Westpac profits lead to sackings

Westpac chief executive Gail Kelly has ordered job cuts across the bank’s middle management despite a $1.55 billion profit for the third quarter. Job cuts, tipped to total more than 1,000, are likely to come from middle management and IT.

Westpac cut 600 jobs, mostly in IT, in the half year to March. The latest round of job cuts are expected to centre primarily at the bank’s head office in Sydney.

Finance Sector Union national secretary Leon Carter said the government should move to protect bank workers in light of the guarantee put in place during the global financial crisis.

"We aren't talking about a small business that has to lay off a few staff to survive," he said.

"The banks are expecting record profits and are among the largest in the world.

"The banks should have a moral and social oversight to maintain employment given that the federal government and the community stood behind them in the downturn. "We believe there’s a public policy response that the government should put in place that requires the banks not to get rid of a single job."

Public Service facts

A report from the Centre for Policy Development - an independently-funded think tank - finds the Commonwealth public service no bigger than it was 20 years ago. "Our analysis contradicts the prevailing rhetoric about a burgeoning public service," writes the research director James Whelan in the report released this morning. It says about one-third of the public service workforce was retrenched between 1991 and 1999, under the Howard and Keating governments. "Most of these retrenchments happened in the early years of the Howard government when it sacked almost 30,000 staff over three years.

"Although staffing levels have almost returned ... to 1991 levels, the ... population has increased more rapidly." The Coalition’s official policy is to remove 12,000 public service positions in its first year in office, but revelations it is looking to find up to $70 billion of savings over four years suggest much bigger cuts are likely.

"The cuts will inevitably have a significant impact on the capacity of the public service " Mr Whelan said.
Instead, I shall give instances of how she worked through them in her novels.

Nationalism
Part of any nationalism is to know one’s own story. In this seventieth anniversary year of the publication of The Timeless Land we should both marvel at its creative power and be grateful for how it gave generations of settler Australians their best chance of learning about their early history. Of course, Dark had an incomparable resource in Watkin Tench’s Journal. Those who praise Tim Flannery for anthropologising Tench and Inga Clendinnen for leaning on him for her Dancing with Strangers seem unaware that Dark had been long before, with a novelist’s ear and historian’s sensibility. Novelists and not academicians introduced us to our settler past.

No national consciousness is possible without the structures for its dissemination. P R ‘Inky’ Stephensen returned from a decade in the UK in 1932 to set up a local publishing house, Endeavour Press, a mad idea at the best of times but certifiably so in the depth of the depression. This wild man of letters published Dark’s Prelude to Christopher in 1934 and went bust in 1935. In February that year, an ‘Unteachable Englishman’ and the professor of English at the University of Melbourne, G H Cowling, regretted that Australians could not expect to have much by way of literature because we had no haunted castles. In response, Stephensen set up a new magazine, The Australian Mercury, to promote his 1935 manifesto, The Foundations of Culture in Australia. He identified a British Garrison blocking advances on every front. The garrison was not only generals and admirals, but the cultural commissars, or gatekeepers as the phrase now is. The Fairaxes imported editors of the Sydney Morning Herald into the 1960s. The revealingly named Church of England did the same for its bishops. If the universities taught any Australian history, they did so as an appendix to the British Empire. J C Williamson occupied center stage by touring West End hits. Nine of Dark’s ten books came from London houses, usually William Collins. Local book publishing was dominated by ‘Anguish and Robbery’ which turned down Herbert’s tragic-comic masterpiece, Capricornia, as too depressing. Today, a Garrison is still in occupation although the command and control centre has shifted from the UK to the US. Washington acknowledges the significance of soft power, which is why they run agents of influence such as deputy-sheriff Howard and their legman Senator Arbib. The proposed trade treaty will stymie quotas for Australian content on television, making it impossible to fund a series based on Dark’s 1938 novel, Waterway, which centers on the 1927 collision of a liner and a Sydney ferry.

Patriotism
Dark explored patriotism as an attachment to country in her 1937 Sun Across the Sky which told of a campaign, led by a poet, based on Christopher Brennan, to save a northern beach suburb from a real-estate developer. The theme remains pertinent today when the developers pay $10,000 to sit beside cabinet ministers. The Darks’ feeling for the bush, which we now call environmentalism, grew from their bushwalking with the Paddy Pallin circle. In championing ‘a sense of place’, Stephenson had called for North Queensland poetry, not just Australian poetry. The sense of place requires more than our being in the landscape. Our sense of place derives from our remaking of our place and ourselves in the process, for example, by building a house and working a garden. More generally, patriotism as a sense of our patch comes through social labours, which include all human activity, the physical and the mental. We become what we do, as a species and as individuals. Dark imagined our place ten times over, winding the intimate around the historical.

Internationalism
We have seen that a strand in Dark’s nationalism was anti-imperialist against the British Garrison. In her literary sympathies, as in her politics, she was neither isolationist nor nativist. The issue of the 1930s was fascism and anti-fascism. Writers were the drivers of the Movement against War and Fascism. She was one of those who asked: why stop fascism in Europe if you impose it here? Her 1944 novel, The Little Hunter, explored patriotism as attachment to country in her 1937 Sun Across the Sky which told of a campaign, led by a poet, based on Christopher Brennan, to save a northern beach suburb from a real-estate developer. The theme remains pertinent today when the developers pay $10,000 to sit beside cabinet ministers. The Darks’ feeling for the bush, which we now call environmentalism, grew from their bushwalking with the Paddy Pallin circle. In championing ‘a sense of place’, Stephenson had called for North Queensland poetry, not just Australian poetry. The sense of place requires more than our being in the landscape. Our sense of place derives from our remaking of our place and ourselves in the process, for example, by building a house and working a garden. More generally, patriotism as a sense of our patch comes through social labours, which include all human activity, the physical and the mental. We become what we do, as a species and as individuals. Dark imagined our place ten times over, winding the intimate around the historical.

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