

Time and Tide wait for none

LIGHT AIRS

IN TASMANIA, THE premier David Bartlett has just resigned in order to spend more time with his family, according to an article in The Sydney Morning Herald. Why do politicians always make the same excuse when they reach their use by date or get shafted? These grey men are seemingly being displaced by a growing band of eager women politicians with interesting hairstyles lusting for their turn at the levers of power.

As they go home to lick wounds, one can only cringe for the families of these roosters become feather dusters, returned from the crypt of the capital to lumber around the family home. In the busy political meantime, no doubt the beloved families have found their own lives.

The same paper reported that the almost forgotten Treasurer of twelve years, what's his name, Peter Costello, never attended a parent-teacher meeting. He must be very relieved to have time for such family oriented activities.

Clichés can be annoying and especially politicians, who are paid handsomely to lead and address us, should be able to do better than the usual statements, 'at the end of the day there will be a raft of measures in place to combat (whatever it is) that has to be combated in the interests of all stakeholders.'

In the opinion of this writer Wikileaks has done the community a great service in opening this moth-ridden wardrobe in the interests of reducing the irritating avalanche of political platitudes that get trotted out to a numb and disinterested public. Now we can hear what they really think of each other. Kevin Rudd, for example, was labelled a 'control freak' by the American ambassador in Canberra behind closed doors.

This Australia Day seems a good time to reflect on justice and

a fair go for those Australians who do not get such an easy ride and for older Australians whose lives have been disrupted by the great flood. At least the retiring politician has a good pension, unlike many Australian citizens who rely on the meagre offerings of government or who imagined they were properly insured.

Close to home, my older brother, who was a hard working farmer all his life, finally retired to the coast where he settled with his wife to see out their golden years. For them it was to be a settling down with careful eking out of superannuation built up over years of solid work. Fate intervened and their beautiful retirement house decided to slide four metres down the block almost next door, caving in as it went. More unhappily, 'slippage' appears as a standard exclusion from the house insurance policy.

A national disaster fund to help people caught out by natural catastrophe is on a par with the need for a fund to help patients of medical misadventure. Stop the suing. The adversarial system we live under is a picnic ground for lawyers. We are a resource rich country with the means. If there was enough political courage to tax super profits on mining there would be plenty for all these needs.

As for ageing, it sometimes seems that younger folk perceive that by the time people get into their 60s, the pattern of life is

done and dusted with no great surprises or excitements to come. At the coalface of 65, it can be a different story. You don't have to be an expert mathematician, only a finger counter really, to realise that there are not so many years of independence and activity left to go. As good as you feel, the evidence points in one direction. Time becomes more precious, less endless. This realisation can concentrate the mind towards major adjustments. Some people write their lives, some get rid of burdensome relationships, and others find new love. Intensity does not have to wane with age, though normal ambition can be futile.

When my father, always an active surgeon with a busy life and wide circle of friends, was aged and bedridden, I asked him how it felt not being able to walk anymore. His answer surprised me.

'Losing my driver's licence was much worse. That really restricted my freedom.'

I remember this and how it happened. At the time, the family breathed a sigh of relief, not realising his inner grief at this loss. His driving was scary.

My mother had asked how he passed his eyesight test. 'Dr Bob does that,' he had smugly replied.

'Dr Bob can see even less than you,' she said.

You better go and see another doctor.'



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