

**From the World Wide Web and the pages
of the now-defunct *Sydney City Hub* ...**

Nick Possum & the Victims of Political Correctness Inc.

Among the barbarians



**Nick B. Possum
Private Eye**

PLUS ...

**White Trash faction captures control of Quadrant
AND ... Fear and loathing on the fireline**

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'Among the barbarians – Nick Possum and the Victims of Political Correctness Inc.' was first published on the Nick Possum Home Page on 10 June 1998 and subsequently serialised in Nick's column 'Whispers from the mean streets', in the *Sydney City Hub* a now-defunct weekly café paper circulating in inner Sydney. 'White Trash faction captures control of Quadrant' was first published on the Nick Possum Home Page on 30 December 1997 and 'Fear and loathing on the fireline' on 13 January 1998. Neither have hitherto appeared in print.

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Among the barbarians

Nick possum & the Victims of Political Correctness Inc.

June 1998

I was sitting at my favourite table by the window of the Brushtail Café reading the *City Hub* when I noticed a well dressed blonde come down the lane. She stopped and pressed my office bell so I walked across the lane, introduced myself and led her upstairs.

“So how can I help you?”, I asked. Everything about her said Money. She was a fine looking woman in her forties. Simple classical hairdo. Simple classical gold earrings. She put a lot of money on her back. Simple classical Double Bay suit (say, \$1500). Simple classical \$400 shoes. I could feel a simple \$2000 fee in the offing. I get a bit of this sort of work. Women will discuss things with possums they wouldn't talk about to men (or even women).

“I feel horrible about this, but I'd like you to follow my husband. I suspect he's ... seeing somebody”.

“What makes you suspect, what are the signs?”, I asked. “In my experience these things often turn out to be some other problem the person is going through”. This wasn't actually true, but I find it's important to defuse the situation if paranoia is on a roll.

“Well, he's become very mean, grumpy. He explodes over trifles. He's developed a real obsessive hatred of my women friends”.

“And perhaps also of Asians, gays, Koories, the unions, the unemployed, young people, the ABC, judges, greenies ...”, I ventured.

“Well, yes, but he was always very conservative, politically ... He's with a newspaper you see”.

“Perhaps it's just a case of Mad Columnist's Disease. Does he also feel he's ...”

“No, It's not that, I know there's something more”. I could tell she had made up her mind.

“Well, is there time you can't account for?”

“Tuesday nights. Every



Everything about her said Money. She was a fine looking woman in her forties. Simple classical hairdo. Simple classical gold earrings. She put a lot of money on her back.

second Tuesday night. But also other times. He comes home late. Says sometimes he had to go to a meeting but he never says of what, and it's as though ... he's different ... as if some stress had been lifted from him. But it only lasts a day. I want you to follow him. I want to know”.

Her face had a sad resigned quality. Did instinct tell her that behind the veneer of success and status there was something she would never have?

“You'd better give me some more details about your husband”, I said.

So it was that the next Tuesday evening I waited in the rain outside the grim grey block on the edge of the city where the target worked. I had no trouble with concealment. Homeless men are a fixture on the streets there. I picked up an empty bottle of cheap muscat I found



I followed him up the hill towards the city. He was nearly sixty and seriously overweight so he moved slowly. I had been shocked when I learned his name. It was not a nice scenario.

Street. He walked into the flash new hotel opposite Hyde Park. It was the sort of place where a five foot eight and a half inch possum in a grubby trenchcoat stands out, but I nodded to the concierge as if I knew him and strolled in. The target was nowhere in sight so I sat down on the black leather lounge where I could see the lifts.

If he'd gone straight up to a room for a rendezvous with a woman I didn't have much of a chance of finding him. Perhaps, after all, he was going to a meeting. I flicked through the hotel brochure. There was a luxurious conference room on the fourth floor. I decided to check it out. I got into a lift by myself and went up.

When the lift door opened it was screened from the room by an opaque glass wall. I slipped out of the lift and looked around the edge. The room was set out for a meeting. A few people were gathered around a heavily loaded buffet table eating and drinking. My target was with them.

