

DIARY

Robert Manne



La Trobe University, where I have taught for 37 years, is awarding Michael Kirby its highest honour. I attend the ceremony. It is followed by a wonderfully relaxed conversation between the two men of their generation who have done as much as anyone in this country to combat the millennial fear and hatred of homosexuality: Kirby and Dennis Altman. Two comments of Kirby's stay with me. He talks with great warmth of his 95-year-old father, still preparing Sunday dinners for his family, who has recently warned him not to be a 'Johnny One-Note' on the theme of gay rights. In answer to Dennis's question about whether he remains optimistic, he answers without so much as pausing for thought. He does. In the end, reason will prevail. His certainty unsettles me.

I attend a symposium on sustainability organised by my university. The keynote address is delivered by David Karoly. Nothing that he says is new to me, but his logically ordered material on the peril human civilisation now faces due to our unwillingness to act on global warming is overwhelming. I feel my heart racing. Later that morning I surprise myself with a speech I deliver from the floor. It goes like this. 'When Barack Obama became President he spoke of climate change as an existential threat. In his 2011 State of the Union he didn't mention the subject. American politics has been corrupted by the power of money — by the fossil fuel industry's Koch brothers' funding of the Tea Party and by Rupert Murdoch's patronage of the unspeakable Fox News.'

My article on Julian Assange is published by the *Monthly*. It is the first article to trace the intellectual origins of WikiLeaks which grew out of Assange's involvement with the cypherpunks movement of crypto-anarchist electronic libertarians. I regard Assange as a true political original. A long extract is to appear next day in the *Weekend Australian*. Given the politics of the Australian press, there is more than a little irony here. I had hoped that the extract would appear in Fairfax. In the evening I appear on ABC's News 24, a station I have never watched. In the studio there is an expensive-looking monitor in theory

allowing me to see the interviewer in Sydney. It is not working. I ask why. I am told it has never worked. Again I ask why. The answer is eloquent. 'ABC.'

Watching the revamped 7.30. Towards the end of the program there is a very moving segment about an apology given by the new Japanese Prime Minister to those Australians who suffered in the prisoner of war camps during the second world war. For a decade, over the question of Aboriginal child removal, John Howard argued that one generation cannot apologise for the actions of earlier generations. It seems likely that Howard will be watching the program; an earlier segment has almost praised his foot-dragging over climate change. Does he truly believe that in apologising so belatedly to the Diggers what the Japanese Prime Minister has done is wrong?

Tonight my wife and I watch that superb film about law, morality and politics, *A Man for All Seasons*. Anne and I have more or less abandoned ABC television between the end of 7.30 and the beginning of *Lateline*. We have become sick and tired of the never-ending diet of middlebrow British television it serves up — Stephen Fry, Agatha Christie, *Midsomer Murders*, 19th century costume dramas, sundry pointless, often necrophiliac, murder series. Recently I read an article by the great American critic Daniel Mendelson in the *New York Review of Books*. He claimed that in the past decade or so there had been a renaissance in US television. He is right. Since becoming an empty nest we have watched with the greatest pleasure *The Wire*, *The Sopranos*, *In Treatment*, *Six Feet Under*, *Mad Men*, *The West Wing*. They represent in our era what the serialised novel represented in the 19th

century. ABC television seems barely to have noticed this remarkable flowering. I would love to understand why.

Anne and I attend the rally in Treasury Gardens supporting the decision by the Gillard government to introduce a tax on carbon. There is a huge crowd. One of the speakers is our younger daughter, Lucy, a member of the truly impressive Australian Youth Climate Coalition. It is her first major public speech. Like many of her generation she is devoting her life to the global warming issue. Her speech includes these words: 'Our collective power stems not from optimistic words but optimistic deeds, acting with a faith not in others but ourselves. A faith that we are the people who can create the world we want to live in.' Her parents are very proud. In the evening we watch Channel 7 News. At the end it has an item which claims that 'hundreds' attended an anti-carbon tax rally in Werribee and 'the same number' a pro-tax rally in Melbourne. I am astonished. According to next day's newspaper reports, 400 rallied against the tax and 8,000 in favour. Those demonstrating for the tax outnumbered those against by a factor of 20. Channel 7 News has told a bare-faced lie. No wonder so many have come to despise the mainstream media.

The most courageous and effectual of such people is Julian Assange. Quite unexpectedly, he emails about my *Monthly* article with a detailed annotation. He says that my piece is the most important 'so far' but that on certain points I have been unduly influenced by his enemies, in particular by 'the Judas' Daniel Domscheit-Berg and by David Leigh of the *Guardian*. I am greatly heartened that he generally accepts my interpretation of the origins of WikiLeaks and his intellectual trajectory. His response is thoughtful, tough and gracious. Given the present circumstance of his life — caught between completing a book, fighting extradition to Sweden and facing the wrath of the American state — it is also almost miraculously poised.

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