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If good sense isn't enough, do it for Dick Hamer

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IT IS to be hoped that good sense will prevail and Melbourne University will not proceed with its proposed changes to the Victorian College of the Arts. The college is a unique and enviable public asset, which any civilised community should be concerned to protect and preserve, and any university fortunate enough to be entrusted with it should cherish. It is also integral to the long-standing tradition in this state whereby successive governments, irrespective of party, have respected the arts institutions inherited from their predecessors, and in turn passed them on in as good or better shape.

In the course of my five years as arts minister, I developed an unlimited admiration for the contribution of the college and the dedication of its staff and student bodies, and a deep gratitude to our former premier, Dick Hamer, to whom it and so many other good things in the arts are owed.

If good sense alone is insufficient to save the college as we have known it, might not the memory of that great Victorian and his vision for the arts also be taken into account? If the university remains oblivious to its obligations and solemn undertakings to the college, might not the Government remind it of them?

Race Mathews, Victorian arts minister 1982-1987, South Yarra

We've heard this before

THE dire implications of VCA's amalgamation into the University of Melbourne were glossed over by the new dean, in defence of her employer (Letters 26/5). Of course, as a recent graduate of the film school, I have welcomed the long overdue \$5 million upgrade to facilities.

Yet the evolution of VCA is eerily reminiscent of the demise of my other alma mater — the University of Melbourne's school of creative arts, which was incorporated from the VCA with similar promises of preserving its integrity. The university's preliminary audits and "reviews" led to major infrastructure spending on new projectors and purple carpets. Hope for the school of creative arts soon dissipated, as subjects were discontinued and facilities monopolised by other faculties. Creative arts had its last intake of students in 2007.

Sharman Pretty's assertion that VCA needs to operate independently and not be dependent on handouts appears to ignore how the arts exist and thrive through government grants and contributions. Would she also apply this "no handouts" policy to Opera Australia, Melbourne Theatre Company, NIDA and the National Gallery?

Advertisement

Jarrold Factor, Hawthorn

A dramatic model

WUNDERKIND administrator Glyn Davis should be congratulated for having the insight to make it necessary for future students of the VCA, such as those training to be actors, to complete the long-winded and costly Melbourne Model of training, where an undergraduate three years will be followed by two years' postgraduate study. Rather than the traditional two or three years, the contemporary dynamic actor emerging from the VCA will have five years' training. Audiences will surely feel more emotionally connected to an actor who not only speaks a soliloquy from *Hamlet*, but has also completed a doctoral thesis on the very speech.

Gerard Matte, Balaclava

Rudd is devastating on climate change

KEVIN Rudd has learned well his lessons from the master, John Howard. When you know that you must appear to take action on an issue but that action would upset your mates, the solution is to facilitate the discussion in a subtle way so that the outcome will be a proposal so awful it cannot be supported.

Then, when it has been defeated, you blame everyone else for not supporting it. This is exactly how Howard manipulated the republic debate.

As the strategic trajectory of the carbon pollution reduction scheme nears its climax, Penny Wong has started to deflect the blame: "Do you really want to go to the Australian people and say, 'I voted down action on climate change?'" ("Rudd no to delay on climate bill", *The Age*, 27/5).

Rudd will go to the next election claiming he tried to take action on climate change and he was not responsible for its failure. So he can satisfy his fossil-fuel mates by doing nothing while blaming his inaction on everyone else. Simple, elegant and devastatingly effective.

Steve Meacher, Toolangi

Losing a soul

AFTER reading that the Catholic Church has decided to sell the Crossley Church and hall (*The Age*, 23/5), I would like to ask if the people making this decision have been asleep for the past three months. Have they failed to notice the seismic shift in Victorian communities since the bushfires of February 7?

Have they not witnessed the outpouring of goodwill, and the growing sense of awareness of the importance of community connectedness and support? Have they not witnessed the sense of loss in communities that have lost not only homes, but all their infrastructure, halls, schools, public buildings.

I'd like to see anybody come to St Andrews or Strathewen and say that they no longer need their community buildings because there are some in nearby Hurstbridge. I cannot believe that Crossley/Killarney is being treated so shamefully by the church. The Catholic Church, in the spirit of these times, should do the honourable thing and return these buildings to the local community, from which they came.

Angela Rodgers, St Andrews

Minister must fight

I AM disgusted to hear of a threat to discipline a police officer who saved the lives of 200-plus people in Marysville on Black Saturday. I demand that the Minister for Police and Emergency Services, Bob Cameron, intervene to make sure that this officer faces no such disciplinary charge.

On Black Saturday, this officer and others acted in the service of his community, risking his life to do so. Based on his experiences, he has made a submission to the Bushfires Royal Commission. The minister should be gravely concerned at any attempt to potentially sanitise the way that information is provided.