Their backs were turned so I walked casually across towards the only cover I could see – a fake Louis XVII dresser topped by a china vase from which exploded an enormous dried flower arrangement. Concealed behind it, a passageway led to the kitchen. I pushed open the door. It wasn't being used.

on the pavement and slumped against the wall, pretending to be asleep. Twenty minutes passed, and the target emerged.

I followed him up the hill towards the city. He was nearly sixty and seriously overweight so he moved slowly. I had been shocked when I learned his name. It was not a nice scenario. I didn't read his column much, never listened to him on the radio, so I went down to the library and looked back over the last 30 years of his stuff, to get a feel for the case.

He was pretty much the average for a Sydney pundit: he'd been a fair-weather dope-smoking lefty in the sixties but he slipped effortlessly to the right in the seventies and eighties. By the early nineties he was a full-blown free-market fundamentalist extolling a glowing consumerist future in which history would die and we would all become just the sum of our shopping. But now his world was disintegrating... currencies and stock markets were crashing, an ugly nationalism was on the rise, there were millions of unemployed in Jakarta, the trade unions were getting stropky and the Spice Girls had broken up.

I followed him down Elizabeth



I waited behind the dried flowers. The lift door opened and out walked Paddy McGuinness with Piers Ackerman and Dame Leonie Kramer. The room started to fill quickly. The celebrated redneck poet, Les Murray, was there with the *Quadrant* crowd. Frank and Miranda Devine drifted in. Then came Ron Casey with what looked like Alan Jones. Stan Zemanek turned up with Paul Sheehan, who was carrying a heavy cardboard box full of books.

There were not many women but Marlene Goldsmith arrived and I thought I recognised Bettina Arndt. Helen Demidenko-Darville was on the fringe of the party talking to a tall woman in a leather miniskirt, fuck-me shoes and fishnet stockings.

There might have been fifty people. I did some rough calculations in my head. I was looking at serious money. Their combined annual income was around \$25 million. If John Laws had walked out of the lift it would have jumped to \$37 million.

I was still utterly mystified as to what could bring this crew together when the chairman tinkled a small crystal bell to bring the gathering to order.

"I declare the 48th meeting of the Sydney Chapter of the Victims of Political Correctness Incorporated open", he announced. "There are apologies from John Howard and Pauline Hanson. Unfortunately pressing engagements have kept them in Queensland. In just a little while we're going to hear an appreciation by Brother Paddy of Brother Paul Sheehan's new book, *Among the Barbarians*, but first I'd like to welcome a new victim to our gathering. Brother Adrian has been victimised. He's the latest to have his right to free speech attacked by the Political Establishment. I'd like you to put your hands together for the Brother as he comes up to tell us about his ordeal".

There was a murmur of approval and a round of polite applause as Adrian made his way to the microphone.

"Brothers and Sisters ... " he began hesitantly.

"'Brothers', we're 'Brothers', we don't have 'Sisters', in this organisation, Brother ... that reeks of the hegemony of PC. We won't have anything to do with the Sisterhood here", interjected a columnist from the *Daily Telegraph*.

"I beg to differ with the Brother", said an elderly female academic. "I'll overlook your use of the left-wing term 'hegemony', but I must say the appellation 'Sister' has a long record of honourable use in quite respectable organisations like the Loyal Order of Wives of the British Empire and ..."

"And in the trade unions and the Catholic Church", somebody else added.

"Hang on a second, what have you got against the Church?", said a thin mustachioed figure whose voice seemed oddly familiar.

"Bunch of Bog Irish republicans and wogs", the Murdoch editor sputtered. "What about Gerard Henderson and his wife? Irish Catholic feminism with a conservative spin".

"Anyway, who are you calling a wog?", demanded a swarthy talk-back DJ.

"Please, please, some consideration for our speaker", the chairman said, raising his voice above the din.

Adrian went on: "I've just moved here from Adelaide and my friend Christopher Pearson ..."

