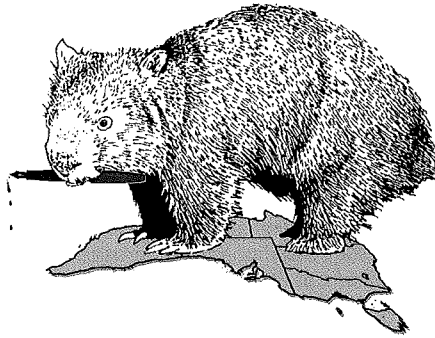


## AUSTRALIAN NOTES

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Stand by for the reintroduction of the Pacific Solution. That, or something like it, is the only way out of the horrible farce to which Kevin Rudd has reduced Australian immigration policy. The Indonesians will not use force to land the Oceanic Viking asylum-seekers. Why, they ask, should they suffer worldwide condemnation just to help the sanctimonious Mr Rudd? Nor will Rudd himself use force and be pictured in the national and international media as an inhumane monster. Yet he cannot tolerate the humiliation of retreating to Christmas Island, where the asylum-seekers he now calls illegal immigrants would shortly be 'processed' before settling in Australia, with all the signals that would send to people-smugglers and legal immigrants. What other option does he have except a new Pacific Solution — camouflaged, of course, with raging Ruddspeak?

One of the hazards of writing history in Australia, certainly of the early years of British settlement, is that you are always likely to bump into the families you are writing about. Almost any of the famous, infamous or forgotten names from the Botany Bay era have proud and sometimes touchy descendants. A good thing too, since they often act as a check on those historians or biographers who are more scandal-mongers or stump-orators than scholars. Some writers — Andrew Tink, the biographer of the first William Charles Wentworth (1790-1872), is one of these — make a point of not interviewing descendants or listening to 'the gossip of servants', and rely wholly on archives and public records. But family, friends and neighbours do not disappear. It was this combination of the local, national, and imperial that produced the special atmosphere at Tink's talk about his biography in the senior citizens' centre in Sydney's eastern suburbs last week. His big theme was Australia's 'greatest native son' — the gigantic contribution this gigantic man made to public life, free institutions, business, farming and grazing, education and the Empire. But the hundred or so people who came to hear Tink included members of the Wentworth family and many more who know the family. This was the Old Sydney where Wentworth lived and built his splendid heritage-listed Vaucluse House, where he gave his name to the federal electorate, the local newspaper and several of the streets, and where the late Bill Wentworth stood for Parliament under the slogan 'Wentworth for Wentworth'. The



gathering was as local as, say, a meeting of the municipal council.

Tink had served for 18 years in the same parliamentary chamber as Wentworth and had sat facing the huge portrait of him that has hung there since 1859: censorious, tight-lipped, domineering and uncompromising, a true likeness down to the cast in his eye. He was one of Australia's few great men. The day of his funeral in 1873 — the first state funeral in Australia — was declared a public holiday. Some 70,000 people (half the population of Sydney) lined the streets to watch the procession of 130 coaches. All we are doing today, Tink says in his well-researched biography, is fine-tuning Wentworth's liberal legacy.

It was a shock to hear the idea of honour introduced into Australian politics. It happened last week at the Centre for Independent Studies, where Ken Minogue discussed the dangers of ideology in political life. Whatever ideals ideologues appeal to, from communism or nationalism to religious rectitude or racial purity, their aim is to correct human nature and eliminate social conflict. Sooner or later, whether reformist or revolutionary, they undermine freedom. What is the alternative? Mindless pragmatism will not do. But instead of relying on the familiar



'Vicar?!'

conservative principles of pluralism, tradition, enterprise or the night-watchman state, Minogue invokes Montesquieu's monarchical doctrine of honour. When Montesquieu spoke of honour as an alternative to ideology, he meant integrity, self-respect, tolerance of difference and a refusal to allow the ideologues to push us about. For the ideologue, life is a matter of binding people to ideals, and to hell with false appeals to freedom; for the man of honour, life is an adventure in which freedom is the essence. We should be teaching Montesquieu in our schools.

Minogue's elegant presentation was well-received, but he did not have it all his own way. Oliver Hartwich of the CIS spoke up for ideologues. We don't have enough of them, he said. We are stuck in the rut of a cosy, empty opportunism from which only frank and outspoken ideology can rescue us. Take Germany, where the pragmatic Angela Merkel says she does not know whether she is liberal, conservative, Christian Socialist or whatever. But the splendidly named and increasingly popular Baron Karl-Théodor von und zu Guttenberg, until recently minister of economics, has revitalised German politics by preaching neo-liberalism, attacking stimulus packages, and opposing the bailout of failed companies. He is popular because he stands for something. What do our politicians stand for? Malcolm Turnbull may be our Angela Merkel. Is Barnaby Joyce our Baron von Guttenberg? Minogue's new book on these themes, *The Servile Mind: How Democracy Erodes the Moral Life*, will be published in July.

There is an obvious political dividend for the Rudd government in appointing leading figures from the last Coalition government to important national posts. It helps its pretence of being a government of national unity. But would anyone seriously deny that the benefit to the country outweighs party political calculation? Everyone (except Mr Keating) agrees that the appointment of Peter Costello to the Board of Guardians of the Future Fund is an excellent one. He conceived the Future Fund, shepherded the legislation through parliament, and appointed the Board. (He is the only Guardian whom he did not appoint.) He budgeted for its \$60 billion. The success of the Fund is close to his heart. His appointment ensures public confidence in it. He will not respond to Keating's characteristic sneers, but readers may refer to *The Costello Memoirs* (especially pages 70-71) for his verdict on Keating.