

7th ANNUAL ETHNIC COMMUNITIES' COUNCIL OF VICTORIA
WALTER LIPPMANN MEMORIAL ORATION 13 Sept 2018
THE THREAT TO MULTICULTURALISM

Julian Burnside

I am delighted to have been asked to give this year's Walter Lippmann Memorial Oration.

Walter Lippmann

I never met Walter Lippmann, and knew nothing about him before this.

In 2016, a collection of extracts from his writing was compiled by Andrew Markus and Margaret Taft. In it, they wrote

“... we are all indebted to Walter Lippmann, who epitomized all that it is to be a *mensch*, a great human being, a compassionate, generous soul who gave of himself to others”.

I recognized the sentiment, because I have an indirect contact with Walter Lippmann – a colleague of mine at the Victorian Bar, who happens to be his grandson: Matthew Albert.

Walter Lippmann was born on 19 December 1919 in Hamburg. He was part of a cultured, prosperous Jewish family. His uncle was a lawyer.

A number of his ancestors had come to Australia in the 19th Century, and the rise of Nazism in Germany in the 1930s caused Walter's family to flee.

Walter was 19 years' old when he arrived in Melbourne with his family in January 1939 – just a couple of months after Kristallnacht.

When World War II started, he was required to register as a German alien, which he did on the 13th September, 1939 at St Kilda Police Station.

He was naturalized in 1944 and was employed as a technical librarian at McPhersons, but when the war ended he lost his job because McPhersons were required to employ returned servicemen.

So Walter set up an electrical fittings business, Meteor Lighting.

In 1945, he married Lorna Matenson, who deserves a memorial oration of her own. She has been described as “a huge intellect, cloaked in elegance and charm”. She was shocked when, in 1957, Doug Nicholls helped reveal the terrible conditions in which aborigines were living in the Warburton Ranges in Western Australia. She became a campaigner for the amendment of state and territory laws which discriminated against Aboriginal people, including those laws which enabled the states and territories to remove Aboriginal children from their parents.

From 1964 to 1975 she was a research fellow at the Monash University Centre for Research into Aboriginal Affairs. She was advisor to Gordon Bryant, when Bryant was Federal Minister for Aboriginal Affairs in the Whitlam government, and she published several works on aboriginal issues, including (in 1981) *Generations of Resistance: The Aboriginal Struggle for Justice*.

I mention Lorna for a specific reason. Walter Lippmann is famous, and is justly honoured, for his work in encouraging the idea of multiculturalism in Australia, as a champion of the merits of ethnic diversity. In the 1960s, this principally meant creating links between the (strongly Anglo) population who had occupied this land for almost 200 years, and the post-war arrivals from other cultures.

Lorna's work involved a parallel attempt to bridge the gap between European members of our community and the Aboriginal people, whose ancestors had occupied this land for about 50,000 years.

It is a curious feature of multiculturalism in Australia that Indigenous people are not embraced by it. On one view of things, they should have been the group who originated it. Indigenous Australians comprise 2.7% of the population, but they are widely regarded by the rest as a lost cause.

At public events like this, it is common to hear well-intentioned people acknowledge the traditional owners of the land on which we meet. It is a reasonable thing to acknowledge the traditional owners. But it is incomplete in crucial ways.

If we are to acknowledge that we meet on the land of the Wurrundjeri people of the Kulin Nation, why don't we also acknowledge that our ancestors took it from them? And that we don't intend to give it back? And that the connection between indigenous people and the land is closer than the connection between indigenous people and their parents. Taking the land from them caused immense harm.

We redoubled that harm by taking their children from them.

And we have no coherent plan to repair the harm we caused.

The acknowledgement of the traditional owners serves mainly to make *us* feel better.

Perhaps we should start by including indigenous people in our conception of multiculturalism.

I don't mean to sound pessimistic, but Lorna's work is far from complete and Walter's work is under threat.

Walter Lippmann helped establish the Ethnic Communities Council of Victoria (ECCV) and it is the ECCV which established the Walter Lippmann memorial oration in 2011.

Walter Lippmann's life was dedicated to migrants, human rights and support for cultural diversity. Consistently with that, the ECCV is the principal advocate for culturally diverse community groups in Victoria and it pursues a vision of a culturally diverse and harmonious society that is just, fair and inclusive.

