive meetings of the Left?

Party discipline? How long has it been since the Left was noted for its party discipline? Surely that prize for solidarity and party discipline goes to Howard's current Liberal Party members and his team of noise makers. If there is any totalitarianism today, it is in the ranks of those who, like Pearson, subscribe to Howard's neo–political correctness.

One of Pearson's defining contributions as a cultural warrior has been to maintain the currency of Howard's marvellously all-

encompassing term ‘the elites’; those people who want to tell us how to live our lives. Who are these elites?

Could he be talking about the advertising industry that spends \$8 billion a year to tell us in specific detail how to think, how to feel, what to value and how to live our lives, promoting the belief that money can buy happiness? No.

Could he mean John Howard, Peter Costello, Tony Abbott, Phillip Ruddock and Alexander Downer who are on our television screens every night telling us what is right and what is wrong? No.

Could he be talking about big business that funds the Liberal Party and their supporting organisations? No.

Could he be talking about the privileged position created for him and his fellow noise makers by Rupert Murdoch? No.

So, if he does not mean the true elites in our society, who could he be talking about? Who else is there?

In his November 2003 article, ‘Elites face being Left behind’, Pearson pompously states:

There is a fissure developing in the geomorphology of the Australian polity – a rift that cuts across party lines.

The division is between:

- those who believe that the future lies in a combination of strong community values and a large measure of individual responsibility and
- those who see the bulk of the population as being incapable of managing their own problems, so that they need to be looked after by government.<sup>4</sup>

I think Pearson is suggesting that the elites are this second group. These are the dangerous people. These are the ones we have to fear. Who could they be? ‘These are educated, middle class, Left liberals who dominate the public service, political institutions, the law and the media.’<sup>5</sup>

So there you have it: Pearson is still living in the last century, imagining that the public service, political institutions, the law and media are made up of rabid socialists. He imagines the hand of the Vast Left Wing Conspiracy behind most things he disagrees with. Perhaps he is still fighting the ghosts of his own Maoist past.

Pearson presents himself as something of a moral crusader, concerned with declining morals. But it is often what our noise makers don't say that is most revealing about their social engineering project. Sadly, like all right-wing pussyfoots, Pearson prefers to attack soft targets, avoiding any mention of cash-for-comment scandals and the ultra-rich elites who may be profiting from today's 'moral decline'.

Does he attack the commercialisation and marketing of sex and violence? No.

While much of this happens on the commercial television networks and magazines, he does not dare to attack Big Media, such as Packer (PBL), Murdoch, Stokes or Southern Cross Broadcasting. Instead he saves his vitriol for the ABC, a much softer target. He knows his friends in government are unlikely to defend their ABC.

In failing to attack those who make mega-profits from our 'moral decline', he destroys his credibility as a conservative defender of morals.

Pearson also likes to quote scientists who are part of well-funded organisations of climate-change denialists. He has his favourites. One is Bob Carter, who has links with the right-wing think tank, the Institute for Public Affairs, and murky associations with Exxon-Mobil, which has been funding climate change denial for a decade.<sup>6</sup> Pearson does not seem so hot on the trail of the Exxon money. But then Pearson and the other noise makers probably see no problem with the ethics of a well-funded disinformation program. After all, they are well rewarded for their propaganda.

The experiences of Big Tobacco and the asbestos industry tell us all we need to know about what happens to truth when scientists are paid for a particular result. The same is now happening with climate change.

We know now that our noise makers were mouthpieces for an international disinformation campaign on climate change. In November 2006, Rupert Murdoch sent out word to the world that he had changed his mind and that climate change was real. This seems to have created a crisis for his Australian noisemakers. Their fanatical service to Howard and his Big Coal cronies seems to be making it impossible for them to make the necessary U turn.

And as brazen as ever, these are the people who charge the ABC with bias: it is a wonder they can look at themselves in the mirror! If our democracy is to flourish, they have to be made more accountable.

### **Piers Akerman**

What can we say about *Daily Telegraph* journalist Piers Akerman's propaganda? Perhaps the only way is to let him hang himself with his own words. On full display we see his appalling naivety and his incapacity to comprehend the truth about war.

We now know that every one of his statements below, written in April 2003, about Tanya Plibersek federal Labor Party Member for Sydney, is wrong:

After her dire predictions concerning the war in Iraq failed to come to pass, Tanya Plibersek epitomises why Labor has become unelectable ... despite the surrender, the headlines and the disappearance of Saddam Hussein's monstrous regime, Tanya Plibersek doesn't think the Iraq war is over and she certainly isn't going to eat her hat any time soon.

