

The Burgeoning of an Unelected Para-Government

Marlene Goldsmith, Political Incorrectness: Defying the Thought Police, Hodder & Stoughton, Rydalmere, 1996

Peter Coleman (ed.), Double Take: Six Incorrect Essays, Reed Books, Port Melbourne, 1996

Reviewed by Patrick Morgan

MARLENE GOLDSMITH is a New South Wales Liberal parliamentarian of liberal and mildly feminist beliefs who was shocked when she experienced at first hand the pressure tactics applied by unrepresentative lobby groups. Her book is valuable because it is full of clear examples of politically correct groups foisting their agendas on to the public. Peter Coleman's anthology also provides examples, but its main value is in giving comprehensive explanations of the phenomenon.

The most important conclusion arising from the two books is that political correctness (PC) is not just a matter of censorship of certain ideas and the promotion of other, trendy ones. It is basically a form of psychological intimidation used in the capture of institutions. It is a complete bureaucratic weapon wielded with the object of gaining and retaining power. In the terms of public choice theory, certain ideological factions use PC to gain hold of a public space, to establish a monopoly and then to keep others out. This is why Peter Coleman's term 'soft totalitarianism' is a better characterisation of the phenomenon than is the term 'political correctness'.

Marlene Goldsmith shows how the Gay Gestapo, as she calls it, operates publicly in NSW. She chaired a government committee on medically acquired AIDS, which understandably wished to give some assistance to these people, who were made fatally ill by receiving contaminated blood transfusions for which the State was responsible. The gay lobby opposed this in every way, on the grounds that it discriminated against them. When in the early 1980s it became known that homosexuals were a high-risk group, they were advised against giving blood donations, but not forbidden to do so. So the people medically infected could have been made ill by gays who continued to donate their blood. Worse, these people with medically acquired AIDS had to go to the gay-dominated AIDS Council of NSW to get help. This is an example of a group which claims victim status and the immunity this gives, and then uses this immunity to launch an attack on others whom it does not like. Goldsmith writes very well in general on the present upsurge of victimology: always blame someone else, preferably the state and ordinary people.

In Peter Coleman's anthology, Christopher Pearson, editor of the *Adelaide Review*, fills in the background which helps us to understand the Goldsmith example. He describes from the inside his two decades' experience of the gay community, showing how it, like feminism, is based on the left oppositional mode of poli-

tics whose *forma mentis* is taken over from Marxism. The target, normal society, is the same; only the victim is different. The familiar features are present: unrepresentative cadres running the community, conformity triumphing over tolerance, the politicisation of all aspects of life ('the personal is the political', 'promiscuity is a revolutionary act'), the unachievably utopian aims, and the contempt for normal people as 'breeders'. The overall atmosphere is cloying and the opposite of liberating. The final, potentially suicidal, act of transgression is not to use safe-sex techniques.

Beatrice Faust, writing in *Double Take*, offers a comparable analysis of feminism. The poet Les Murray, in his contribution, shows how some cultural cliques have a predictable ideological stance, which Murray summarises thus: 'Someone else is always to blame, be it men or parents, repressive agents or capitalism, reactionaries or fascists, and the defeat of these demons will bring Freedom' (p. 71). The poet Jamie Grant objects to the commercialisation of sport, and the writer Frank Moorhouse objects to the current priorities of the United Nations.

Arthur Koestler once said the final struggle would be between the communists and the ex-communists: that is to say, between those who have clung to an ideology and those who, once true believers, have begun to question it. It is noticeable that the people who are objecting to PC here are not conservatives, as one might expect, but liberals and ex-liberals. In fact, the advent of PC has caused them to reaffirm their liberal principles of tolerance, pluralism and the free exchange of ideas.

The best example of this is David Williamson. In *Double Take*, he provides a brilliant, original article outlining the weakness of ideas that are currently fashionable. He raises similar questions in his play *Dead White Males*, but here he gives the intellectual background to the controversy. The progressive literary worldview, which Williamson is rightly suspicious of, is that all male, phallogocentric, Eurocentric, imperial colonisers from the centre are bad, and that all marginalised others — women, indigenes, the colonised, the disadvantaged and other 'victim' groups — are good and should benefit from positive discrimination. Furthermore, literature and culture are alleged to be part of an attempt by dominant groups to deprive minority groups of their place in the sun.

Williamson argues against the notion that there is no such thing as fixed human nature, that it is only a manufactured construct imposed on us, and that all is relative. He cites new research from biology and psychology to show that there are certain constant features of human behaviour which derive from evolutionary adaptation. We may not be hapless victims on whom things are imposed. We do have internal impulses and we do have moral responsibilities. Research backs up the liberal humanist position. There are differences in human sexual psychology: for example, men are more aggressive and power-seeking than women. But though there are differences, Williamson, like Pearson, concludes that we all face common dilemmas together, and we should not be diverted from these by narrow ideological agendas.

PC is entrenched in the academies, where a new generation of journalists and media operatives are being trained on a diet of victimology and obeisance to the

grievance industry. These intellectually protected ghettos sustain and perpetuate what Les Murray describes in *Double Take* as an unelected para-government made up of the media, humanities faculties in the universities, and a system of semi-governmental boards and authorities which started to appear 30 years ago. The social commentator Phil Ruthven, of Ibis Business Information, provides a good explanation of all this. In Goldsmith's book, he is quoted as saying that the Baby Boomers are 'probably the most spoiled or selfish generation that has been seen for 500 years. They have no idea of the struggle former generations had, and are shocked at the struggle their children face' (p. 69). In *Dead White Males*, Williamson creates an Australian grandfather who 'led a life of backbreaking toil in which he had exercised very little power over anyone' (p. 18)

After some time in the fantasy world of PC, it is refreshing to return to real problems. Marlene Goldsmith points out that jobs are becoming concentrated, with some families having two or more, and others none. She supports the unfashionable goal of one job per family. Should pregnant women be allowed to drink and smoke? Should young girls have the expectation that the state will support them if they become single mothers? These are real dilemmas for liberals where the balance between tolerance and intervention is hard to define.

One form of PC that these books do not touch on is the all-pervasive attack on free-market economics, or 'economic rationalism' as it is known. Australia won't be able to sustain its prosperity if its economic and cultural institutions become intellectually protected havens and fail to match international standards.

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