



# PRIME MINISTER

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**THE HON. JOHN HOWARD MP  
PRIME MINISTER OF AUSTRALIA  
ADDRESS TO THE *QUADRANT* MAGAZINE 50<sup>TH</sup>  
ANNIVERSARY DINNER  
FOUR SEASONS HOTEL, SYDNEY**

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It is a pleasure to be here to celebrate the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of *Quadrant* and to honour a great literary journal of culture and commentary.

For five decades, *Quadrant* has upheld the best traditions of free thought and vigorous debate, often as a lonely counter-point to stultifying orthodoxies and dangerous utopias that at times have gripped the Western 'intelligentsia'.

It has helped many of us navigate the battle of ideas, while staying true to its calling as an outlet for essays and poetry of the highest quality. Indeed, it's no exaggeration to say that *Quadrant* has been Australia's home to all that is worth preserving in the Western cultural tradition.

At its finest, this cultural legacy rests on the great pillars of classical Greece and Rome, Judeo-Christian beliefs and ethics and the progressive and rational, yet sceptical and humane, spirit of the Anglo-Scottish Enlightenment.

Tonight, we recognise the debt that intellectual life in Australia owes to Quadrant, and to the people who have sustained Quadrant's free spirit for 50 years.

Quadrant has always attracted a very diverse group of people to its circle – people of different backgrounds, different faiths as well as those of no faith, people with different party political sympathies – but all united by a commitment to intellectual freedom and liberal democracy.

This diversity was nowhere more apparent than among the people who launched Quadrant in 1956 – in the shadow of the Soviet suppression of the Hungarian uprising.

Let me briefly pay tribute to three individuals:– Quadrant's founder and long-time publisher Richard Krygier; its first editor James McAuley and the first Chairman of the Australian Committee for Cultural Freedom, Sir John Latham.

Each was crucial to Quadrant's birth, its childhood growth and its path towards lively middle age.

Richard Krygier – the Jewish immigrant from Poland whose experiences of both Nazism and Communism bred a passionate grasp of what was at stake in the great ideological contest of our time.

James McAuley – the poet and Catholic convert who edited Quadrant in its early years and who saw with great clarity the need for a cultural journal in Australia that stood apart from the canons of conformity on the left.

John Latham – the former Chief Justice and politician; the avowed humanist and rationalist whose involvement added prestige and stature to the Quadrant project.

I want to also recognise all those who worked, often for very little money, to produce some 430 issues of Quadrant down the years. Like most small magazines, Quadrant has invariably led a hand-to-mouth existence and been very much a labour of love for many committed people.

It's important we remember not just the big ideological struggles but also the individuals who took up the cause of cultural freedom and the defence of liberal democracy against its enemies.

With the fall of the Berlin Wall and the collapse of Soviet communism, it became all too easy to pretend that the outcome of the Cold War was an inevitable result of large-scale, impersonal forces that ultimately left totalitarianism exhausted and democratic capitalism triumphant.

Nothing could be further from the truth. This was a struggle fought by individuals on behalf of the individual spirit.

And Quadrant holds an honoured place in Australian history for the stance it took for democratic freedom and a pluralist society and in opposition to collectivist ideologies that so many saw as the inevitable wave of the future.

It's worth recalling just some of the philo-communism that was once quite common in Australia in the 1950s and 1960s:

- Manning Clark's book *Meeting Soviet Man* where he likened the ideals of Vladimir Lenin to those of Jesus Christ;

- John Burton, the former head of the External Affairs Department, arguing that Mao's China provided a model for the 'transformation' of Australia;
- All those who did not simply oppose Australia's commitment in Vietnam but who actively supported the other side and fed the delusion that Ho Chi Minh was some sort of Jeffersonian Democrat intent on spreading liberty in Asia.

To quote George Orwell: 'One has to belong to the intelligentsia to believe things like that: no ordinary man could be such a fool'.

There is a view that the pro-communist left in Australia in decades past was no more than a bunch of naïve idealists, rather than what they were – ideological barrackers for regimes of oppression opposed to Australia and its interests.

In taking on the Communist left and their fellow-travellers, people like Richard Krygier, James McAuley, Peter Coleman, Bob Santamaria, Heinz Arndt and Frank Knopfelmacher were not only right in practice.

They were right in principle and part of a noble and moral cause.

The influence of the pro-communist left in Australian cultural circles did wane over time – after Hungary and Khrushchev's secret speech in 1956 and further still after the brutal suppression of the Prague Spring in 1968.

In the 1960s and 1970s, it largely gave way to a New Left, counter culture – where again Quadrant served as a beacon of free and sceptical thought against fashionable leftist views on social, foreign policy and economic issues.

In the eyes of the New Left, the Cold War became a struggle defined by ‘moral equivalence’ – where the Soviet bloc and the American-led West were equally to blame, each possessing their own dominating ideologies.

It became the height of intellectual sophistication to believe that people in the West were no less oppressed than people under the yoke of communist dictatorship.

