

Alf's weird new world

SEEING that two old Japanese men have re-emerged after hiding since World War II, the time is right for some self-analytical fantasy.

Imagine one of our own diggers has been holed up in Glen Waverley since 1945, out of touch with humanity, with no idea of what has happened over the past 60 years.

Suddenly he's forced out of hiding by the redevelopment of VFL Park, how do you explain the modern world?

Let's say his name was Alf, which is the only thing that would be possible here.

What would he ask?

Sport? Yes, Alf, of course that's your first question.

Collingwood is still struggling. The club doesn't win flags that often but it has plenty of money and is an "international brand" because it has a television presenter as president who uses his show to promote his club and plays outrageous publicity tricks to get sponsorship.

Oh, he's also a sports commentator and he sits in on confidential AFL meetings. But there's no conflict of interest.

League football is now played in Canberra, Brisbane and Tasmania but possibly not at the MCG at the end of September.

We call this progress.

The administrators don't care whether people go to sport any more, provided they watch it on television.

Yes, it keeps coming up doesn't it?

So what is television? It is the world, Alf.

It teaches kids how to speak American, how to behave like gorillas, and what music to play.

It is a box that sends out



Neil Mitchell

pictures of things that may or may not be happening.

Every house has at least three and this is what people do with their lives when they are not eating or sleeping.

Television decides who will be prime minister and who will be found guilty in Bali drug cases.

It can make people with no talent very rich and people with principles very angry.

It has an extraordinary power to stop thought, any thought.

Food? It's not made of plastic Alf, it just tastes like it. Yes, we did win the war, but we still eat raw fish, rice and soup made of bean curd.

Nobody knows why.

The Empire? Gone, Alf.

There's a Queen as monarch and a twit as her heir.

HIS first wife was like a rock star but she died and now nobody likes him because he was a cad and wanted to be a tampon.

We'll become a republic soon Alf, and probably change the flag. Sorry, do you need some brandy?

Politicians? Still the same Alf. And you missed some beauties.

There was this bloke called Keating who really didn't seem to like us very much but was most impressed by himself.

Then there was this bloke called Hawke who everybody loved for reasons nobody understands.



Unbelievable: a mobile phone viewable through a device attached to spectacles.

This Keating fellow is now trying to convince everybody that it was him, not Hawke, who did the good things and anybody else who did the bad things.

And the real shock Alf — some in the media believe him!

A man called John Howard is prime Minister.

People laugh at him because he looks like a suburban accountant but he hangs around and fights like a rabid dog so he usually wins.

His main opponent is a strange bloke called Peter Costello and nobody really knows what he believes in other than being prime minister.

No, Alf, he's not from the same side as John Howard.

Don't ask me to explain.

The Labor Party doesn't really matter any more.

There's a big cuddly bloke as leader but their future was decided months ago by another bloke called Latham who was determined to lead them into oblivion and did.

Now he's doing the same thing as that fellow Keating. Blaming everybody else.

The world? You've missed a few wars and although God was on our side we actually lost one in a place called Vietnam.

We fought that because America said we should and also to stop the hordes of Vietnamese coming here to live.

I'll take you to Footscray and Richmond later to show you what happened next.

This is called multiculturalism, Alf.

Nobody really knows what that means but be very, very careful what you say about it.

Free speech is much defended in this country now, provided you say what you are supposed to say.

Technology? This is terrific. You can have a telephone in your pocket and talk to anybody, without

wires, unless you are on the Punt Rd hill.

This makes life better because the boss or your wife or a salesman from India can ring you any time anywhere.

We've been to the moon Alf, but we don't know why.

We also have people floating around in space stations but we don't know why we do that either.

Our cars go faster and faster but are not allowed to and our apartment buildings get taller and taller but the inland is still empty.

Words? "Gay" doesn't mean happy any more Alf, it means homosexual.

"Cool" doesn't mean cold and "sick" means bonzer.

"Mad" means something is good-oh and "like" is used to hold sentences together.

And finally? You'll be set for life Alf.

