

This bought a quick reply from Professor Robert Eagleson, who is Plain English consultant to the Department of Special Minister of State helping to simplify Government forms. He drew a distinction between, for example the complexity of 'an advanced text on cancer or law about the ownership of shares' and gobbledegook which simply obscures content and meaning. For one thing, he pointed out, the absence of gobbledegook highlights those areas in a document where the policy is complicated or unfair: gobbledegook tends to conceal weakness in underlying policy.

the last bastion. There is one pocket of resistance to plain English which has been overlooked. That is the members of Parliament themselves. Francis Bennion, a former English Parliamentary Counsel, reports in his recent book *Statute Law* that he once drafted a Bill referring to a landlord who 'tried his best' to let office property. This was called 'amateurish' and 'a headmaster's phrase' by members: they would have preferred the well-worn phrase 'used his best endeavours' to let the property. One wonders how these members would have coped with section 5 of the Commonwealth *Dis-tillation Act 1901*.

non-sexist language. An earlier edition of *Reform* ([1984] *Reform* 69) reported the beginnings of a drive to eliminate gender-specific expressions from legislation and the law, getting rid of so-called sexist language. This wave of reform has now washed up on the shores of the Commonwealth Parliament. From now on, like the Victorians, Commonwealth drafters will make a conscious effort to avoid sex-specific language. 'Chairmen' are to be deposed, and 'Presidents' and 'Convenors' put in their stead. Masculine personal pronouns are to be eschewed in preference to repeating the relevant noun or, where this would lead to an inelegancy, 'he or she'. Despite mutterings from some quarters about 'femlibspeak', the new drafting style seems set to stay.

days of future passed

Certainly the dead will be our Judges
but the unborn are assembling in the Jury Room.

Kevin John Hart, *The Jury*

future frolics. If the past is a foreign country, the future is an alien world. Early in February the Federal Minister for Science Barry Jones launched the Commission for the Future. Phillip Adams is the Chairman of the new body. Other Members are Dr Robyn Williams of the ABC 'Science Show', Dr Martha Cleary of ICI, Professor Shirley Smith of UNSW's School of Education, Professor Peter Mason of Macquarie's Physics Department, Mr Jan Owen, President of the Youth Affairs Council, and Professor Leonie Sandercock of Macquarie's Urban Studies Department. The aim of the Commission is to inform the community about technological change. In announcing the appoints the Minister for Science Mr Barry Jones asked:

Our new technological environment makes many people feel powerless. If we cannot understand the opportunities, and the threats, how can we make effective choices for ourselves or democratic decisions as a community?

The Terms of Reference of the Commission include to promote community awareness and understanding of developments in science and technology and their potential impact on Australia in the future and to stimulate discussion and debate on the economic and social policy options available to Australian decision-makers in responding to such developments.

The announcement was greeted by a good deal of derision at least from the *Sydney Morning Herald*. It was the subject of a *Herald* editorial (14 February 1985). The editorial's tone was set by its heading: 'the pick-a-future commission'. After reciting the expressions of mutual admiration of Phillip Adams and Barry Jones the editorial noted that there was nothing terribly new in trying to predict the future:

Man has always had a fascination for predicting the future. Roman Emperors attempted to do so by the divination of a bird's flight offered by augurers. More contemporary seers relied on tea leaves. In the

US, future commissions, most of them funded privately, have operated for decades with varying degrees of success. Most recently a Commission for the Future was established in New Zealand by the Muldoon Government. It was disbanded by the Muldoon Government in 1982 after producing an unacceptable report on New Zealand's future in ANZUS.

It will be a difficult row to hoe if the new Commission for the Future not only has to make accurate predictions but 'acceptable' ones as well.

The Herald editorial pointed out that difficulty of accurate forecasting and produced a list of examples of inventions and developments which individuals depicted an unspectacular future for – the micro, the telescope, the flying machine and the electric light bulb. It noted that Alfred Noble thought his invention of dynamite would make wars impossible and that Einstein thought the unleashing of nuclear energy was not worth the effort.

The Herald then asked, even assuming the new Commission 'has a better success rate than some of its overseas predecessors', the question still remains whether any one in Australia will take its prognostications seriously. Economists beware! Not all of the Herald's readers endorsed its editorial. One letter to the Editor, by Mrs LH Nelson of Frenchs Forest, put its 'derision of Barry Jones and Phillip Adams' down to 'the "tall poppy" syndrome', which she said was endemic in our country.

Undeterred the *Herald* did another 'job' on the Commission for the Future in an article by Robert Haupt in its 'Good Weekend' Magazine of 2 March 1985. Haupt wrote:

Adams does well at – and by – the big, ill-defined tasks, like tackling Sloth (Life Be In It) and Making Us Feel Better About Ourselves (Project Australia). In each of these campaigns, Monahan Dayman Adams was retained to devise advertising campaigns aimed at altering our behaviour for the better. In fact, they are part of a trend in which governments spend our money exalting and admonishing us, so far as one can tell, to little effect. The future is a big account – it could be bigger than soap power – but Adams will rise to the occasion ... If scientific understanding is what the Commission's on about, the

money would be better spend on providing free subscriptions to *Scientific American* to all who wish them. How odd that a person as bright as Barry Jones can't see this?

In his press release announcing the appointments to the Commission for the Future Mr Jones said he was delighted that the Commission, like the Human Rights Commission, was one of the first bodies of this kind in which a majority of its members were women. That aspect proved not to be newsworthy.

aussie bob, irish mick

CECILY: I don't think you will require neckties. Uncle Jack is sending you to Australia.

ALGERNON: Australia! I'd sooner die.

Oscar (Fingall O'Flahertie Wills) Wilde,
The Importance of Being Earnest, Act 2

extradition experiences. Media interest in attempts to extradite Mr Robert Trimbole from Ireland to Australia elevated law reform of extradition to the unlikely status of a contentious subject. International lawyers probably thought they would never see the day when an article on page 3 of the *Sydney Morning Herald* would begin this way: 'The tome *Extradition in International Law* warns of the problems that arise when the laws of one country meet the often totally different legal system of another' and concludes 'it is often only after a lengthy period of trial and error that extradition proceedings may finally settle down into an understood pattern' (11 February 1985).

Mr Trimbole had been living in Ireland. When arrested he claimed to be Irish potato farmer Michael Hanbury. His successful appeal against extradition led to allegations that Australia had been tardy in entering modern extradition arrangements with Ireland. That claim was promptly denied by the Federal Attorney-General, Mr Lionel Bowen, who outlined the speed with which a reciprocal agreement had been put in place with the the Irish Government, by regulation in the absence of a formal treaty. However, the episode led the Shadow Attorney-General Mr Neil Brown to call for an immediate review of our extradition treaties, and Mr Bowen announced that a task force to