It's often said that Australia is a very successful multicultural nation. I think that is true.

It was not always so, and there is no guarantee that it will always be so.

Those of you here tonight who, like me, grew up in Australia in the 1950s might remember how it was: Sunday lunch was lamb and three veg – always cooked to within an inch of its life. Post-war immigrants were treated badly and with suspicion. They were called insulting names; they “didn't speak English properly”, they were “too religious”, they “had too many kids”, they “didn't mix in” and ... they “ate weird food”. Walter Lippmann's great insight was that for immigrants to this country, it was important to be able to retain their culture while accepting those of their new home. We were not to be a melting pot – where all the ingredients become indistinguishable, but a combination of various cultures united by shared goals and shared values. Walter Lippmann said of a new arrival to a multicultural society:

“only when he enjoys the sense of belonging to a group and thus feels secure in his own identity would he feel secure to venture into a wider society”. He believed that it was the fundamental right of all individuals to be free to find their “own level of acculturation or assimilation”.

In 1992, the central features of the Australian model for immigration and ethnic relations were described this way:

- planning and strict control of entries by the government;
- entry policy marked by non-discrimination on the basis of race, ethnicity and national origin, but selectivity according to economic and social criteria;
- rapid access to citizenship and other formal rights;
- active social policies and special agencies to deal with the educational, social and economic needs of immigrants;
- acceptance of cultural pluralism, within carefully defined limits.

The “planning and strict control of entries” feature has become a matter of obvious importance in recent years, in connection with our response to boat people.

The major threat to multiculturalism these days, in my opinion, is the rise of Islamophobia: it has become a distinctive feature of Australia specifically, since the Tampa episode in 2001.

Islamophobia is not an unheralded phenomenon in this country. Before WWII, before multiculturalism was a distinctive feature of Australia, the events which ultimately drove Walter Lippmann's family to Australia were developing in Germany.

In 1935, the Nuremberg laws rendered German Jews stateless.

By 1938, 150,000 Jews had fled to Palestine, but in 1938 the Anschluss, by unifying Germany and Austria, added a further 200,000 Jews who sought to flee Nazism.

Evian Conference

The Evian conference was held from 6-13 July 1938. Kristallnacht had not yet happened. The purpose of the conference was to discuss the problem of the increasing number of Jewish refugees.

At that time, refugees had little choice but to move to countries adjacent to the trouble spot.

The Evian conference conspicuously failed to pass a resolution condemning Nazi persecution of the Jews.

Australia was represented at the Evian Conference by the Minister for Trade and Customs, T. W. White, who said:

"Australia has her own particular difficulties...migration has naturally been predominantly British, and it (is not) desired that this be largely departed from while British settlers are forthcoming.

...

It will no doubt be appreciated also that as we have no real racial problem, we are not desirous of importing one by encouraging any scheme of large-scale foreign migration...I hope that the conference will find a solution of this tragic world problem."

Anti-Semitism was alive and well in Australia in the 1930s, as it was in other Western countries. The more things change, the more they stay the same.

It is tempting to reach far back into history for the origins of human rights thinking. But it is not necessary to go back further than 1948.

The UDHR

The Universal Declaration was the work of a surprising activist: Eleanor Roosevelt. She was the widow of Franklin Delano Roosevelt who had died shortly before the end of the Second World War. She was also cousin to Roosevelt and had grown up in the rich surroundings of the Roosevelt family. But Eleanor Roosevelt was a genuine egalitarian and had set her heart on responding decisively to the horrors of the Second World War.

The Universal Declaration begins as follows:

PREAMBLE

Whereas recognition of the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world,

Whereas disregard and contempt for human rights have resulted in barbarous acts which have outraged the conscience of mankind, and the advent of a world in which human beings shall enjoy freedom of speech and belief and freedom from fear and want has been proclaimed as the highest aspiration of the common people,

Whereas it is essential, if man is not to be compelled to have recourse, as a last resort, to rebellion against tyranny and oppression, that human rights should be protected by the rule of law, ...

It's not widely remembered that Australia was advocating that the rights it declared should be enforceable. The inspiration for that of course came from the fact that Ben Chifley was the Prime Minister at the time and Doc Evatt, uniquely among Australians, was the President of the General Assembly on 10 December 1948 when the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was adopted by the United Nations. Australia's influence in the formation of the declaration was very significant, especially considering that we only had a population of about 3.5 million back then.