We need to hear the cold, harsh truth about Black Saturday and that is what we were promised. Lives of precious Victorians were lost. This officer (and others) went above and beyond to make sure that loss was minimised. I want to hear from them.

Government is not just about media releases and opening new police stations. We expect the minister to do his job, and if that requires him to step in and protect an officer where management has made a mistake, that is what I expect him to do.

Valerie Butler, Strathmore

A deal, finely sliced

IT IS incorrect and misleading to describe the agreement Radovan Karadzic entered into with Richard Holbrooke as an "immunity deal" (*The Age*, 27/5). Karadzic is not arguing that he is immune from prosecution; he is arguing that Holbrooke, on behalf of the international community, promised him that he would not be prosecuted at the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia if he agreed to withdraw from public life in the Balkans, a move that the international community regarded as a necessary precondition of peace in the region. Karadzic held up his end of the bargain; he is now requesting that the international community hold up its end.

The situation is no different to when a prosecutor promises to drop the charges against a criminal in exchange for his co-operation — wearing a wire, testifying against the other members of his criminal organisation, for example. Such bargains are co-operation agreements, not immunity deals.

Kevin Jon Heller, senior lecturer, Melbourne Law School, legal associate to Radovan Karadzic

Dunces of Victoria

IN QUEENSLAND recently, I noticed their number plates touting "the smart state"; I was a bit miffed at the implication for the other states.

However, it seems we must concede that the Brumby version of our state is as implied, at least with regard to water policy, with the UN's senior adviser on water, Maude Barlow, describing the north-south pipeline as "about the stupidest idea I've come across in a long, long time and I hear a lot of stupid ideas" (*The Age*, 27/5).

So John, into the corner with the dunce's hat please. While you're there, practise your maths and see if you can count all your broken promises on pipelines, desalination, old growth forests, planning, government transparency ...

Ian Lyon, Foster North

Catastrophic action

YOUR report ("Bid to ban mourning of Israeli national day", 27/5) contains a mistake. It is not Israel's victory in the 1948 war that the Palestinians call al-Nakba, the catastrophe.

The Palestinian catastrophe started before the war, when the Jewish underground terrorist groups launched their final military drive. They put Plan Dalet into force on April 1, 1948, with two objectives: to establish a Jewish state beyond the boundaries defined by the UN and to establish a state devoid, as much as possible, of its indigenous Palestinian population by expelling it, in order to turn the non-Jewish majority in Palestine into a minority and the new European Jewish minority into a majority.

Through war and terror, the Jewish terrorist groups dispossessed between 850,000 and 950,000 Palestinians of their homeland, occupied 78 per cent of Palestine (including 85 per cent of Jerusalem) and destroyed 418 Palestinian towns and villages, and denied the rights of refugees to return to their homeland. This is what the Palestinians call al-Nakba, the catastrophe.

Ali Kazak, Manuka, ACT

Laugh? Not at all

SOL Trujillo is correct. It may be considered by some as amusing or endearing to call him and his colleagues "the three amigos" and for the Prime Minister to wish him "adios", but it is in fact racist and demeaning for the person on the receiving end of such comments. The same logic has us call people of Greek origin "wogs" and Aborigines "abos". It may be a laugh for us, but it's not so funny for those on the receiving end. Australians should grow up.

Garry Meller, Bentleigh

Shades of difference

WHEN I was an Australian living in Canada, no one commented on my accent or country of birth. Australians usually comment on an accent or appearance that is "different". Although it is well meant, it is time we stopped to think how the recipient feels having it pointed out that they are "different".

Alison Milne, Ivanhoe

How taxes are flattening our beer

I WON'T dismiss Jessica Lake's article as a "feminist rant" (Comment, 26/5), but it is still woefully misinformed and one-sided. Brewers in Australia already suffer under one of the world's most restrictive excise tax regimes. The excise on a bottle of beer in the US is about 0.7 of a cent. That country enjoys a thriving market of local craft breweries. By comparison, Australian excise tax on a stubby is 60 cents. Although a handful of independent breweries are working to bring exciting beers to the market, they struggle to make a profit and regularly close due to the tax burden.

I don't think anyone can reasonably argue that hooligans are getting riled up on these premium beers. Yet local producers are the ones who suffer for every increase in the so-called "sin taxes". Increasing the excise tax burden on small businesses won't curb anti-social behaviour. The increase in violent crime as excise taxes rise would indicate that the opposite is true.

Ian Morgan, Seddon

Work, or don't

ANDREW McIntosh and Bruce Cormick (Letters, 27/5) are both free to retire whenever they choose. We are a lucky nation to receive any form of pension, and to complain about the rather minor increase in the retirement age seems somewhat small-minded. After all, we are all getting older and living much much longer and someone will have to pay for increased health costs associated with our ageing population. Time to get real.

Paul Finlay, Clayton

This story was found at: <http://www.theage.com.au/articles/2009/05/27/1243103591382.html>