

Bill Leak's final brilliant speech

From John Roskam, Executive Director, IPA, 12 March 2017

Editor's note: also view this very moving and salutary tribute to Bill Leak:

<http://www.heraldsun.com.au/blogs/andrew-bolt/bill-leak-a-great-cartoonist-hounded-to-the-end/news-story/0cdcf9baecdef7e456a8743e7df16b0>

Dear IPA Members

I won't be writing much to you this afternoon because as you would have heard Bill Leak died this morning of a suspected heart attack at the age of 61. Right at the moment I'm too upset and too sad to say much at all. Our thoughts are with Bill's family. I will try and gather my thoughts and write a few words about Bill next week. Bill was warm, and funny, and generous. I'm honoured to have counted Bill as a friend. Bill was a member of the IPA. I last spoke to Bill on Wednesday night at the launch of his book in Sydney. After the launch I asked Bill for a copy of his speech and yesterday morning he emailed it to me.

I've pasted below Bill's speech from Wednesday night as he sent it to me - it is Bill at his magnificent best. Please remember a very special person and please remember the principles he fought for.

John Roskam

"Ladies and gentlemen,

I know it's International Women's Day so first I must apologise for not being a woman. It's particularly regrettable that I'm not a glamorous Sudanese-Egyptian-Australian woman who wears a hijab promoting a book about what it's like being a glamorous Sudanese-Egyptian-Australian woman who wears a hijab. If I was, this wouldn't be the *only* event I've got lined up on my non-government funded whirlwind Trigger Warning awareness-raising tour.

When I met the great cartoonist Bill Mitchell about 34 years ago, he said, "Mate, a cartoonist only has to be funny once a day, but it's a lot harder than you'd think." He was right, but he had no idea how much harder it would be for me than it ever was for him.

For a start, in order for Bill Mitchell to come up with a cartoon, all he had to do was take a serious political issue, exaggerate it to the point of ridiculousness, then draw what he saw when he got there. But I can't do that because the ideas our politicians come up with these days are utterly ridiculous to begin with. And if you're starting at the point of absurdity, where do you go from there? I mean, what am I going to have to come up with to make teachers in the Safe Schools program look ridiculous when they actually start giving jobs to gimps? And how long do you think it will be then before some gimps' rights campaigner accuses me of gimpophobia? It's only a matter of time.

Another reason why the job's so much harder now than it was for Bill Mitchell is because, unlike him, I can't just breezily assume people are looking at my cartoons hoping to get a laugh. Ever since conceptual art supplanted transcendent art, all art has been reduced to the level of graffiti. And to people reared on postmodernism and cultural relativism who can't tell the difference between Picasso and Banksy, I'm not a cartoonist drawing cartoons for a newspaper; I'm an artist exhibiting his work in a gallery that gets hundreds of thousands of visitors through the doors every day. And the work of a man like that has to be taken *very* seriously indeed. It has to be *analysed*. It has to be *deconstructed*. It has to be *decoded* by these people in a search for hidden meanings. And because art, like political activism, is a form of therapy, it's supposed to reinforce and confirm their prejudices, not challenge them.

Well, bugger that.

Political correctness is a poison that attacks the sense of humour. Luckily for Bill Mitchell, it was tipped into our water supply at around the time he retired and, since then, it's infected an awful lot of people. As the senses of humour of people suffering from PC atrophy, their sensitivity to criticism becomes more and more acute until they get to the stage where everything offends them and they lose the ability to laugh entirely.

For people with chronic PC, feeling offended is about as good as it gets. A good cartoon gives them an excuse to parade their feelings of moral superiority in 140 characters or less, scrawled on the toilet door of social media where every other humourless halfwit who's seen the cartoon and felt offended too can join in the fun. And they do.

Well, I don't twit, and I don't face, so most of the time I'm able to remain blissfully unaware of all the howls of outrage and indignation directed at me in response to my cartoons -- but not always. Two years ago I realised that sometimes I really do have to worry about whether people think my cartoons are funny or not when I discovered that bloodthirsty barbarians aren't immune to political correctness and their delicate sensibilities are just as easily offended as those of any precious little snowflake you'll find in a gender studies faculty at a university. And for your average Islamist terrorist, firing off a few impassioned obscenities on a Twitter feed is no substitute for the sort of satisfaction you can get by hunting down the person who's offended you and chopping his head off.

Then, in October last year I realised there's another group of people who are just as capable of making life hell for me if they fail to be amused by my wit and artistry. It's just my luck that *causing* offence has been *made* an offence at the same time that *taking* offence has become fashionable. So now there's a mob that won't only punish you if your cartoon offends them, they'll punish you if it's offended someone else. They might be a little less murderous than your Islamist terrorists, but they're no less unhinged and they're no less dangerous. They're also driven by the same authoritarian impulse to silence, using whatever means they have at their disposal, anyone who transgresses against the unwritten laws of political correctness. I'm talking, of course, about the thought police at that rogue

totalitarian outfit, the Australian Human Rights Commission.

Well, bugger them, too.

Thank goodness for deplorables like you, that's all I can say. I knew I was in the company of fellow subversives, dissidents and weirdos when I opened my remarks with a potentially explosive "ladies and gentlemen" and no one complained."

John Roskam
Executive Director

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