

## Purely Devine

In the company of politicians, academics and legal professionals, it was bemusing at first to see the lone female speaker at the 2009 *Sir Samuel Griffiths* was none other than an opinion columnist. Whatever one may think of that unique breed of individual espousing definitive views in somewhat stark contrast to their “objective” reporter-type colleagues, a female opinion columnist in the midst of a conservative male line-up leads to only one question – affirmative action?

Seeing as this writer had not heard of Miranda Devine in the past, it seemed appropriate to perhaps attempt to do a little bit of research and possibility foresee a little about the content which Devine would preach – “Human Rights Bureaucracies.”

It is of no doubt Devine is a journalist born and bred. An academic would title their paper “*A discussion on issues pertaining to the development of Human Rights and those groups promoting their protection.*” Whilst a lawyer would title their paper “*Rights of the Human (per Geneva Convention); a discussion over legal interpretation.*” And a politician, ever careful of political correctness and the sensitivity of the electorate would settle for something along the lines “*Human Rights: how to protect them, whilst preventing terrorism, decreasing the unemployment rate, cutting taxes, increasing welfare, improving health, education...etc.*”

But Devine is upfront and to the point. Playing on the masses entrenched feelings of frustration against public sector’s inability to perform any task in a timely fashion and the much loved buzz word of “human rights,” she creates such a stark juxtaposition that would make “human rights” activist cry, totally ignorant to the actual right of “free speech”, that such a perverse phrase should not be allowed to be published.

So having managed to deduce that Devine’s paper would not be a melancholy menagerie of anger towards Howard or Bush, or a plea for those still wishing it was the good old days of the 60’s resistance, unlike the other 99% of papers written on human rights nowadays, it was time for the background researching on Devine to begin. It seemed that I had found the long awaited combatant to Germaine Greer and the leftist elite encouraging radical social change. I wondered where this columnist had been all my life. Why hadn’t I heard of her take on society before? And why was I pressured to write a post modern Greer feminist perception of several Shakespearean texts when I would have really enjoyed using the Devine approach?

To save sounding like Devine’s publicist or spruiker –it is not Devine’s sometimes radical social policy which appeals, more her somewhat lone voice in a sea of left-leaning activists. It was appealing to expect that her paper may present some of the arguments against blindly trusting the many human rights crusaders in contemporary society.

A simple *google* search revealed more about Miranda Devine. Wikipedia described her stance on political social issues as “conservative” within the first line and many other hits both espoused her ability to connect with the community, whilst others presented a rather dissatisfied opinion about her columns.

So where better to understand a bit about the person behind the paper, than on her own blog <http://mirandadivine.com>, an uncensored, sometimes crass but overwhelmingly passionate space. In the midst of kindergarten-esque photo-shopping of pictures of Kevin Rudd, jabs at politicians from both sides of the coin and a list of “*Glorious and unqualified assertions about Kevin Rudd*” including that he associates with a communist vegan, is the love child of Justice Kirby and Peter Garrett, and eats babies, there is a theme of conservatism, scepticism and what Devine describes as, the voice of

the silent majority. Although most of her columns for the Sydney Morning Herald are somewhat censored for mainstream reading compared to her blog, they follow a similar tone; critical of Government and critical of political correctness getting in the way of society functioning efficiently.

With the background research completed I was intrigued to see what Devine's paper would espouse. Due to family reasons, unfortunately Miranda Devine was unable to attend the conference and deliver her paper in person, but nevertheless the reading of her paper shed an alternate light on the issues surrounding promotion of human rights by various bodies. She was intensely critical of the narrow minded approach human rights organisations play in creating fear within the wider community that one minor group or one human right is being violated, without adequately assessing the situation as a whole.

