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JAY WALKING

Sinister cheese straws and celebrity politicians

By Jacqui Zurcher

Posted Thu, 31 Jul 2003

During his presidency, Ronald Reagan once said: "Facts are stupid things." That's a slippery statement when you are the person steering a large superpower. But, when it comes to politics, facts seem to be troublesome.



Tony Blair is struggling with dispensing facts at the moment as he fields questions about the demise of David Kelly. Kelly, one of Britain's foremost weapons inspectors, was found dead two weeks ago in the countryside, his wrist slashed. Two days before his death he was questioned by a parliamentary committee about leaking confidential information to the BBC. According to the BBC, Kelly reportedly claimed that British reports on Iraq's weapons' capabilities were exaggerated before the war.

Was it suicide or was Kelly assassinated? Was the media brouhaha justified? Were the weapons findings exaggerated to justify British involvement in the war? Did the BBC have a hidden agenda? The way I see it, Tony Blair is mastering the art of vagary and evasion as he avoids answering these questions. Why confront the ugly facts when obfuscation can be served by creating a commission of enquiry.

I wonder what the commission will say about David Kelly's death and the related alleged WMD scandal? Perhaps, as was the case with Reagan in the Iran-contra scandal, a commission will find that indeed arms had been sold to Iran to fund anti-communist guerrillas in Nicaragua, but that the president had not been aware of this due to his lackadaisical management style. Reagan, already heading into Alzheimerville might have been able to get away with that, but Mr Tight-Reigns Blair will have to make sure his commission comes up with something more believable.

Perhaps the commission will find that Blair's brain was hijacked by a biological agent engineered by George Dubya's scientists. This would also explain the queer facial expressions of late. The wily Texan could have offered Blair a doctored cheese straw at one of their official meetings. Once ingested, the straw gratin would have released the biological agent that surrendered control of the British PM's mind and

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Leigh Robertson,
Highlife Editor

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facial muscles to his American counterpart.

Who knows what the commission will find, but if Blair comes out smelling like a rose on the other side, their creative genius will be unsurpassed.

The world of politics seems reliable at spitting up controversy and regularly exposing some unwitting devotee unable to juggle the smoke and mirrors. Our own country is not immune to the scourge of truth-challenged power jockeys. At least here there seems to be some recourse to action, with the media roasting offenders and the government handing out suspended suspensions to individuals named after luxury 4x4s.

Commissions of enquiry and its ilk are also not unfamiliar. Our own deputy president, Jacob Zuma, is feeling a bit uncomfortable, being the subject of a probe into defence-related bribery allegations. Hopefully the truth will out and Zuma will either be cleared of any wrongdoing or become a colloquial reference for bribery-related indiscretions. Sentences like: "I am not sure about closing this deal, but perhaps with a bit of Zuma, I'd be convinced," might become de rigueur. Hopefully not.

With all the minefields endemic to public office, why would anyone want to go into politics? Perhaps some hope to make a difference, to make the world a better place?

Into the fray step two rather unlikely candidates. These would-be politicians are respectively better known as an action hero, and a host of what the generous call a talk show and what the more realistic call a freak show. Yip, Arnie and Jerry want to run for office in their respective American states of California and Ohio.

As the closing date for nominations looms, Schwarzenegger is being reticent and reconsidering entering the race in the light of the impact this could have on his family. Wise man. As if it isn't confusing enough for small kids seeing their dad as an evil killer alien robot that gets crushed and re-engineered as a good killer alien robot.

Springer, on the other hand, is all set. A past mayor of Cincinnati, he has already started initial campaigning, airing a fundraising infomercial on local American television stations.

Don't some career choices short circuit political aspirations? Spawning a tacky, mud-slinging chat show industry would surely not be a CV winner for a wannabe senator. How can a man famous for earnestly mediating between groups of people with unfathomably intertwined interpersonal issues be taken seriously?

He encourages people to disgorge their dirty laundry and skeleton-infested closets and passes it off as entertainment. With dazzling showmanship he baits his audience and those on stage and after exposing all to public ridicule he flashes a winning smile to the television audience and it's fade to credits.

I'd love to see his fundraising infomercial. It must be difficult to present your own life history as engaging when you have primed your audience for twisted thrills and dark revelations. But, you won't be

disappointed. If you call with a donation within the next five minutes, you could receive this Jerry Springer bumper sticker, and if you are caller number 51 you could go into a draw to receive an exclusive CD of him singing "rockabilly" music. Scary, but true.

Well, good luck to Arnie and Jerry. They might want to remember another famous statement of Mr Reagan's: "Politics is supposed to be the second oldest profession. I have come to realise that it bears a very close resemblance to the first."

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