

contracts in 1993. Profits, productivity and production have all risen markedly.

By contrast, BHP did not follow Robe's lead. In 1986, the new chief executive, Gordon Freeman, criticized management of Robe and emphasized the importance of consensus and communication. The workforce was granted a 4 per cent pay rise in exchange for 'goodwill'—agreeing in principle to moving toward flexible job structures. By 1988, BHP was struggling to meet the increased international demand for iron ore. No longer able to offer the lucrative deals that were the customary price of productivity increases, management stood up to the unions, refusing to recognize site convenors. The unions responded in the spirit of 'goodwill' with industrial action. BHP management reverted to negotiating directly with the unions.

But now BHP has got in on the act. In November 1999, the organization offered about 1000 of its employees the choice to move from industrial Award-based conditions to individual agreements. Half of these have been accepted and the unions are resorting to the Federal Court in an attempt to bolster a bargaining power that is ebbing away on the ground. President-designate of BHP Iron Ore Graeme Hunt stated that, 'we no longer believe [the current system] can deliver the progress we need to compete successfully in the global market.' And stating further, 'we think that the current system has run out of steam and this new system is necessary for us to be able to move the organization forward.' Finally.

The iron ore industry and indeed workplace relations in Australia are greatly indebted to Charles Copeman. His efforts at Robe provided the catalyst for change. He carved out a space in which the companies could begin to open the dialogue between management and workers without the interference of the arbitration system and the unions. In June of 1999, Copeman was appointed a Member in the Order of Australia (AM) for his achievements in the mining industry. Perhaps this belated gesture goes some small way to rectify the otherwise inadequate recognition of his foresight and tenacity.

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**I P A**

# New Class Suicide

PAUL ROSS

**I**N 1995, my *IPA Review* article 'Losing Their Faculties?' looked at some of the dreadful courses imposed on students by Australian universities. This return to the crime scene shows the same academic confusion of fashion, political bias and propaganda. But perhaps we are seeing the suicide of the New Class. As the utter, unrelenting triviality drags drearily on there is—from personal observation—a growing, sniggering reaction amongst students.

Simon Leys defines the university as 'a place where scholars seek truth, pursue and transmit knowledge for knowledge's sake—irrespective of the consequences, implications and utility of the endeavour'. The actual agitprop nature of the beast is found in this invitation to a lecture by a master's student in Creative Arts at James Cook University:

The thesis centers around the idea that Western culture suffers imbalance [sic] due to a disparity in the way we think because emphasis in the west is focused on the male in the male/female psychic dichotomy [sic]. The works seek to restore balance by manifesting the female.

In the course description for 'Australian English' at the Australian National University (ANU), books are replaced by text selections in a 'reading brick' to aid a study of 'the language used to describe and control the indigenous population'. To consider the 'experiences of personhood' in the course 'Culture and Person', the 'case studies used include sexuality and sexual identity, witchcraft, madness and time/space'.

In 'A History of Western Sexuality, specific topics will vary from year to year, but will include three or four of the following: fertility, contraception and abortion; transmitted diseases; sexual violence; prostitution; pornography; homosexual/lesbian and bi-

sexual identities; cross-dressing; masturbation; sexual panics and moral regulation; race, nationalism, eugenics and sexuality; sexology and sexual knowledge in various periods'. No, love doesn't get a mention.

From these undergraduate studies, a promising ANU student may proceed to higher studies. Current PhD topics, which involve three years' full-time research, include 'A Social History of the Cash Register in Australia' and 'The Militarisation of Australia in the 1950s'.

Robert Manne has written that 'far from being the Mickey Mouse subjects of conservative imagination, those courses that are anchored in critical theory are, in fact, extraordinarily demanding'. Did he mean the University of New England course 'Approaches to the Study of Religion'? Seemingly more a Gilbert patter song than Mickey, it may mask profundities of French philosophical cloudiness:

This unit examines a number of the major approaches to the critical study of religions, including the historical, theological, philosophical, psychological, anthropological and sociological, political and feminist.

The same university offers 'Why study Religion?' and suggests this answer:

One important general reason for Australians is to understand an important aspect of the life of the diverse cultural groups in our nation, since religion has had a profound influence on the history and development of many of them. It is important too for Australians to understand the place of religion within the cultures of many of our closest geographical neighbours.

As this goes on, a PhD student in Communication Studies is completing 'A Study Concerning "The Bill" and Television Police Drama' and the Geography Department teaches first-year units on 'Earth in Crisis' and 'Australia: Sustainable Development?'.