Many critics of Devine denounce her controversial, somewhat one sided articles. I find this quite a peculiar criticism seeing as it inherently obvious from the job description of an opinion columnist that they are employed to write articles which are merely opinion. But Devine fires back at these critics scathing their one sided view of the situation. It reminded me of the recent example given by the former Prime Minister of Australia the Hon. John Howard AC at the 2009 Menzies Lecture at the University of Western Australia where he spoke about the introduction of emergency terror laws in response to the September 11 attacks which gave police the right to detain an individual without charge. Human rights 'crusaders' were outraged that such laws would deprive persons of their liberty without any formal charge. Yet Howard made a convincing counter argument; what about the rights of the rest of society not to be killed and injured due to actions of terrorists, isn't that the predominant right we should be protecting? Devine had previously written, on the subject of the police investigation of the Haneef case that;

*"The police can't win. When it comes to weighing the safety of the public versus the perhaps mistaken detention of a terrorism suspect it seems we don't want a seasoned police commander trusting his instincts, and erring on the side of caution.*

*It will be our own fault when we eventually get a police force of automatons, blocking every hunch with the dead hand of objectivity."*

Devine's paper made one resounding argument; that the mill of human rights agencies, so called protectors of freedom, are doing Australia more harm than good. For example, the outcry from members of the Muslim community in Australia outraged over the searching of a Muslim families house on the Ramadan. To this Devine countered;

*"Then the complaints came thick and heavy from people outraged "culturally insensitive" police would dare execute a search warrant during Ramadan, a holy month of the Islamic calendar, when Muslims fast until sunset. Do they think there should be one law for Ramadan observers and another for "kefeirs"?..."*

*"A lot of people like to use excuses for their behaviour. There's a way to solve that - don't commit crime ...  
"This is NSW. We have laws in this state we must all abide by, and these people have to abide by the same laws.""*

In context with one of the predominant issues discussed at this year's conference, the question of an Australian Bill or Charter of Human Rights, it was appropriate for Devine to make mention of how

the cause *for* a bill of rights is popularized by those human rights proponents maintaining that such a piece of legislation will lead to the protection of human rights within the Australian community. Many other speakers including the Hon. Christian Porter MLA and the Hon. John Hatzistergos MLC, the Attorney-General's of WA and NSW respectively, and also the University of Queensland's Garrick Professor of Law James Allan, spoke so strongly against a bill of rights that it was hard to understand why any individual could make a case *for* a bill of rights.

The bill of rights debate is not two sided. There are members of both sides of politics, academics, members of the legal profession and many others in the wider community opposed to the bill. However, this argument is somewhat quietened by the verbosity of human rights activists playing on public ignorance and claiming that a bill of rights will save the world from the destruction of rights unalienable to all individuals.

Without reciting the many arguments against a bill of rights, I will merely state that the argument against it is almost impossible to counter. I came to the conference believing that a bill of rights was dangerous, I left understanding that it would not only be dangerous, but inevitably lead to our politicians becoming managers, rather than decision makers, and our courts becoming politically active rather than strictly interpretive.

The question which arose in my mind was;

*Why would individuals or human rights agencies support a bill of rights?*

The answer from Devine was simple – it is the trend of human rights proponents to promote ideas which serve to support a feeling of “saving” the rights of each individual from the anarchistic powers of Government. Human rights bureaucracies play on individual events, without seeing the picture as a whole. These organisations fail to grasp what is good for the whole of society, rather focusing on the utopian and populist ideals.

Many argue that Devine is too opinionated. That she fails to evaluate each side of the coin. Yet in her paper to the 2009 Samuel Griffith Society Devine built on the bill of rights debate, with her take on why individuals seek to promote such idealistic, though unrealistic causes. Of course Devine's papers and articles are opinionated, that is inherent in being an **opinion** columnist. In a field of well articulated arguments and examples, Devine's paper delved further into the psyche of the Australian community. I am sure any suggestion of affirmative action would be scoffed at by Devine, and I would whole-heartedly agree. Her paper was provocative, honest and brilliant. With a unique ability to connect with the Australian populous and *tell it how she sees it*, I'll be no doubt more wary of human rights crusaders lurking around my neighbourhood in the years to come.

**Zach Cole**