

In-efficiency dividends The anti-culture wars

Libraries, galleries and museums have been subjected to two per cent budget cuts every year since 1987. One-off belt-tightening might direct staff towards core objectives. Year-upon-year cuts take us to the frog in the pot of water on a stove. Long before the water boils, the frog dies. That fate has befallen cultural institutions. Yet their doors remain open. Books are still read. Paintings and relics are viewed every day.

Some of the means adopted to do so are adding to the impact of death by 1,000 cuts. Quality is sacrificed to quantity. A second affront is that institutions intended for the general public are sold out to corporates.

The havoc began in the heyday of Hawke-Keating irrationalism when the Department of Finance calculated that the National Gallery in Canberra should not hold prints and drawings because it could not display them all the time since they faded.

William Baumol, a winner of the fake 2003 Nobel Prize in self-styled Economic Science, explains why it is much harder to quantify productivity in the service sector than on a production line. Some requests for information take a couple of minutes to answer. Others might need a couple of hours – even days. Because the managers cannot standardize all the services, they shut them down.

Two kinds of cuts depress the quality of service at the National Library of Australia. First, there is the loss of specialist staff in Rare Books, Pictorial and Manuscripts. Last year, the Asian Studies Reading Room closed which means that requests are no longer handled by staff who are linguistically and culturally competent in non-English holdings.

Secondly, and despite the hoo-ha about STEM subjects, the NLA has cancelled its physical and on-line subscriptions to *Nature* and to all its derivative publications.

[A freelance Communist in Russia has created a site to break through the pay-walls - https://www.reddit.com/r/scihub/comments/jg8ka2/official_scihub_website_directory_scihub_project/?utm_medium=android_app&utm_source=share]

Closed to the public

'National' in the National Gallery of Victoria is not another piece of that State's chauvinism. When its Gallery was founded in 1861, 'National' meant for the public, as distinct from private collections. Now the tax-funded institutions are being turned into bemusement centres for the big end of town.

The State Library of Victoria closes for a few days during Fashion Week so that photographers can take shots on the marble staircase. Its managers rent out other parts of the building for weddings and wakes. How long before the Library applies for the Crown licence?

Arts Patron and co-founder of Transfield Franco Belgiorno-Nettis confesses in his corporation's official history that he and his ilk cover up their criminality and strong-arm tactics with 'a veneer of civilisation.'

Ian Potter has his brand all over the visual arts in Melbourne. Potter should have gone to gaol for his stock-market manipulations during the collapse of the Cox Bros chain of stores in 1960-61, when he helped to swindle investors out of nearly \$16m. In place of stiff sentence, Potter got a knighthood. Dick Pratt is another crook

who used philanthropy to cover up his stealing from every Australian by the cartel pricing of cardboard products. Elizabeth Murdoch could underwrite a concert venue because, although Rupert might be a swine, he is not such a shit that he would let his mother pay tax.

Kerry Stokes donated his way to the Chair of the War Memorial with tax-deductible gifts paid for out of the profits he extracts from his wage-slaves. He did the same to get his son in as head of the National Library Council in the vain hope that proximity to books might teach him to read.

The recently retired Chair of the State Library of Victoria, John Wylie, earned his spot by donating and showing that he could attract other donors. Once installed, he took over the functions of a managing director. On his watch, we lost the Victoria Gallery, Manuscripts, Rare Books and Pictorial Rooms. The Library Board installed a money-making loss exhibition about *Les Miserables*. Mrs Wylie was the French Consul.

The extensions to the Art Gallery of New South Wales that will flow down towards the harbour are not to exhibit more art painting but for spaces to rent out for corporate entertainment. In *Culture Heist art versus money* (2017), the long-term executive for Friends of the Art Gallery of New South Wales, Judith White, captures the *modus operandi* for these takeovers across the country.

At the 'Public' Library of NSW, the forces of darkness suffered a partial check to their scheme to stick a restaurant on top of the Mitchell Library Reading Room. That ambition has been reduced to a roof-top bar for 120 people open till midnight. The Library's management promotes this vandalism to 'increase visitations to the library, stimulate the local economy and to maximise the potential of this unique, picturesque location.' Note the management-speak of 'visitations' - not even visitors, let alone readers.

At the Library of South Australia, the Mortlock collection is no longer the pulsing mind of South Australian studies. Instead, the Mortlock Chamber shows how 'books do decorate a banquet room' with space to seat 200 for product launches. That barbarism resulted from the Library Board's engagement of a 'change agent.' Gawdelpus!

A rank-and-file union- campaign saved the Fryer Library at University of Queensland. Staff fight to preserve the quality of service by keeping provisions for reference librarians and curators in their EBAs. The pressure is having an effect. The in-efficiency dividend is being reduced by a quarter. The rest has to go and thirty-four years of cutting repaid.

On the other side, management is anxious to shed specialists because they cost more than teenagers in t-shirts whose expertise is confined to pointing hopeful researchers towards computer terminals.

What they forget

The Australian War Memorial needs \$500m. to display future wars. It's long past the time to use its bloated funding to tell the truth about previous war crimes, starting from those against first peoples here and against our 'Anzac mates,' the Maori. It's also high time to install a replica of one of the British concentration camps in which more than 30,000 women and children were murdered during the Boer War.

The SAS is not subject to efficiency dividends, or even to the loss of its unit citation. What could be the reason for that?