In time, the world would luckily see the emergence of three remarkable individuals whose moral clarity punctured such nonsense – Ronald Reagan, Margaret Thatcher and Pope John Paul II.

Reagan – the man who gave America back its confidence and optimism in the wake of a decade of setbacks and who began to talk openly and candidly about an ‘evil empire’ – the sort of talk that sends diplomats the world over into panicked meltdown.

Thatcher – the Iron Lady who as well as anyone grasped and articulated the essential connection of personal, political and economic freedom.

Pope John Paul II – a man of enormous courage and dignity whose words of faith and hope inspired millions behind the Iron Curtain to dream again of a Europe whole and free.

All of us here tonight owe a particular debt of gratitude to these three towering figures of the late 20<sup>th</sup> Century.

Beyond this defining ideological struggle, Quadrant has also been at the centre of various controversies and causes in Australia – often prepared to publish things that others would not touch, often taking stands which others shied away from taking.

According to Peter Coleman, it was the Whitlam Government that inspired Quadrant to go from a bi-monthly to 10 issues a year and based on some of the policies around at the time, I'm not surprised. I want to pay a special tribute to Peter as Quadrant's longest serving editor.

Current editor Paddy McGuinness also deserves special praise for the way he has carried on the Quadrant tradition of fine scholarship with a sceptical, questioning eye for cant, hypocrisy and moral vanity.

Of the causes that Quadrant has taken up that are close to my heart none is more important to me than the role it has played as counterforce to the black armband view of Australian history.

Until recent times, it had become almost *de rigueur* in intellectual circles to regard Australian history as little more than a litany of sexism, racism and class warfare.

Again, it would take the brave voices of a few individuals to take a stand against the orthodoxies of the day. And again Quadrant has been an outpost of lively non-conformity in its willingness to defend both Geoffrey Blainey and Keith Windschuttle against the posses of political correctness.

Nowhere were the fangs of the left so visibly on display in a campaign based on character assassination and intellectual dishonesty than in their efforts to trash the name and reputation of Geoffrey Blainey.

Despite a more diverse and lively intellectual environment in Australia compared with past decades, we should not underestimate the degree to which the soft-left still holds sway, especially in Australia's universities, by virtue of its long march through the institutions.

Quadrant has always been a principled defender of what I might call a ‘traditionalist’ view of a good education and in opposition to the more fashionable, progressive views that have held sway in schools and universities.

Early this year I called for a root and branch renewal of Australian history in our schools, with a restoration of narrative instead of what I labelled the ‘fragmented stew of themes and issues’.

Armed with clear evidence of the decline of Australian history in our schools, the Government has made a start in our quest to ensure that the nation’s history is an essential component of every Australian child’s education, no longer an afterthought or an optional extra.

This is about ensuring children are actually taught their national inheritance – a nation like all others with its share of failures and mistakes, but one that has emerged at the start of this millennium as one of the most successful societies on earth.

Few debates are as vital as those over education – whether it be in upholding basic standards on literacy and numeracy, promoting diversity and choice or challenging the incomprehensible sludge that can find its way into some curriculum material.

That is why the Government will continue to be very tough on states and territories that fail to live up to their obligations for high standards in our schools.

Having spoken earlier about Quadrant’s role in the defining global struggle of the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, let me say a few words about the global struggle we now face at the start of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

Today, free and open societies face a new tyranny – the tyranny of Islamist terrorism – one with at least a family resemblance to the great struggles against forces of totalitarianism in the past.

A Czech writer once wrote with great prescience that: ‘You can’t build utopia without terror and ... before long terror is all that’s left’.

And just as past struggles called for clear and unambiguous statements of belief and purpose, so we must again make very clear what is at stake.

Let me repeat what I have said before. This is not a struggle against Islam. It is a struggle against a perverted interpretation of Islam.

As we see on a daily basis, it is the terrorists and suicide bombers who eagerly set out to spread terror and to kill innocent Muslim civilians. Countries with their sons and daughters serving in Iraq and Afghanistan today would like nothing more than to see them complete their job and return home.

To those who want to portray the West as anti-Muslim I would say that it was not the Arab League who went to war in the 1990s on behalf of Muslim minorities in the Balkans. It was the governments of the United States, the United Kingdom and their NATO allies.

Let me also remind people who now talk as if Iraq was some island of pro-Islamic tranquillity before 2003 that the person who probably killed more Muslims in history is Saddam Hussein.

There are, as Owen Harries reminds us, people who legitimately opposed the original action to oust Saddam Hussein, but it remains (to borrow a phrase) an inconvenient truth that if countries such as the United States, the United

Kingdom and Australia simply abandon the people of Iraq this would be an enormous victory for the forces of terror and extremism around the world.

The fact is we are part of a global campaign for the very ideals that some people wistfully dreamed were unchallengeable after the Cold War. No less than in that long, twilight struggle, this too will be a generational struggle for ideals of democratic freedom and liberty under law.

Thank you for giving me this opportunity to join this celebration of 50 years of Quadrant. Long may its free and sceptical spirit enrich our national life.

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