

quite rightly notes that the 'culture wars' battles over History in the United States have had the question of national identity at their heart. This implication is less clearly drawn for the Australian context, and analysis of the conservative rationale is missing. There is one, not so much in the writings of Geoffrey Blainey or Keith Windschuttle, as in those of John Carroll – also a 'Quadrant intellectual' – who has argued very strongly that the cultural identity of 'the West' is crumbling 'through want of a story'.

Communal narratives do provide identity. It is one such narrative that Howard wishes to be taught as History. Here Clark's analysis is sharp and ironic. The undoubted strength of this book is that Clark takes the issue of pedagogy seriously. She engages with both the practitioners and theorists of History teaching. She points out that, while it is more than possible to teach national narratives, this does not mean that students either want to, or will, learn them. That is a matter which has not been addressed in any of the debates, consultations, summits, working parties and reviews to date. So far it has all been about the content. The proposition that there is no teaching without learning remains an educational truism. As a result, conservatives will continue to fail in asserting the value of national narrative while students are disinclined to learn it.

Edith Cowan University

BILL LEADBETTER

Fay Anderson, *An Historian's Life: Max Crawford and the Politics of Academic Freedom*, Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, 2005. pp. xii + 398. \$49.95 paper.

Clive Hamilton and Sarah Maddison (eds), *Silencing Dissent: How the Australian Government is Controlling Public Opinion and Stifling Debate*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 2007. pp. xiv + 279. \$24.95 paper.

In relation to free speech, the Liberal Party under John Howard has strayed a long way from liberalism, behaving more like the authoritarian socialists it likes to castigate. The public service has been politicised, so that advice to government is fearful and acquiescent. Sycophants are rewarded, internal critics have no future and leakers are pursued with ferocity.

Access to government information has been restricted. As government services are privatised and commercialised, information is denied on the basis of commercial-in-confidence claims.

Critics on the outside are finding life difficult too, with funds withdrawn from any service brave enough to engage in 'political' activity, namely anything that might embarrass the government. Unthreatening groups may be rewarded with additional funding. The ongoing undermining of secure employment makes employees, public and private, more fearful of speaking out.

In this context, the documentation of suppression is a signal service to free speech. The collection *Silencing Dissent* is a powerful indictment of the Australian government's information-control agenda. It includes chapters by prominent commentators such as Ian Lowe and Andrew Wilkie on a range of areas, including universities, the research community, non-government organisations, the media, the public service and intelligence services.

There are many examples of attacks on individuals, such as reprisals against atmospheric scientist Graeme Pearman for his statements about climate change, and on organisations, such as criticisms of the National Museum over its indigenous exhibits. There are case studies of silencing dissent, such as the 2001 children overboard affair, used to scare people about asylum seekers, and the government's forcing of legislation through parliament without proper discussion. There are accounts of systemic changes to deter criticism, such as removing organisations' tax-deductibility status and clamping down on the Australian Broadcasting Corporation through ministerial complaints and board appointments.

Silencing Dissent is well written, accessible, up to date, referenced and filled with enough material to alarm anyone complacent about the state of public debate. It is essential reading for anyone concerned about dissent and free speech in Australia.

The main limitations of the collection can be encapsulated in two words: 'labour' and 'history'. The government's new industrial relations laws are incredibly powerful tools against free expression, targeted specifically against trade unions and more generally against labour-related activism. Dissident workers can now be dismissed far more easily. Strikes and boycotts – key forms of expressing dissent – are increasingly circumscribed. Workers whose employment is more precarious are less likely to be vocal. However, this crucial aspect of the government's assault on dissent receives little attention in Hamilton and Maddison's book.

The other major omission is a sense of history. A reader of *Silencing Dissent* might easily assume that the Liberal-National Party government in Canberra since 1996 has been uniquely damaging to free expression. Actually, there is a long history of free speech struggles in Australia. For example, during the anti-communist scare in the late 1940s and early 1950s, left activists in all walks of life were hounded. Many lost their jobs, making today's tribulations seem minor by comparison.