I like to think that the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was a genuine reflection of the sentiment of the times: across Australia and across the world.

But things changed.

The Tampa episode

At the start of 2001, John Howard was facing an election to be held in November that year. He played what he probably hoped would be a trump card and which turned out to be more successful than he could have dared hope for. He became aware that a small boat, the Palapa, carrying Hazara refugees from Afghanistan was falling apart in the Indian Ocean. He knew the Norwegian container ship the MV Tampa was in the area. He asked the Tampa to rescue the people on the Palapa.

The captain of the Tampa agreed, and when he found the Palapa he thought it might hold maybe 50 people. He was astonished when 434 people climbed out of the water, up the rope ladder and onto the deck of the Tampa.

Australia – indeed the whole world – knew about the Taliban's murderous attitude to Hazaras. In February that year, the Taliban had publicly destroyed the Bamiyan Buddhas. The statues had been erected 1500 years earlier by Hazaras – they are thought to be descendants of Genghis Khan – when they arrived in the area now known as Afghanistan. Hazaras are readily identifiable, because they look Asian. They were Buddhists when they arrived, but later converted to Islam. But they embraced Shia Islam. The Taliban are Sunni Muslims, and claimed that they wanted to clear Afghanistan of idolatry. The division between Shia and Sunni Muslims is as sharp and hostile as the division between Protestants and Roman Catholics used to be.

When the Tampa had rescued the refugees on the Palapa, there were two problems: some of them were in bad shape and needed medical help. And the Tampa was licensed to carry 50 people: it had 47 crew, and (suddenly) 434 unexpected passengers.

Captain Arne Rinnan decided to put the refugees ashore at Christmas Island, which was on his planned route.

Christmas Island is a speck of Australian sovereignty in the Indian Ocean. It is close to the equator. It is about 2000 kilometres to the nearest point on the West Australian coast and is almost 3000 kilometres from Perth or Darwin.

But when the Tampa entered Australian territorial waters off Christmas Island, Howard sent out the SAS, who took command of the bridge at gunpoint.

A stand-off followed. Howard closed the airspace above Christmas Island, and issued a command that no "humanising images" of the "rescuees" should be taken (the government coined the oddly dehumanising expression "rescuees" for the people who had been rescued). A group of us went to the Federal Court to try and resolve the impasse: after all, there were more than 400 people – men, women and children – being held hostage on the steel deck of a ship, in the tropical sun. The trial was heard straight away by Justice North in the Federal Court. He delivered judgment at 2.15 pm, Eastern Australian Time, on 11 September 2001. The attack on America happened about 8 hours later.

John Howard, always quick to scramble for a political advantage, started calling boat-people "illegals". The Federal election was held two months later. Howard went to the polls with the slogan "We will decide who comes to the country, and the circumstances in which they come." The coalition election campaign had Philip Ruddock – the walking spectre – as its pin-up boy.

The Tampa episode, coupled with the terror attack of 9/11, revived an ancient fear in Australia: a fear that our hold on this country is insecure. I dare say Lorna Lippmann would understand that.

Having come to this country and done what we could to transform it into an outpost of Britain, for a long time we were a mono-culture. After WWII we saw that we needed more people to help build the country. More recently, we discovered that multiculturalism did good and didn't hurt.

But Islamophobia revived the old fear that we were unsafe; that our grip on this land was insecure.

After 9/11, a colleague of mine gave me a very disturbing report. She is a middle-aged Indian woman. She is not Muslim, but she wears a head-scarf which looks a little like hijab. After 9/11, for the first time, she was spat at on public transport.

Asylum seeker policy

And after 9/11 our treatment of boat people became conspicuously harsh. A few facts about our asylum seeker policy are clear:

First: we receive far fewer unauthorised arrivals in Australia than most other nations do. Our refugee "problem" is a tiny one.

Second: boat people do not commit an offence by arriving here without papers.

Third: 90% of the boat people turn out ultimately to be genuine refugees.

Fourth: despite these facts, we lock-up boat people indefinitely in circumstances which drive many of them to despair, madness, self-harm or suicide.