"I know I'll be in trouble for saying this, but Pearson is a poofter. Are you a poofter too?" asked a tense, florid, white haired man seated in the back row.

Snickers and murmurs of disapproval gusted around the room.

"Well I hardly think such terminology is called for", Adrian said.

At that, the florid man lurched towards Adrian. "PC! PC!" he screamed, "You won't let us say what we want to. Censorship! It's the Jews! The Jews are using the Abos and the poofters and the greenies! Locking up the land. Cheap imports. The yellow hordes are upon us! They took my guns! I fought for this country and now They won't let me evict possums from the ceiling!"



I think it was Paddy McGuinness I saw, standing like a grim prophet in the midst of chaos as the fighting surged around him.

The chairman stood up and tinkled his little bell but everyone was yelling at once and nobody noticed. Adrian grappled with the florid man and they fell among the seats. All hell broke loose. My target started swinging wild punches at the bloke beside him. A champagne bottle spun across the room and crashed against the wall behind me.

I think it was Paddy McGuinness I saw, standing like a grim prophet in the midst of chaos as the fighting surged around him. He was bellowing slogans mustered from some deep leftist archive of his memory: "Brothers! This is what they want! Only with unity will we overcome the tyrants! We must have unity around our demand for tolerance and free expression!"

The melee subsided in a litter of upturned chairs, broken glasses, truffles, tiger prawns and soiled copies of *Among the Barbarians*. The Victims backed away from each other in small knots gibbering in low voices.

To my horror I saw the florid man staggering towards me. Perhaps he mistook the kitchen door for the toilet. It was too late to escape down the corridor but I remembered the adage Old Possum had taught me: "Bigots are easily conned by their own prejudices". I slumped against the wall and stretched out my paw. "Gibbit dollar boss, for an ol' marsupial to buy a drink, gibbit dollar for an old grey possum, boss", I said as he lurched around the dresser.

"Jesus", he muttered, reeling back, "There's an intruder, there's a fucking possum here. Who let the bludger in ... call security".

I fled into the kitchen but the back exit was locked and the Victims barricaded the door to the conference room.

Hotel security arrived five minutes later and dragged me by the tail to the lift. Most of the Victims averted their gaze but the florid man spat at me.

The chairman had re-established order and Paddy McGuinness was making kind remarks about Paul Sheehan's book. "It will rapidly become the bible of the One Nation party ... There is truth in every one of Sheehan's charges ... they will rue the day that one first-rate journalist has been so angered ..." I heard him say as the lift doors shut.

The goons hustled me through the foyer and threw me out into Elizabeth Street. "Back up the tree, possum", one of them sneered, "Don't bother coming down while your balls are still above your dick".

"I saw your face at Port Botany before you pulled your balaclava on ... You had your



partner on a leash back then ... I'll tell my wharfie mates where you work, asshole", I said.

He lifted a can of capsicum spray to my face but he fumbled with the button and I ducked around a taxi and limped across the street to the park.

I pulled the Nikon out of my trenchcoat pocket and examined it under the harsh glare of the street lamp. Despite having been bashed around in the encounter it was okay. I moved into the shadows and waited.

An hour later, the Victims drifted out of the hotel and started to leave in taxis and limousines. My target emerged. I watched through the viewfinder as he stopped near the door to talk with the tall woman in the miniskirt and the fishnet stockings. I squeezed the button and took a dozen frames before he jumped in a cab.

My hunch about Mad Columnists Disease had been right all along. I called his wife up and asked her to come over.

I searched her face as she slid elegantly into the chair opposite me. It was a kind, decent face. It seemed to be free of ego, or greed or envy. What did she really fear? What did she want?

I saw myself standing in court giving evidence in a ghastly celebrity divorce and I wanted no part of it.

I spread the prints out on my desk.

"I followed him to this hotel. He went to some sort of, ah, meeting there. He was there for a couple of hours. He walked out with this woman. I dunno, dunno ... she's another, ah, journalist ... writes about sexual politics, mostly. I've got to be objective. You wouldn't hang a dog on that evidence. I can't help you interpret this."