It has been a month since the Leftist Federal Member for Sydney promised to 'be the first' to tuck into a tifter if 'this war is over quickly and we find an Iraqi population that has welcomed it' but, despite all the evidence, she remains adamant that 'the war's not over yet'.

Promising to snack on a hat is not the only silly remark Ms Plibersek made in the lead-up to the conflict and some of her statements now bear repeating because they illustrate the dilemma the ALP, particularly members of its Left, now faces ...

Indeed, in our conversation she happily attempted to duck responsibility for the ill-informed and inaccurate claims she made two months ago that '90 per cent of the casualties of modern wars are non-combatants'.

The latest estimates show the Iraqi army lost somewhere between 2000 and 10,000, the coalition forces lost fewer than 160 and there have been fewer than 1700 civilian deaths – numbers which turn the MP's best estimates on their head.

Tie that in with her estimate of 260,000 civilian deaths, more than a million refugees and another two million internally displaced and you have to wonder why she still bothers to collect her parliamentary pay and how safe any of her hats will be in the future...<sup>7</sup>

In fact there are now over half a million dead, mostly civilians and four million refugees.

Likewise in the following attack on Greens Senator Bob Brown (April 2003), every one of Akerman's statements wrong. The comments in brackets are his.

Two months ago, in stating the Australian Greens' absolute opposition to Australian involvement in the liberation of the Iraqi people, he told the Senate that more than 100,000 children under the age of five were expected to die (they haven't), that 950,000 Iraqis would become refugees (wrong again), that 1,230,000 would be left highly vulnerable to a pandemic (no sign of that yet), that two million would be internally displaced (Baghdad's parks seem to have fewer homeless than Sydney's) and that two million children and a million Iraqi mothers would be in urgent need of food aid (... this prediction seems really off track).

Continuing to outline his vision of doom, he said 5,400,000 would be in urgent need of supplies and 18 million would be in urgent need of services such as water and sewage treatment to protect their health...

The ancient Greeks, who coined the term hysteria, believed that such emotional instability was caused by a malfunction of the

uterus, an observation that was as severely off-course then as Senator Brown's gloomy observations and prognostications are now ...

Yesterday, despite the overwhelming evidence that the prosecution of the war has been swift and effective with minimal civilian casualties, Senator Brown was still at it, condemning the Government and calling for an independent international inquiry into the 'killing and maiming of innocent men, women and children'.

'I think now it's going extremely badly,' he said of the war. The evidence, again, gives the lie to that statement.

But Senator Brown and the Greens embrace the notion that the end of the world is nigh and choose to ignore the abundant proof to the contrary ...

Even the old global warming scare, which sustains Senator Brown's feral followers has been thoroughly discredited by a Harvard University study released this week. The Chicken Littles of the Green movement need lose sleep no longer ...<sup>8</sup>

These madcap rants bear no relation to reality; they have nothing to do with journalism. When Rupert Murdoch appoints journalists and commentators of this calibre to his top-selling newspapers, he displays his disdain for his Australian readers.

## **Conclusion**

This is but a small sample of some of our madcap noise makers.

For all their wit and cleverness, they are employed to re-engineer the way Australians think, so that we will accept policies that help the ultra-rich get richer faster and so that Howard will flourish.

Few in number, they punch well above their weight in terms of influence because of their powerful backers. Supported by some of the biggest companies and richest individuals in the world, these noise makers have become the new elites, experts in the neo-political correctness of the new century. They lie in wait, ready to ambush any

public figure that dares criticise economic fundamentalism or suggest an iota of independence from the United States.

They are Murdoch's gift to Howard. Unfortunately, since these noise makers are not an entity related to the Liberal Party, the Australian Electoral Commission does not count their salaries and costs as donations to a political party. It could be argued that, as electoral propaganda, they should be.

However, it is not as propagandists for the ultra-rich that the noise makers are doing most damage. They share responsibility for the breakdown in Australian values and social cohesion. They have:

- attacked those who support Australian independence
- made extremist attacks on the ABC
- attacked people with expertise, such as scientists and public servants
- lied about the position of Aboriginals in our society
- incited the Australian people to pre-emptively attack another nation
- refused to criticise abuses of wealth and power
- lied about climate change
- attacked community leaders who voice real Australian values.

By undermining those with the courage to speak truth with wisdom and compassion, the noise makers are leading an attack on Australian values and on our democracy.

Propaganda is not information, it is manipulation. The deliberate engineering of thought in the guise of journalism is anti-democratic. Nobody is setting any boundaries on this sort of behaviour. It seems that the power of our media to deliver propaganda has moved way beyond the outdated laws that are supposed to protect our democracy.