Fifth: a succession of Coalition governments strenuously (and successfully) argued in court for powers which no decent democratic government should ever seek, including:

- (a) The right to hold a failed asylum seeker in detention for the rest of his life, if the Government is unable to remove that person from Australia;
- (b) The right to hold people in detention regardless how harsh or inhumane the conditions in detention may be.
- (c) The right to hold children in detention regardless of age, health or other circumstances;
- (d) The right to send a failed asylum seeker to a place where death or torture is a certainty;

Sixth: people in immigration detention are often held in solitary confinement – for days or weeks at a time – but the use of solitary confinement is completely unregulated.

Seventh: people held in immigration detention used to be liable for the costs of their own incarceration. No other country in the world does this. The only precedents are Robespierre's France (the Law of Suspects 1793) and Hitler's Germany.

We now have people in offshore detention on Manus Island (part of PNG) and Nauru who have been there for 5 years. We have people in detention at Yongah Hill in Western Australia and Christmas Island who have been detained for up to 10 years.

They have committed no offence: they have not been tried or sentenced to imprisonment. But imprisoned they are.

Being Muslim is now a basis for being mistreated.

And our fear of Islam does not stop with Muslims: it affects Tamils fleeing Sri Lanka and pre-Christian groups fleeing other countries.

Because since September 11, 2001, many Australians assume that all boat people are Muslims.

Fear is the great threat to multiculturalism in Australia. It is hard to avoid the thought that our fear is the product of the fact that white people arrived in this country 230 years ago and simply occupied it:

we displaced the people who had occupied it for 50,000 years. And now, 230 years since we arrived here, we are afraid that we may lose our grip on the country.

We overlook the fact that multiculturalism has worked incredibly well here.

We overlook the enormous contribution made to our culture by people who arrived here since the end of WWII.

We overlook the fact that our population is aging: in a few years, more Australians will be older than 45 than are younger than 45.

We overlook the fact that most of the people who try to come here to escape persecution are young, energetic, eager to work, and show courage and initiative in their attempts to get here.

But we mistreat them.

Scott Morrison used to be their chief tormentor. Now he is our PM: he narrowly beat Dutton, despite Dutton having led the coup.

Scott Morrison is horribly ill-suited to be Prime Minister of this country.

In his maiden speech in Parliament, Scott Morrison placed great emphasis on his Christian values. Among other things he said:

"So what values do I derive from my faith? My answer comes from Jeremiah, chapter 9:24:

... I am the Lord who exercises loving-kindness, justice and righteousness on earth; for I delight in these things, declares the Lord.

From my faith I derive the values of loving-kindness, justice and righteousness, to act with compassion and kindness, acknowledging our common humanity and to consider the welfare of others; to fight for a fair go for everyone to fulfil their human potential and to remove whatever unjust obstacles stand in their way, including diminishing their personal responsibility for their own wellbeing; and to do what is right, to respect the rule of law, the sanctity of human life and the moral integrity of marriage and the family. We must recognise an unchanging and absolute standard of what is good and what is evil. Desmond Tutu put it this way:

... we expect Christians ... to be those who stand up for the truth, to stand up for justice, to stand on the side of the poor and the hungry, the homeless and the naked, and when that happens, then Christians will be trustworthy believable witnesses.

These are my principles."

If those are Scott Morrison's principles, he is not a man of his principles. During his time as Immigration Minister, Morrison showed no trace of "loving kindness" or justice or compassion for refugees who came to Australia by boat looking for protection from persecution. He issued a directive to Immigration staff that the group who are referred to in the Migration Act as "irregular maritime arrivals" must thereafter be referred to as "illegal maritime arrivals".

Let's be clear about this: Scott Morrison specifically ordered immigration staff to lie, or (at least) to mislead people.

Morrison recorded a video, which was screened in the detention centres on Nauru and Manus, in which he told boat people that they would never be allowed to settle in Australia.

Morrison is a dishonest hypocrite, but we tolerate him, and got him as our Prime Minister. Oddly, it almost felt like a relief.

But why do we tolerate people like Dutton and Morrison? Why do we tolerate their dishonesty and cruelty?

Fear.

Fear of Islam, which was triggered by 9/11, was fanned by political dog-whistling and is a real threat to multiculturalism.

Because fear of “the other” makes people less willing to tolerate difference. It is the impulse which led to the early response of “assimilation”: the idea that all foreigners who come here must (quickly) become like us.

That is the opposite of multiculturalism.