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At Melbourne University, lecturers flaunt 'Art / Pornography / Blasphemy / Propaganda' and 'Reading Sexuality'. The examination topics for 'Feminist Cultural Studies' include 'women's and girls' magazines, the fashion industry, daytime television, cyberfeminism, plastic surgery'. In history, the impact of the American Revolution on American Indians, slaves and women is discussed. Reconciliation appears as an honours subject where 'the subsequent conservative critique of the underlying values of the reconciliation policy and its implication for issues of national identity will also be examined.' Something called the Social Theory Department offers

**Identities in Conflict:** This subject investigates identities in conflict by studying witchcraft accusations, Nazi doctors, Malcolm X, the bonds of love, formations of violence, ethnic and racial conflict, gender relations and everyday life in high or post modernity.

Ideal vocational programming for those seeking jobs with the ABC or SBS.

In 1995, I suggested that the *Priscilla* drag queens were heading for higher education. The boys didn't make it. Down at the University of Tasmania, however, the film *Titanic* appears on the first-year English 'reading' list.

*Pravda* may have sunk but the *Australian Humanities Review*, published on the Internet, provides rigid intellectual guidance in correct-thinking—naturally it receives financial help from the Australia Council, and naturally it is unintentionally funny. What really happens when the *Titanic* docks in Hobart lecture theatres and tutorial rooms is made amusingly clear in an article by a Tasmanian English lecturer:

Something rather interesting is going on in Hollywood cinema today. Art is being used to deflect feminist inquiry; but more incredibly still, feminist self-assertion is being used to avert a critique of capitalism. I am thinking particularly of the nude scene in *Titanic* ... The fantasy at the heart of *Titanic* is that a modern person such as ourselves [sic], such as Jack and Rose who represent us, would not act so abominably as the rich did then, nor buy into the neo-feudalism the rich once commanded.

The tinkling ice cubes then reveal that the film is actually 'a story of female self discovery'. There are few lifeboats provided for students.

Some idea of the way this stuff is enforced is seen in examinations,

where the case for the prosecution is usually the correct answer. After an intensive study of Shakespeare's *Hamlet* and *Much Ado about Nothing*, English students at the University of Tasmania were faced with this question: 'Both Claudio and Hamlet complain about and verbally abuse women. Are they given just cause?' Other exam questions were: 'Why is it helpful to think of film as being like a kind of language?' and 'What ideas about women and female power do you find in the plays studied in this unit?' Clichés and feminist platitudes receive high distinctions. Naturally, and miserably for Australia, intelligent young men desert the humanities.

A high level of success in these rigid tests of right-thinking-ness may lead to postgraduate study. Recent writings by PhD students in the dull, funded, free

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## ***The New Class has sought, and nearly achieved, the intellectual impoverishment of a generation***

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publications found in unwanted piles around universities offer further evidence of New Class euthanasia. *Amida* is a fairly typical example: it is a magazine in content, tabloid in format. It expresses the usual political and social dogmas while making the usual claims to be an 'independent student-based publication'. It has a glossy cover, behind which hides a full-page advertisement for the *Financial Review*. Sponsoring monies come from Victoria University, ANU and Medibank Private. The target readership is impressively affluent. General prices for the books reviewed are from \$35 to \$150. Advertisements are carried for ethical investments, airline travel, further education and real estate—flogging Melbourne apartments with prices beginning at \$169,000. A notable feature article lauds a prize-winning student dress designer. Her international award was for a dress dealing with global warming.

The article noted that the fortunate student personally attended the competition in the Chinese capital.

The articles written in *Amida* by PhD students represent abilities and thought processes taught over at least seven years' full-time university study. A student in English and Theatre Studies, at ANU, offers

... a simple list of twentieth century politicians who have utilised popular paranoia and the conspiratorial mindset to gain power, from Adolf Hitler to Pol Pot, from Joseph Stalin to Joseph McCarthy, and from Idi Amin to Richard Nixon.

Another writer, who has completed her PhD in English at the University of Queensland, has a brilliant New Class version of our recent history:

After currency crashes and recessions took hold in Asia, however, the utility of Asians dissipated. Not surprisingly, this coincided with the appearance and rise of Hansonism (and right-wing politics in general) in Australia.

Immigrants to Australia, while awaiting citizenship papers

could be deported for participating in workers' protests or rallies ... The fear and loathing of infection from Asian-ness and Asians in Australia is only ever a short step: from merely celebrating diversity to real power-sharing in society.

Other student newspapers and magazines are equally dismal, superficial and snobbish. The political fire seems faked, their targets the usual ABC victims and originality is banned.

Sham courses, trivial exams, futile postgraduate research. The New Class has sought, and nearly achieved, the intellectual impoverishment of a generation. At one end of society are the hopeless unemployed, at the other the hopelessly miseducated humanities graduates. Sniggering disbelief does not make a cultural revolution but in the present academy its appearance is a welcome sound.

And still political correctness hangs on. In the *Australian Universities' Review*, published for its academic members by the National Tertiary Education Union, contributors are advised that 'male nouns and pronouns should not be used to refer to people of either sex.' Perhaps 'she/it' would be acceptable?

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**I P A**