

FIRST CARTOON  
SUBMITTED  
1/3 (18.1.85)

DS113.DO

ON THE DRY SIDE OF STATESMANSHIP AND ARCHITECTURE

John Hyde

I was once accused by parliamentary colleagues, who I am sure found me a pain in the behind, of sermonising. Well, today's text is taken from lectures on art and science by J Bronowski, of "Ascent of Man" fame.

"[A] society is as balanced as a building is. We must not fall into the trap of parcelling out either between two minds: between the architect and the engineer, or between the statesman and the scientist. The statesman cannot create policy if he simply accepts sanctions from the nuclear physicist. Statesmanship without scientific vision, even citizenship without it, is (like bad architecture) a mere decoration of acquiescence."

The disciplines most relevant to Australian statesmanship are economics, law, philosophy and politics (nuclear physics is less so) but never the less I think Bronowski said something pretty fundamental, even if in passing. The architectural analogy is apt. Politicians are the architects of States.

States like buildings are functional: they are there to serve people who should be free to come, go and do within them; but either can be made into gaols. They may serve people well or ill; they can inspire or depress. The mistake made by social planners is to try to design people to fit ideal dwellings.

Builders of nations are as constrained by the materials and techniques they command as are the builders of buildings, and competent architects of both must understand the technical limitations and opportunities germane to their art. Whatever else they may be, great artists are always technically proficient. They do not try Canute-like to ignore reality but to use it to bring out all that it has to offer. Those who imagine that reality itself is their clay will fail - their buildings will fall down - such are the thunderbolts of the Gods.

The Architect or the Statesman who has not a clear idea of the purpose of the edifice he builds will fail also. What he builds will be cold in winter, hot in summer, expensive to run and extravagant of both time and patience. Great artists are also students and masters of utility.

Bronowski's point was that it was within these constraints that the architect found the opportunity to develop HIS artistry which was much more fundamental than Doric columns and plaster rosettes plonked on to facades. Only the man with a clear goal and a scientific knowledge of his medium and his tools could truly succeed. In passing he observed that the principles also applied to statesmen. How true!

A "wet" was originally one who would not accept the technical limitations and opportunities germane to his art. Not understanding his medium or his tools, and not willing to accept that there is no easy way to produce anything truly great the goals he had set himself in campaign speeches became too difficult.

In the same way that bricks, steel and concrete, and wind, rain and earthquakes have properties that are not always to the architect's liking so have deficits and money supplies and trade balances and law courts and policemen properties that are not always to the statesman's liking. Thatcher referred to a colleague who tried to wish them away as "wet" and a political term was born.

The real Australia is flawed by declining relative wealth and security, inflation, unemployment, inequity and the concentrated power of some vested interests. It is the statesman's task to confront these problems, but he can succeed only by understanding and accepting what is known about his medium and his job by economists, lawyers, philosophers and politicians.

The hardest fact for a politician to accept is that a decision to do one thing is almost always a decision not to do something else. If Gothic does not rule out Rococo the building is likely to be a mess; wood panelling rules out wall paper and while a loose budget might win an election it rules out tax cuts and reduced interest rates and makes inflation control more difficult.

Laws which keep wages high rule out full employment; industry protection rules out international competitiveness and the maintenance of high living standards; money given to the wealthy in education or arts grants ~~is not~~ is not available to the poor; universal welfare rules out low taxes; the unemployment benefit does discourage work; fawning on communist states weakens the American Alliance; being inconsistent by condemning human rights violations in some countries but ignoring others sacrifices credibility on the issue everywhere; subsidising one industry weakens others; and a free society rules out much Government intervention.

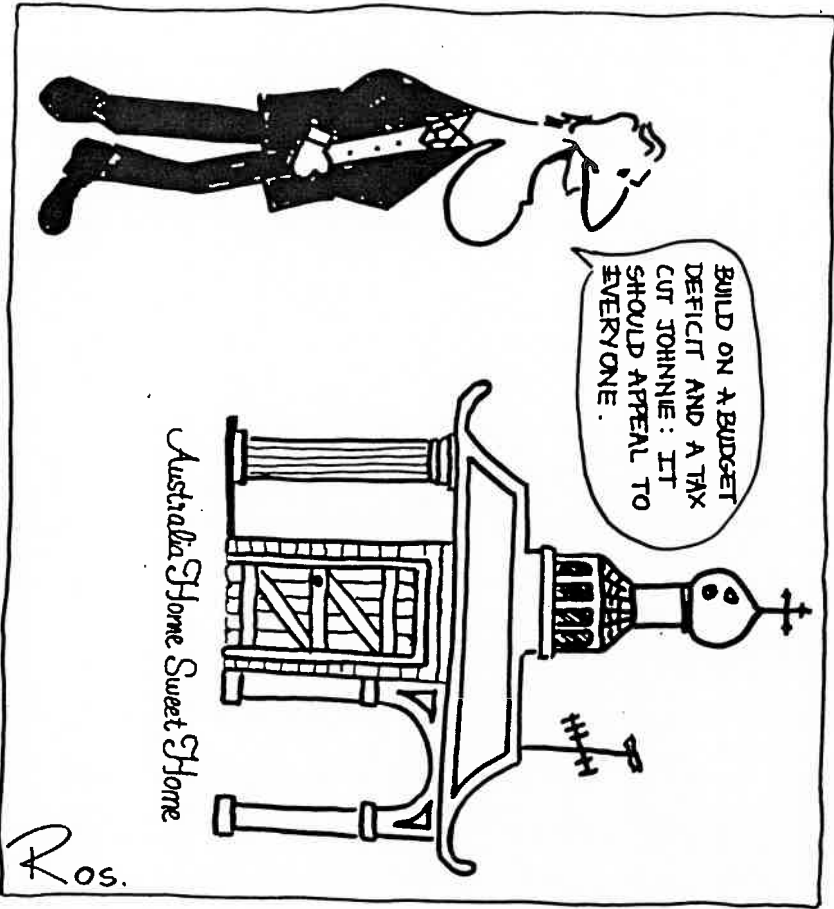
Since Federation the Australian Public Sector has had some enthusiastic builders: it has grown to around 40% of GDP. It has been built in many styles.

Recently, Gough was a man of vision; he knew what he wanted; he tried to build a Southern Versailles. But Gough never worried too much about technique or the limitations of his materials and he certainly didn't worry soon enough about the limitations of his craftsmen. If the edifice did not exactly fall down it fell into an awful muddle.

After Gough's extravagance Malcolm promised to build something functional, plain and within budget. Had he done so he might have produced a building of quiet beauty. The plans displayed the charm and clean symmetry of the functional but alas he could not resist adding gargoyles and friezes and, at the end, battlements.

Bob was apparently greatly impressed by the eclectic nature of his predecessor's work because he tried a consensus of all styles. He is making a virtue of what Malcolm did by chance.

Like Gough, Malcolm and Bob (so far) ignore unfortunate facts like gravity. In this they are both "wet" - they do not accept the constraints of their art. This stopped them building anything very tall. They lack Gough's inspiration but their buildings are less likely to fall down. The state they built will however continue to be plagued by unemployment, inflation, poor economic growth, petty government tyranny and small country status overseas.





WHEN ADAM DELYED AND EVE SPAN  
WHO WAS THEN THE GENTLEMAN (COURTESAN)