For decades, whistleblowers have suffered horrendous reprisals. Since the 1990s, though, their visibility, status and prospects have distinctly improved despite continuing hostility from employers.

A reader of *Silencing Dissent* might be forgiven for believing that the Howard federal government is uniquely antagonistic to free speech. Actually, Labor governments can be just as bad, depending on the circumstances, and there is plenty of suppression instigated in and by state and local governments, corporations, professions, churches and indeed trade unions.

Because *Silencing Dissent* covers so many arenas, it is unable to go into depth about any case study. At the opposite end of the spectrum in this regard is Fay Anderson's account of historian Max Crawford, 1906-91, who was appointed professor of history at the University of Melbourne at age 30. Crawford, as well as playing a central role in shaping the history discipline in Australia, was active in civil liberties organisations and, during World War II, Soviet friendship organisations. Crawford, characterised by Anderson as a progressive liberal, was a prominent advocate of free speech but, as the times changed, so did Crawford. In the 1950s he gradually retreated from activism. In 1961, he made an ill-informed allegation about a communist conspiracy in his wife's academic unit, an allegation that discredited Crawford himself and ended most of his influence.

An Historian's Life gives a good sense of how an intellectual can bend with the times, being outspoken when this was more acceptable and retreating when

circumstances changed. Anderson ably uses Crawford's extensive correspondence, as well as other archival sources and interviews, to show how his engagement with social issues and his stance on academic freedom were shaped by the historical context and by individuals in his life. This biography shows vividly how social pressures can influence the public engagement and views of an intellectual.

Anderson reveals how universities informally vetted candidates for positions or promotions – for example in seeking a person with the right background or style – long before intelligence organisations began political vetting.

At the conclusion of *Silencing Dissent*, the editors offer a brief chapter on 'Signs of resistance'. This useful treatment highlights the focus of the rest of the volume, and all the contributors, on the problems, and the lack of attention to strategies for change. The same focus is apparent in David Marr's eloquent essay 'His master's voice: the corruption of public debate under Howard' (*Quarterly Essay*, Issue 26, 2007), a superb account of the problems facing Australian dissenters without a hint of what to do.

Perhaps it is too much to ask for free-speech strategies. All these authors highlight the value of dissent and praise dissenters. This is a worthy contribution that should stimulate readers to reflect and, perhaps in some cases, to act.

University of Wollongong

BRIAN MARTIN

Patrick Bertola and Bobbie Oliver (eds), *The Workshops: A History of the Midland Government Railway Workshops*, University of Western Australia Press, Crawley, 2006. pp. 300. \$45.00 paper.

Railway workshops have held some appeal for historians. This is not surprising given the general characteristics. Typically workshops were the dominant establishment in a locality, both physically and in terms of employment, and they were close-knit communities. The construction and repair of railway rolling stock was a complex process which required a wide range of skills and this often gave rise to a diverse and highly unionised labour force with strong lines of demarcation and ingrained custom and practice. Railway workshops were usually long-established, self-sufficient and their production largely free from competitive forces. Many of these features have been highlighted, for example, in the work of John Brown (the Baldwin works in the United States), Lucy Taksa (the Eveleigh works, New South Wales, Australia), and Diane Drummond (Crewe works, Britain). The field has also been covered in a number of doctoral theses over the last decade. In addition, the subject has attracted a strong enthusiast literature, either in the form of books and articles describing the output and products of these plants, or in the reminiscences of former employees. The latter genre can be traced back to Alfred Williams' classic *Life in a Railway Factory*.

The Government railway workshops at Midland, near Perth, Western Australia, opened in 1904 and it was the largest industrial works in the State, at its peak employing 3,500 people. It undertook a wide variety of tasks including the construction, repair and maintenance of locomotives, rolling stock, and a variety of other railway equipment and material for stores. After a protracted decline the Midland workshops closed in 1994. As the editors, Patrick Bertola and Bobbie Oliver