Offshore processing

Until 2013, when boat people arrived at Christmas Island, they had typically spent eight or 10 days on a rickety boat. They had typically come from landlocked countries and had typically never spent time on the ocean. Typically, they had not had enough to eat or drink on the voyage. Typically, they had not had any opportunity to wash or to change their clothes. Typically, they arrived distressed, frightened and wearing clothes caked in their own excrement.

They were not allowed to shower or to change their clothes before they were interviewed by a member of the Immigration Department. It is difficult to think of any decent justification for subjecting them to that humiliation.

When they arrived, any medical appliances they have would be confiscated and not returned: spectacles, hearing aids, false teeth, prosthetic limbs: all were confiscated. If they had any medications with them, those medications were confiscated and not returned. According to doctors on Christmas Island, one person had a fulltime job of sitting in front of a bin popping pills out of blister packs for later destruction.

If they had any medical documentation with them, it was confiscated and not returned. The result of all of this was that people with chronic health problems found themselves denied any effective treatment. The results could be very distressing.

Doctors were required to determine within 48 hours whether there was any reason why a person was unsuitable to be moved to Manus or Nauru. Some of the tests which are necessary for that assessment take seven days to complete. They were not given the opportunity to complete the tests properly. The detainees were nevertheless moved to Nauru or Manus.

One doctor who worked on Christmas Island told me of a woman who had been detained there for some weeks because she was generally regarded as psychotic. Her behaviour was highly erratic, but for reasons no-one understood. The consultation with this woman was very difficult because, although the doctor and the patient were sitting across a table from each other, the interpreter joined them by telephone from Sydney: over 5000 kilometres away.

Eventually, the doctor worked out the problem: the woman was incontinent of urine. She could not leave her cabin without urine running down her leg. It was driving her mad. When the doctor worked out the cause of the problem, she asked the Department to provide incontinence pads. The Department’s initial response was “we don’t do those”. The doctor insisted. The Department relented and provided four per day: more than that would be a fire hazard, they said.

In 2012, the Pacific Solution was revived by Julia Gillard and in 2013 it became much harsher thanks to Kevin Rudd, in his second incarnation as PM.

From 2013, boat people were sent for offshore processing more or less regardless of circumstances. So, for example, we know of cases where some members of a refugee family arrived in Australia before the cut-off date, were assessed as genuine refugees, and have since been settled in the Australian community. But their family had been split up in the course of the journey, and some of the arrived just after the cut-off date, and are still held in Manus or Nauru.

From 19 July 2013, boat people have been sent offshore as a deterrent to others who might be tempted to seek asylum in Australia. Behrooz Bouchani is held on Manus. He has written a book called No Friend but the Mountains. In it he says, at page 133:

“Can it be that I sought asylum in Australia only to be exiled to a place I know nothing about? ... Clearly they are taking us hostage. ... We are being made examples to strike fear into others, to scare people so they won’t come to Australia. ...”

Behrooz Bouchani noticed something that had escaped notice by most Australians. Australia’s Criminal Code defines the war crime of hostage taking.

268.75 War crime—taking hostages

- (1) A person (the *perpetrator*) commits an offence if:
 - (a) the perpetrator ... holds hostage one or more persons; and
 - (b) the perpetrator threatens to ... continue to detain the person or persons; and
 - (c) the perpetrator intends to compel ... a person or group of persons to act or refrain from acting as an explicit or implicit condition for ... the release of the person or persons; and

(there are three other elements, relevant to the conduct taking place in the context of international hostilities, which do not apply to our detention system. But it is clear beyond argument that we are holding people hostage on Manus and Nauru in order to dissuade others from trying to seek asylum in Australia.

The penalty for taking hostages in wartime is imprisonment for 17 years.

The Commonwealth Criminal Code has added relevance in this context.

268.12 Crime against humanity—imprisonment or other severe deprivation of physical liberty

- (1) A person (the *perpetrator*) commits an offence if:
 - (a) the perpetrator imprisons one or more persons or otherwise severely deprives one or more persons of physical liberty; and
 - (b) the perpetrator’s conduct violates article 9, 14 or 15 of the Covenant; and
 - (c) the perpetrator’s conduct is committed intentionally or knowingly as part of a widespread or systematic attack directed against a civilian population.

Penalty: Imprisonment for 17 years.

