

THE AUSTRALIAN Editorial 14-October 2004 (Part 2)

Watchdog keeps pulling leash to the left

HAVING announced his departure as host of ABC Television's *Media Watch*— his only regret that he has not ended more careers at News Limited — David Marr is letting it all hang out. In a 6000-word essay last month in *Overland* — one of Australia's many taxpayer-funded loopy-Left little magazines — he compares the ascendancy of John Howard to the rise of Hitler, laments the Coalition's silencing of the media and suggests the Left no longer gets a hearing because the establishment fears a debate about "wages v dividends" — as if wages and dividends had not been equal beneficiaries of the reforms the Left has opposed since the 1980s. Among the hoary old chestnuts on offer, we learn that Paul Keating hated the ABC as much as Mr Howard, so there cannot be any bias. Well, except that Mr Keating never suggested the ABC was biased towards the Coalition: like Mr Howard, he believed it was captured by the cultural Left. And Mr Marr dismisses independent monitoring of bias at the ABC because such monitoring would not factor in the plain objective fact that the Howard Government "deserves a drubbing".

Anybody who has read the letters page of *The Australian* this week would have noticed a very different set of complaints about the media. Readers have wondered how Mr Marr's two employers, the *ABC* and *The Sydney Morning Herald*, could get it all so terribly wrong. As John O'Hara, a former senior political reporter for the *SMH* asked, why were senior journalists at the paper campaigning openly for the defeat of the Howard Government? Other readers wondered how so much of the commentariat missed the underlying drift of support back to the Coalition in middle Australia. Now there's a topic fit for a media watchdog.

At *The Australian* we do not believe it is the role of news reporting to advocate either side of politics: its role is to inform. For far too long the brief at *Media Watch* has been to protect one particular set of prejudices from challenge. Mr Marr leaves the *Media Watch* brand weaker than he found it because he subordinated a rational assessment of the media's weaknesses to

his obsession with the perfidy of Howard, Bush and Blair. So if the *ABC* wants to persist with a media watchdog, here's a radical idea: find someone who will use the program to advance accuracy and honesty in the media, rather than turning it into a personal ideological soapbox.
