

## 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 1000, 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.

## Humphrey McQueen: Disturbing the Status Quo

*A talk given at the Katoomba section of the Sydney Writers' Festival, 17 May 2011 to celebrate the twentieth anniversary of the Varuna Writers' Centre.*

After the novelist-historian Marjorie Barnard had enjoyed a weekend with Eleanor and Eric Dark at Varuna in 1940 she wrote to the Melbourne critic Nettie Palmer: 'Katoomba Society appears to have dropped them on account of their radical views'. She then added 'A merciful release'. Eleanor Dark's radicalism found an early expression in her first novel, *Slow Dawning* (1932), where an unmarried woman doctor contemplates the virtue of brothels for women who choose not to marry. When I visited the Darks on a Saturday afternoon in October 1973 we watched a black-and-white television as the Queen opened the Sydney Opera House. The morning papers had reported Patrick White's Nobel Prize, which Eric thought should have gone to Eleanor many years before.

We can imagine her mixed emotions as she watched that ceremony. A Queen of England was about to become the Queen of Australia - the republic did not become an issue until the dismissal. An Opera House showed that the arts were being taken seriously. The Eight Wonder had been designed and engineered by Danes, a early sign of multi-culturalism. The opera season was inaugurated with Prokofiev's *War and Peace*, a contemporary work from a Soviet composer, a long way from the Red Scare. The telecast from Bennelong Point evoked the indigenous protagonist of her *The Timeless Land*.

Why was I having a little tea and a little chat with the Darks? It was all the fault of Manning Clark. When Manning established the first major in Australian history at the ANU, he asked me to conduct the twentieth-century course. In 1972, there were next-to-no secondary sources on the years after 1918. I wrote lectures from primary sources. Thirty years before, Manning said he had learnt how to think about the history of Australia from the opening of *The Timeless Land* where the Aborigines are waiting for the return of the white ships, which they had woven into their stories. Bennelong grew up

expecting to see the ships arrive, and leave after a few days. This fictional moment is stunning for Dark's imagining of their imagining.

Sparked by Manning anecdote about his getting started, I read Dark's ten novels to prepare a lecture about her life and work as a way of discussing women in Australian society. I turned my research into an article for *Hemisphere* in 1973, perhaps the first serious if not scholarly comment on her work for more than ten years. Drusilla Modjeska was in the class; next year, she wrote her honours thesis on Eleanor Dark and gave us *Exiles at Home* in 1981. In 1989, Drusilla commissioned me to write an introduction to a reprinting of *The Timeless Land*. Hence, as with so much that we are told is wrong with the writing of our history, it is all Manning Clark's fault. The confluence of changes that I have deduced to be warming Dark on that spring afternoon was part of the Whitlam nationalism, or what Donald Horne called *The Years of Hope*, spreading from that best of all worlds under McMahon when we had no government. As with my imagining of Dark's responses to the opening of the Opera House, it is not hard to catalogue the Whitlam-era policies that would have caused her to hope that the values she had upheld through what Manning had recently called 'the years of unleavened bread' were to flourish. The previous year had ended with the closing down of conscription, withdrawal of the last advisors from Vietnam and the recognition of the Peoples Republic of China. The Labor government was cutting the painter from what had been 'Home', setting up our own honours system from which Dark got her AO in 1977. White Australia was on its way out. The arts were funded as never before through the Australia Council. Her black-and-white television showed Whitlam pouring soil into Vincent Lingari's hand to symbolise the recognition of the land rights of the Gurindji. Their strike was one of the little things that were growing into big things. This remaking of what it meant to be Australian had not started in December 1972. Dark had contributed to that endeavour through her creative writings from the 1930s. One way to survey her achievements is around three interlocked but also conflicted notions - Nationalism, Patriotism and Internationalism. It would take all day to define and refine them.

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 as 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 anthologising 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 academics 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 Fairfaxes 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 Company*, explored the difficulties for the small-l liberals who asked such questions, disturbing the status quo.

When Liberal Senators were attacking Manning Clark in the lead-up to his 1977 Boyer Lectures, he told me that he realised that their onslaught was not targeting him. He compared their abuse with McCarthyism from twenty-five years earlier when the aim had not been to defeat the Reds but to scare off the progressive minded, Dark's little company of small-l liberals. If someone as eminent as Manning Clark could be traduced, what chance did a school teacher have in sticking up her beliefs?

September 22 this year is the sixtieth anniversary of the defeat of the anti-Red Bill. That vote did as much to secure democracy in Australia as any victory on the battlefield and deserves to be celebrated with postage stamps, a television series and inclusion in the history syllabus.

The Menzies government had ordered the barbed-wire for intern a thousand Reds and their families under 'Operation Alien'. The sole proof required to declare someone a Commo was if ASIO said so. No appeal was allowed and the accused had no right to see the evidence. Ben Chifley said the Bill opened the door to the 'pimp and the perjurer'.

When his successor, Dr H V Evatt took the opposition case to the High Court, only 12 percent opposed the ban. The court threw the Act out on technicalities. Menzies had to go for a referendum to change the constitution. After a year of building a mass campaign, Evatt lifted the vote against to just over 50 percent. Who today would take on such a lost cause? Where were the focus groups?

Had the Act gone through, Australia would have been a very different place. One model for its drafting was South Africa's Suppression of Communism Act. Eric had written *Who are the Reds?* in 1946, to which Eleanor contributed a 'Foreword'. It is not improbable to think that Evatt's campaign kept Eric out of a Menzies concentration camp. Katoomba Society might have dropped the Darks, but their life-long friends the Evatts had not. We owe them. One of the Darks' reasons for going north to Montville was to escape from Katoomba Society and the Red Scare. On the nut and pineapple farms of southern Queensland, she wrote *Lantana Lane*, a delicious re-statement of her patriotism as attachment to working the land. Her internationalism bubbles up in the French aunt and her views about atomic bombs. In the mid-1980s, I used *Lantana Lane* as bait to win Patrick White to her. This Spatlese has delighted so many others. Her final fiction, with its discontinuous narrative, is an example of the little but beautiful things that grow out of very big things.

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BMUC Secretary  
52 Great Western Highway  
Mount Victoria  
NSW 2786  
Phone 02 4787 1401