"Thank god, it's probably only another affair", she said sadly, "My worst fear was that he'd got mixed up with the Victims of Political Correctness".





White Trash faction captures control of *Quadrant*

30 December 1997

The patrons of the Brushtail Café were all a-twitter at the news of ructions on of the editorial board of *Quadrant*, the premier intellectual mouthpiece of capital 'C' Conservatism in Australia, not to mention the announcement that The Great Fulminator himself, Paddy McGuinness, was taking the editorial reins.

It seemed control had been wrested from the Political Correctness Faction following a palace coup – rumoured to have been led by right wing academic Dame Leonie Kramer and celebrated arts grant recipient and self-confessed 'redneck' poet Les Murray. The coup toppled the eminent historian Robert Manne from editorship of the low-circulation journal.

There followed the traditional exchange of politely vitriolic letters and restrained op-ed pieces with which the *Sydney Morning Herald* covers fallings-out in the small and incestuous world of conservative ideologists.

On the face of the debate, Manne's heresy was to have steered *Quadrant* towards what the board felt was a fashionable left-wing political correctness – by which they apparently meant his interesting idea that the women and the boongs had had a rough time at the hands of society.

Maybe it was only marsupial instinct, but a nagging inner voice kept insisting there might be more to the case.

Manne seemed to be a nice sort of bloke and his book *The Culture of Forgetting**, is a masterly analysis of the intellectual cause celebre surrounding Helen Demidenko-Darville's anti-Semitic novel *The Hand that Signed the Paper*. Unfortunately, his resolute defence of historical truth against rabid anti-semitic folklore can hardly have been received with pleasure by many on the conservative side of politics and, indeed, on the *Quadrant* editorial board.

Dame Leonie was, after all, one of the judges who awarded the prestigious Miles Franklin prize to the hoaxer Darville and who, as the controversy mounted, doggedly refuse to acknowledge the anti-semitic nature of the novel or to withdraw the award.

For Dame Leonie, Paddy McGuinness, and the *Sydney Morning Herald's* nameless editorial writer (was it Padraic P. himself?), not to mention scores of newspaper and radio pundits, the affair was about the intolerance of the "politically correct".

This followed the general line of the anti-political correctness party which tends to shamefacedly defend demagogues, racists, misogynists, and thinly-concealed nazis with the plea that any criticism of the ideas of these people is tantamount to censorship. Thus, for the Demidenko defenders, criticism of her novel was an attack on "free speech" (in Paddy's words) or even on "a tolerant and fair-minded society" (as Kramer would have it).

My mind was troubled by these things when Bettina popped into the café to take the weight off her six inch heels. Tricks were slow up at the corner, she said, and besides that she wanted to jot down some ideas she had for a *Quadrant* piece. She had a thing about original sin, the primacy of feminine perfidy and the alarming growth in the number of women politicians ... which she saw as an assault on male self-esteem.

"This is your big chance", I said, "There'll be no sacred cows in Paddy's *Quadrant* ...



it'll be a veritable charnel house of holy beasts butchered at random".

She ordered a coffee prepared in the manner popularised by the friars of the Capuchin order and began scribbling in a tiny scratchy hand on the back of a napkin.

Perhaps, I thought, at the level of literature, in terms of the pure pleasure of reading shady ideas expressed in wild and tortuous prose; on the level of ingenious special pleading and effortless bitchiness, perhaps at that level, there was no getting away from it – Paddy was The Right Choice, especially if, as so often happens with little journals, he is forced to contribute regularly himself, in order to fill up the pages.

Perhaps also, as onerous as his weekend editorial duties would be, Paddy had needed this sort of challenge for a long time.

His writing had, I felt, declined in interest since he cut his *SMH* columns back to two a week. When he was pumping out four or five, the pressure of the deadline pushed his writing towards a unique stream-of-consciousness analytical style in which his real strengths came to the fore.

