

Australia's anti-military. A reader's comment in Quadrant Online. 1 January 2015.

I spent a considerable period of my working life in the military and after I was posted from field postings to a desk job I discovered that we are in fact funding two militaries: the excellent uniformed branch that does things and fights wars and a civilian defence bureaucracy that sucks the life out of the war-fighters. Let's call this second group the 'Vampire Defence Welfare Parasitic Internally Focused Enervating Anti-Military, Anti-Violence All-Encompassing Diversity Promoting Team' – aka VDWPIFEAMAVAEDPT for short.

We pay the uniformed military to learn and practice controlled violence against those the government deems to be 'enemies of the State.' Not surprisingly, these enemies try hard to kill our military. But to man at the other end of the two-way rifle range is not the only enemy our military has to contend with. Far harder to deal with are the armchair minions of VDWPIFEAMAVAEDPT who constantly seek out non-PC behaviours and thoughts, actions that show discrimination and bias and who with all the power granted to them will second-guess the decisions and actions of those fighting for their lives. Who can forget the decision of the non-military 'Brigadier' Lyn McDade who prosecuted two brave Commandoes for the collateral damage of children who were killed as they fought several Taliban trying to kill them? McDade serves on as a dark shadow and a threat to every lethal decision our warriors make. Maybe she could turn her attention to the Lint Café siege as there must be some publicity there?

As a shadow following our uniformed soldiers she fully demonstrated her legal abilities by completely failing in her quest as an armchair warrior to prosecute combat soldiers in Afghanistan for murder. Despite her morale-sapping incompetence I have not sighted her resignation. Surely after such an epic failure to miscarry justice an ethical person would resign? As a civilian she can never gain the understanding of what happens when under fire. It cannot be much fun knowing you are completely out of your depth and held in low regard by the military in which she hold a high, but merely symbolic rank.

The following extract is from an email from an anonymous officer who encapsulates the problem:

"The Australian Defence Force, for example, no longer deploys soldiers or staff. It "brings together people elements", according to the mission statement of the Defence People Group, a directorate once known simply as HR.

The person in charge of DPG is Rebecca Skinner, the deputy secretary, Defence People. She is one of a dozen or so elite civilian bureaucrats in the Defence Department who receive a salary in the vicinity of \$300,000 a year, somewhat more, incidentally, than a Major-General.

Few would disagree that the troops currently on the ground in Baghdad deserve every dollar they earn and then some. It is hard, however, to make the case for the shiny-trousered battalions of functionaries who make up the bulk of the workforce. Bureaucratic reform is the challenge facing former Rio Tinto managing director David Peever, who is conducting the 'First Principals Review of Defence' and is due to deliver his recommendations on efficiency and effectiveness next year. Peever and his team have much to work on. The frontline to back office ratio in Defence continues to grow in the bureaucrats' favour. In 1999, when Australian forces were deployed in East Timor, civilians made up 24 per cent of the workforce. Now it is 28 per cent, and they are rewarded more generously.

The number of senior executive grade public servants — that is to say those on salaries of \$100,000-plus — has increased by half since 2003.

The ranks of those in the highest paid category, SES Band 3, which currently attracts a salary of up to \$450,000, have swelled from six to 11.

Much of this unseemly growth in officialdom can be traced to a decision in the late 1990s to centralise supporting activities that the army, navy and air force once carried out separately. It is a fine idea in principle, but the problem with letting bureaucrats run the back office is that they will inevitably try to take over the front office, and then we are really in trouble.

So it is, one suspects, with the DPG, a division caught up in the prissy, moral crusades of our time and driven by obsessions that bear little relation to the strategic purpose of Defence.

Take, for example, the five-year Defence Diversity and Inclusion Strategy, developed by the Centre of Diversity Expertise. It is more than 20 years since Defence ended institutional discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation, yet the department has not yet gone far enough to appease the regiments of social engineers. The Centre of Diversity Expertise demands "specific strategic communications and marketing" (something we once called "advertising") to attract lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex recruits. There must be "sexual orientation, intersex and gender identity awareness and education training" and forums to discuss "best practice LGBTI workplace inclusion". Staff must produce regular reports "on the effectiveness of workplace inclusion initiatives for LGBTI people"; Defence needs "LGBTI outreach programs".

That Defence, like any modern workforce, should not discriminate goes without saying. The rules against intimidation and bullying are well established and must be enforced.

Yet the Centre of Diversity Expertise, like the Circumlocution Office, adopts the cause “as if it were a brand new thing of yesterday, which had never been heard of before; muddled the business, addled the business, tossed the business in a wet blanket”. Space does not permit us to quote more than a tiny sample of the sanctimonious jargon that oozes from Defence headquarters in Russell these days. Women, Aborigines, Torres Strait -Islanders, Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Australians, the disabled and those of a mature age get much the same treatment. Complying with these morally loaded, but ultimately self-defeating programs wastes countless hours of time and millions of dollars of resources that could be –directed to more direct ways of defending the country.

The Defence People Group could, for example, be addressing the chronic shortage of submariners that threatens our capacity to patrol vital sea-lanes. The shortage is likely to get worse.

If culture change is its goal, Defence could draw on the strengths of the Special Air Services regiment, surely among the most efficient fighting machines in the world, skilled in problem-solving and driven by results.

Pushing paper and cultural diversity (they now even have to take into account the effect of their operations on climate change) while the enemy is trying to kill our uniformed soldiers is a recipe for disaster. Let’s form a committee to consider that ...