- (2) Strict liability applies to paragraph (1)(b).

268.13 Crime against humanity—torture

A person (the *perpetrator*) commits an offence if:

- (a) the perpetrator inflicts severe physical or mental pain or suffering upon one or more persons who are in the custody or under the control of the perpetrator; and
- (b) the pain or suffering does not arise only from, and is not inherent in or incidental to, lawful sanctions; and
- (c) the perpetrator’s conduct is committed intentionally or knowingly as part of a widespread or systematic attack directed against a civilian population.

Penalty: Imprisonment for 25 years.

There is no doubt that our use of indefinite detention is a breach of section 268.12. And it is strongly arguable that offshore processing as it is presently done is a breach of section 268.12 *and* section 268.13.

The only difficulty is that prosecutions for these offences can only be instituted with the Attorney-General’s written consent.

Tony Abbott became PM later in 2013 (there's a thought to conjure with) and appointed Scott Morrison as his Immigration Minister. Later, Malcolm Turnbull rolled Abbott, and Turnbull appointed Peter Dutton as his Immigration Minister.

I mention Morrison and Dutton specifically because they are, arguably, the most dishonest hypocrites ever to hold high office in this country. "Dishonest" because they call boat people "illegal", even though the fact is that boat-people do not commit any offence against Australian law by arriving the way they do. "Hypocrites" because they both claim to be Christians, and yet their treatment of asylum seekers has been criticized by every Christian denomination and by the World Council of Churches. Their conduct is irreconcilable with Christian teaching.

Offshore processing is done on Manus Island and on Nauru. Manus is part of Papua New Guinea. Nauru is an independent republic. Both are close to the equator. Both are tiny: Nauru is smaller than Tullamarine airport in Melbourne.

Nauru

In the middle of 2016 The Guardian Australia published the Nauru files: more than 2000 incident reports, compiled by workers employed by Australia. More than half of the Nauru files concern mistreatment of children. They range from a guard grabbing a boy and threatening to kill him once he is living in the community to guards slapping children in the face. In September 2014 a teacher reported that a young classroom helper had asked for a four-minute shower instead of a two-minute shower. "Her request has been accepted on condition of sexual favours. It is a male security person. She did not state if this has or hasn't occurred. The security officer wants to view a boy or girl having a shower."

Reading the Nauru files, you learn that in September 2014, a girl had sewn her lips together. A guard saw her and began laughing at her. In July 2014 a child under the age of 10 undressed and invited a group of adults to insert their fingers into her vagina.

It is very difficult for us to know exactly what is happening on Nauru. It is an independent republic which is very selective about who can have a visa. It costs \$8,000 to apply. The fee is not returned if the visa is refused, as typically it is. Journalists in particular are unlikely to receive a visa. When the Pacific Island Forum was held on Nauru recently, the ABC was refused permission to attend.

Manus

The UNHCR recently delivered a report on the state of affairs on Manus. Their report includes these observations:

"UNHCR protection staff and medical experts observed a high level of tension and further deterioration in the mental health of refugees and asylum-seekers on Manus Island. Separation from family members and a deep-seated fear of being abandoned in Papua New Guinea by Australia without adequate support has contributed to an acute sense of insecurity and helplessness...

Caseworkers visit refugee and asylum-seeker accommodation sites for the purpose of identifying and providing support for vulnerabilities such as medical needs and mental health issues. For people who have withdrawn and are unable to seek assistance, however, no follow up interventions are made. For those with serious mental health needs, such withdrawal may in fact be a sign of greater vulnerability. There is no systematic, ongoing process to identify those at low, medium or high levels of risk, and tailor assistance accordingly. This means that

those with the most significant needs have not been monitored on a regular basis since October 2017.

UNHCR staff asked diverse stakeholders who is responsible for follow up of identified vulnerable people, and received inconsistent answers. Service providers work in silos, without clear information as to the role of others - which should be complementary and coordinated.

The Government of Australia has no continuous or regular on the ground presence to coordinate and supervise the fulfilment of contractual obligations by those it has engaged to provide basic assistance and support to refugees and asylum-seekers on Manus Island. The Government of Australia, rather than the Government of Papua New Guinea, is the contracting party for all medical, security, infrastructure, garrison and caseworker services...”