A frisson of anticipation ran down my tail.

*Robert Manne, *The Culture of Forgetting: Helen Demidenko and the Holocaust*, The Text Publishing Company, Melbourne 1996.

Call for conscription in the war against
the Great Harlot Nature

Fear and loathing on the fireline

13 January 1998

When I went down to the Brushtail Café at dusk, I was surprised to see Bettina propped up at a table in the corner reading the *Sydney Morning Herald*. She looked terrible. There were big bruises on her arms and in spite of her sunglasses I could see she had a black eye.

"My God", I said "Not one of those screen jockeys from the merchant bank again ... I could get Ann and Geraldine from Dykes on Bikes to pop down to Pitt Street and sort them out ..."

"No, it wasn't them, I don't know what happened" she said, "He reckoned he was a member of parliament ... the State mob down in Macquarie Street, so I congratulated him on his superannuation rise and the next thing he went berzerk and started thumping me."

It was a bad business and she looked depressed so I changed the subject by asking how her article for *Quadrant* was going.

She pulled a wad of paper from her handbag and spread it out on the table. Her tiny spidery handwriting covered the backs of used envelopes, parking tickets and old Wetchex instruction leaflets.

She had titled it 'The Role of Female Triumphalism in the Decline of Male Self-Esteem'. It drew heavily on the public panic over girls' successes in the 1996 HSC, the writings of St Paul and a rambling op-ed piece on the Wingello bushfire tragedy from the *Sydney Morning Herald* by one David Foster who was said to be an author and a deputy captain in the Rural Fire Brigade.*

"David is a genius", she said, "Listen to this: 'I believe it imperative that we redefine fire-fighting as men's business. That a woman was critically burnt in that Wingello tanker was the worst aspect of it. Women can certainly do the work, but the presence of women



on a fireground, and the voluntary nature of the service, militates against the efficient deployment of our equipment’”.

“Well David seems to have a problem about women”, I said, “Check out paragraph three: ‘... and the bush, that old tart, perfumed up and deshabelle, smelt like a new-age boutique’, and then, ‘The eucalypts are in heat at present ...’.

“And then follows his description of the burnt-out tanker and the burnt men and his lush remarks on the inaptness of comparisons between the burn wounds and the hairy fan-flower *Scaevola ramosissima* and his tasteless observation that ‘It must be a nasty way to depart the service, cooked in close company’.

“And then there’s his anthropomorphic stuff about the stringybarks (in heat, no doubt) and how he hates them with a passion; how the stringybark will ‘cosset a flame’ and how David and his boys ‘spent a lot of time chasing flames, with a hose stream, up the stringybarks’.

“And then he winds up with a terrific flourish: the good old volunteer brigades aren’t good enough for David, he wants ‘a well paid army of conscripts and professionals ... a job for young rural unemployed men’.

“It all sounds pretty obvious to me”, I said, “The bush is female, an old harlot no less, and it needs to be triumphed over by a bunch of ardent stormtroopers ... and on the way to the final conflagration we’d better purge the women from the ranks lest they weaken our boys’ resolve and fighting ardor. If there isn’t a Freudian subtext in all this, I’ll be a mangy wombat”.

Bettina had cheered up and was nodding enthusiastically “You’re right, she said, “David sees so much further than Phil Koperburg, and he is, after all, a famous author”.

I felt confused and out of my depth. There was no accounting for human taste. I was struggling to think of a single novel that David Foster had written and his article read like an turgid fusion of poetry and prose ... but then an inspiration hit me like a firestorm running uphill with a gale-force westerly behind it and a fine fuel loading of two tonnes to the hectare in front of it.

“Why don’t you ring David and suggest he calls Paddy McGuinness”, I said “The Millennium is rushing upon us. The Book of Revelations is coming back into fashion. His stuff will go down well in the new *Quadrant*”.

*Foster, David 1998, ‘Lightning turns the bush into friend and foe’, *Sydney Morning Herald*, Tuesday 13 January 1998, p. 13.