YOU can sell your story to *New Idea*, talk to Ray Martin (even you will have heard of him) and there's this bloke called Bracks who will hold a state reception for you if you can stay awake.

You'll be a celebrity for a few weeks but soon they'll turn on you and some idiot on radio will accuse you of making the whole thing up even though he has no proof.

Because you've been a soldier for nearly 70 years there could be a few protests in the city because you must be a warmonger, Alf.

The unions will ban you and the peace movement will ridicule you because they are the only ones who are allowed to have integrity.

So that's the world you have returned to Alf.

Want a lift back to Glen Waverley?

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NEIL MITCHELL broadcasts from 8.30am weekdays on 3AW

Unjust, wrong? Too bad, you're sacked

WILL was worried he wasn't being paid properly.

He raised the issue with his boss, a small business owner. His boss refused to talk about it.

Will kept working because he needed the job, but eventually rang Wageline.

Wageline confirmed that his boss was underpaying him more than \$3 an hour.

That might not sound like much, but after six or so months it adds up to thousands of dollars in lost wages.

A lot of money to a 19-year-old tiler from an outer suburbs working class family.

Will eventually got up the courage to ask his boss to pay him his minimum legal wage. His boss didn't react well. They had an argument and the boss told him:

"Don't preach to me boy, or I'll change things."

The next week, Will was sacked. His boss then lied to him about the reason for the dismissal saying, "I'm not going to have enough work to keep you on."

The boss later admitted that the real reason he sacked Will was because "he went behind my back to Wageline".

Will was out of a job, in a tough job market, and all because he'd stood up for his rights. Will sought our help.

Hugh de Kretser

We lodged an unfair dismissal application and a month later his boss agreed at mediation to pay him compensation for the unfair dismissal.

Will's story is a true one, and cases like his are played out every day in the Industrial Relations Commission.

But not for much longer.

This month, the Federal Government announced radical changes that will exempt businesses with 100 or fewer employees — about 99 per cent of private sector businesses — from unfair dismissal laws.

These unfair dismissal laws require employers to do two things: have a valid reason for a dismissal, and carry out the dismissal in a fair way.

By doing so, they serve a vital social role protecting job security and employee well-being.

If the Federal Government's changes are passed by Parliament, this vital protection will be destroyed for small and medium business employees.

And if the changes pass, a small or medium employer

will be able to lawfully sack a worker for something they didn't do.

The employee will have no right to challenge the decision, no right to prove they didn't do it.

A small or medium business employer will be able to sack a worker for poor performance without having to warn them that their work is not up to scratch, regardless of how long they have been working at the business or whether in fact their work is or is not satisfactory.

ASMALL or medium business employer will be able to invent redundancies to get rid of employees, manufacture a business downturn to dismiss staff, or simply sack someone because they don't like their haircut.

A small or medium business employer will basically have carte blanche to sack an employee for any reason whatsoever.

The only real protections left will be the limited protections against dismissal for a prohibited discriminatory reason such as race, gender or religion.

The employer will not even have to give an employee a reason why they are being sacked.

In this age of low unemployment, the justification advanced for the changes is jobs growth.



The Government is effectively saying that to create jobs, businesses need the right to sack workers unfairly. This reasoning is dishonest and dangerous, and it ignores the fact that small and medium businesses already receive significant protection under current unfair dismissal laws.

Under the present law, the size of a business and its access to human resources expertise are factors that must be taken into account in assessing the fairness of a dismissal.

The law doesn't expect small businesses to know the detailed ins and outs of employment law.

Businesses also have the protection of an automatic statutory three-month probationary period.

This means that an employer can take a worker on and give them a chance to prove themselves.

If the employer isn't happy with the worker, for whatever reason, they can end the employment in the first three months without worrying about unfair dismissal laws.

Rather than being an unjustified burden on employers, unfair dismissal laws simply require employers to act fairly when considering dismissal.

Surely, no reasonable modern employer could seriously argue that it needs the right to sack its employees unfairly.

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