

in DFAT. That almost 70% of officials surveyed found relations 'collegial but competitive at times' presumably means they tend to think alike but compete for promotion. The fact they think alike is less important than in what particulars. One such issue that puts officials at odds with the book's authors is the DFAT view that Australia's security and economic welfare should drive foreign policy, which the authors dismiss as out-of-date. They think foreign policy has become more diverse and complex in ways that devalue these traditional concerns. Whether it has is a matter of judgment. While differing from much DFAT staff on this point, the authors are well disposed towards them. Most other government officials find DFAT attitudes soft.

The politicisation of DFAT, indeed of the entire bureaucracy, is nothing new. Governments of all shades practise it because ministers prefer loyalty to disinterested advice. Changes intended to promote politicisation are typically represented as administrative reform, and public service careerists are encouraged to take advantage of the opportunities available. Only oppositions resent it. Taxpayers meet the cost in every sense. Evidence of politicisation is the way that officials see assignment to the minister's office as the best guarantee of promotion.

Curiously in today's climate, intelligence is dismissed as a rather marginal influence. Such a judgment fails to differentiate among types of intelligence—

raw, departmental, national—the latter typically shaping Cabinet decisions (on which point Prime Minister Keating is quoted to good effect). It also neglects to point out the resources and effort that successive Cabinets have devoted to improving intelligence—especially national intelligence, which underlines how ministers appreciate the way it helps them decide, notably in matters of strategic security. True, questions of war and peace are particularly susceptible to intelligence judgement. But in the Prime Minister's view, committing Australian troops is the most testing decision he can face. The furore over Australia's involvement in the second Iraq war demonstrates the importance of Cabinet basing decisions on sound intelligence. The issue has become painfully partisan and is a warning against the politicisation of intelligence.

Distance from the centres of international tension tends to increase Australia's sense of security (even more so New Zealand's). This may explain the authors' apparent willingness to accept the mindless activism of much Australian foreign policy, where the number of initiatives undertaken is used to measure success. This ignores masterly inactivity, which is one of the most powerful diplomatic tools. The book attributes the more cautious attitude of regional neighbours to the constraints affecting them, failing to appreciate how alien they find fussy activity. This cultural difference pinpoints why neighbours don't accept us as 'fellow Asians'—and never will.

Ultimately, the pursuit of power drives political interest in foreign policy. In countries like North Korea this means developing weapons of mass destruction to scare others silly. In Australia where governments are elected, politicians aim to persuade majorities through the quality of their decisions, including in foreign policy. *Making Australian Foreign Policy* demonstrates how constitutional differences between Australia and the United States affect the way that foreign policy is decided. But for all such differences—as well as those of size, culture and so on—there is surprising similarity in the way political opinion groups around opposed poles find expression in foreign policy. US Republicans, like Coalition supporters in Australia, tend to emphasise security interests and 'realism'. American Democrats and the Labor Party here are disposed towards 'idealism' or 'liberal internationalism'.

**Reviewed by A.D. McLennan**

*The Howard Years*  
**edited by Robert Manne**  
 Melbourne, Black Inc.  
 Agenda, 2004, 326pp  
 \$29.95, ISBN 0 9750769

**R**obert Manne has attempted to create his public persona and reputation over the past eight years through his intellectual stalking of John Howard. By this I mean that Manne has sought to confirm

his status as a morally superior person through a continuous commentary on what he perceives to be John Howard's flaws and moral failings. At the same time he has indelibly stamped his vision of Howard onto the collective mind of the Australian chattering classes. What has emerged out of that mind has been less a portrait of a real person than a cartoon that depicts Howard as somewhat less than fully human.

So it was with a certain trepidation that I approached this volume. Most of its contributors were not people likely to be sympathetic to Howard. If one read this collection, and had no other knowledge of the Howard government, one would come away with the conclusion that it is the worst government that this country has ever known. We are all, apparently on the edge of the abyss, governed by men and women whose inhumanity is such that, as William Maley puts it, future generations will find it 'impossible to fathom'.

