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### AN EDICT FROM THE MOTHERLAND

From the first days of European settlement, our colonies were bombarded with bureaucratic edicts from the Motherland, until Federation and Australia's emergence as a proud and independent nation put an end to our dependency.

But the Motherland's long-lost role was recently revived in an editorial in *The Lancet* entitled *Australia: the politics of fear and neglect*.<sup>\*</sup> Short, simplistic and sensational, it proclaimed that Australia's progressive and inclusive culture was burdened by a dark underbelly of political conservatism.

It further asserted that the Australian Government had effectively silenced dissent in the scientific community, and propagated a political view "that those who spoke up for indigenous health were simply 'establishing politically and morally correct credentials'". To top it off, the Prime Minister was portrayed as ruthlessly exploiting Australia's strong undercurrent of political conservatism.

And *The Lancet's* solution? Gratuitous advice to oust the conservatives at this year's federal election and usher in a new era of "enlightenment" for Australian health and medical science!

Significantly, the editorial was silent on the concerted efforts of dedicated Australian researchers and doctors working to improve Indigenous health, and the fearless advocacy of this goal by various professional bodies and this Journal. Despite *The Lancet's* assertion of "silenced" scientists, its editorial was strangely silent on the conservative government's unprecedented investment in health and medical research.

Following *The Lancet's* edict, a commentary in *The Australian* warned scientific and medical journals not to engage in politics<sup>†</sup> and put their public standing, independence and integrity at risk. As long as there remain unresolved issues in the delivery of health care to all Australians, requiring political attention and action, the *MJA* will never heed this injunction.

But, in pursuit of this goal, the recent edict from London is hardly an example to emulate.



Martin B Van Der Weyden

<sup>\*</sup>Australia: the politics of fear and neglect [editorial]. *Lancet* 2007; 369: 1320.

<sup>†</sup>Cook M. Keep petty politics out of science. *The Australian* 2007; 1 May: 12.

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(*Med J Aust* 2007; 186: 485)

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**Cover:** Cardiac valve surgery. Courtesy Dr G Shardey, Cardiothoracic Surgeon, Cabrini Medical Centre, Vic.

## April MJA BookClub Winners

Congratulations to Dr Olga Utkina, Hurstville, NSW, Dr Andrew Walker, Tugun, Qld, Dr Hope Huang, Castle Cove, NSW, and Dr Martin Byrne, Mitchell, Qld, all of whom have won the MJA BookClub April prize of a paediatric cotton cuff sphygmomanometer set. Thanks to all the doctors, students and general health care professionals who purchased books from the April MJA BookClub and went into the draw. Pictured far right is Chris Gosling, the AMPCo Publications Coordinator, drawing the winners. To see this month's MJA BookClub's great prize giveaway, see page 590 and the inside back cover of this issue.



Dr Olga Utkina



Dr Andrew Walker