The report includes recommendations:

“...The Government of Australia should ensure that a clear strategy and critical incident response plan includes significantly bolstered mental health support...”

The Government of Australia should immediately identify and secure alternate durable solutions outside of the bilateral arrangement between Australia and the United States of America, including acceptance of the continuing New Zealand offer. Clear information on all appropriate available options outside of Papua New Guinea should also be communicated to refugees...

Given the increasing mental health needs of the refugee population, the number and expertise of caseworkers should be increased to a level commensurate to different degrees of risk and vulnerability...

There is an urgent need for outreach medical care, enhanced general medical and specialist mental health care. The tragic death of a Rohingya refugee on 22 May 2018 underscores the criticality of these unmet needs...”

Reza Berati

In February 2014 Reza Berati was killed on Manus.

Curiously, tellingly, Scott Morrison went public after Reza Berati was killed. He said Berati had escaped the detention centre, and had been killed by locals. He said:

“...[T]his was a very dangerous situation where people decided to protest in a very violent way and to take themselves outside the centre and place themselves at great risk...”

By speaking this falsehood, Morrison inadvertently disclosed a serious truth: that the locals on Manus are extremely hostile to the refugees.

Just a couple of weeks after Reza Berati was killed, I received a sworn statement from an eyewitness, Benham Satah. The statement included the following:

“J ... is a local who worked for the Salvation Army. ... He was holding a large wooden stick. It was about a metre and a half long ... it had two nails in the wood. The nails were sticking out ...

When Reza came up the stairs, J ... was at the top of the stairs waiting for him. J ... said 'fuck you motherfucker' J ... then swung back behind his shoulder with the stick and took a big swing at Reza, hitting him on top of the head.

J ... screamed again at Reza and hit him again on the head. Reza then fell on the floor ...

I could see a lot of blood coming out of his head, on his forehead, running down his face. His blood is still there on the ground. He was still alive at this stage.

About 10 or 15 guards from G4S came up the stairs. Two of them were Australians. The rest were PNG locals. I know who they are. I can identify them by their face. They started kicking Reza in his head and stomach with their boots.

Reza was on the ground trying to defend himself. He put his arms up to cover his head but they were still kicking.

There was one local ... I recognized him ... he picked up a big rock ... he lifted the rock above his head and threw it down hard on top of Reza's head. At this time, Reza passed away.

One of the locals came and hit him in his leg very hard ... but Reza did not feel it. This is how I know he was dead.

After that, as the guards came past him, they kicked his dead body on the ground ...”

A short time later, Benham Satah was taken into the Wilson Security cabin in the detention centre. Wilson Security provide the guard services on Manus and Nauru, and in your local park. They are incorporated in Panama, presumably to avoid the inconvenience of paying Australian tax on the vast amounts they are paid by the Australian government. The Wilson Security people tied Benham Satah to a chair and beat him up. They told him that, unless he withdrew his witness statement, they would take him outside the camp, where he would be raped and killed by locals.

By their threat, the Wilson Security people echoed what Morrison had conveyed: that the locals on Manus are extremely hostile to the refugees.

Several Australians involved in the killing of Reza Berati were, conveniently, able to return to Australia before any charges were laid. The people who were, eventually, two years later, convicted of murder were somehow able to escape from prison.

It took nearly five months before anyone was charged with the murder of Reza Berati. Benham Satah is still on Manus, still living in fear of retribution.

The treatment of boat people in offshore detention is dreadful. We are lucky that Behrooz Bouchani – an Iranian Kurd, who has been on Manus for 5 years now – is also a skilled and perceptive writer. He has recently published a book which tells us what we cannot see: the terrible conditions in which people are held on Manus.

Peter Dutton recently had to deal with a suggestion that some people should be brought from Manus to Australia as a matter of compassion. He said:

"It's essential that people realise that the hard-won success of the last few years could be undone overnight by a single act of compassion in bringing 20 people from Manus to Australia..."

How many people in this hall— how many people in this country – would have believed it possible, even 5 years ago, that a senior Minister of the Crown would publicly dismiss the possibility of compassion?

He got away with it because his brutal mistreatment of refugees is calculate to appeal to our fear: our fear of Islam, our fear of losing this country.

His comment hardly raised a stir of concern, and just a few weeks later he was positioning himself to become PM.

I suspect Walter Lippmann would have been seriously concerned.