In fact it is difficult to find a kind word for the Howard government in this book. According to Ian Lowe, in environmental matters, Australia under Howard, in partnership with the United States, are 'two rogue states which constitute an axis of irresponsibility'. When it comes to foreign affairs, we are told by Tony Kevin that we are at 'the nadir of many relationships', including South-east Asia, Europe and the Islamic world. China, apparently is willing to be 'patient' with Australia, just as I suppose an adult is patient with a little child as, in Kevin's words,

it seeks to 're-civilise' Australian foreign policy. We should all be pleased that the Chinese government with its well-known human rights record is willing to be so condescending towards young Australia. What Kevin cannot abide is the American relationship seeing it as a 'form of dependency relationship'; he appears to wish that we shift that dependency to that bastion of liberty China. But then Kevin believes that Guy Rundle and Mungo McCallum are good on Australian internal politics and describes Paul Keating's recent book on Australia and the Asia-Pacific as a 'must-read'.

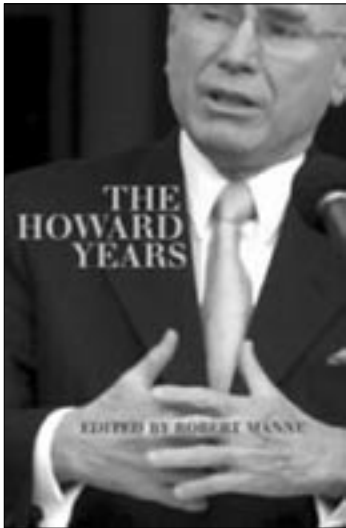
Even in areas that we might think that the current government has scored some successes, such as economic management, we learn that this is not the case. John Quiggin tells us that 'the most the current government can claim is that it did not interfere with the judgement of the Reserve Bank'. In fact all that the Howard government has done is to miss opportunities in policies regarding unemployment, superannuation, and post-secondary education. Drawing on Donald Horne, Quiggin characterises the government as composed of 'second-rate people' who survive only because they live in the 'lucky country'.

And of course Howard himself is the most malignant second-rater of them all. Mick Dodson calls him a 'deliberately divisive', and insensitive to Australia's indigenous people. The problem is that Dodson, a fan of the 'insightful' John Pilger, seriously overplays his

hand by trying to make the Australian experience unique and Howard uniquely awful. He makes the extraordinary statement that 'Simply because of Howard's intransigence on these matters, Australia is the only nation in the world that has not made a formal apology to its Indigenous peoples for past injustices.' The only! Maybe I missed something but have the Russians, the Brazilians, the Argentinians, not to mention the Indonesians in West Papua, recently made apologies?

Manne himself, who dwells excessively on what he considers to be the faults and mistakes of Howard, cannot bring himself even to mention those occasions on which one might have thought that he would have approved of Howard's actions, such the aftermath of the Bali bombing and the uniform gun laws. Only after criticising him as 'inexperienced' and 'negligent' does Manne grudgingly concede that East Timor was 'probably John Howard's finest hour'.

Helen Irving will not even allow Howard to be a



conservative. Howard makes claim to be a Burkean but, according to Irving, he does not deserve the title as he has 'regrettable disregard for constitutional principles' and a 'limited faith vision of how the parts of the constitutional system holds together'. But then Irving, as a well-known republican, does have an axe to grind when it comes to the constitutional monarchist John Howard.

The real puzzle is: why do they hate him so far beyond the realms of normal political partisanship? Two pieces in this volume provide some of the answer to this puzzle. The first is by Simon Marginson on higher education. He states that the 'Howard government's policy on universities is driven by the political prejudices of the cabinet, rather than by a more dispassionate assessment of long-term national need.' In other

words there is plenty of money available for universities but the Howard government won't spend it because the universities are full of anti-government lefties. This argument simply does not appreciate the financial exigencies under which any contemporary government has to operate.

The second is by Judith Brett. She says that the problem with the Howard government is that it ignores 'informed public opinion'. Of course by informed public opinion she means people like her, left-liberal academics and ABC journalists and commentators. Put Brett and Marginson together and you get the reason for the hatred. The 'good' want power, lots of jobs and prestige. The Howard government doesn't give them any of these things. In fact it doesn't even think that they are particularly good! How mean-

spirited could such a government, and its leader, possibly be?

Of course this is where the greatest irony lies. The contributors to this volume decry John Howard as mean-spirited and narrow-minded. But there is nothing in this book that suggests any greatness or nobility of spirit on the part of its authors. At the end of the day it is a pricked *amour propre* that dictates so many of the responses in this volume to the Howard government. It would be a pity if future generations were to see the Howard years through the soured spectacles of Manne and his supporters. We are desperately in need of an account of the Howard government that is not based on wounded pride and the desire to display moral vanity.

Reviewed by  
Gregory Melleuish

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