

THE AUSTRALIAN

Abandon doubt

STREUTH: JAMES JEFFREY THE AUSTRALIAN NOVEMBER 27, 2013 12:00AM

GOUGH Whitlam might not have been in the room yesterday, but his presence was felt. The event was the launch of The Whitlam Legacy at NSW Parliament House, something you may well have read about in the news pages.

Between book-launcher Bill Shorten and book editor Troy Bramston, many serious topics were canvassed - but there had to be some fun as well. Bramston recalled when, aged 23 and working to revive the Fabian Society of NSW, he received a phone call from Whitlam: "He was moving into his second hour on the phone when Margaret, from the background, urged him to: 'Wrap it up, Gough.' 'Margaret,' he said, 'I'm talking to Troy Bramston about how Kim Beazley can reform the hospital system of NSW.' Margaret and I had to wait." Bramston said when Whitlam was asked how he'd meet his maker when that day came, he replied: "I shall treat him as an equal." That lack of self-doubt was echoed nicely by Nick Whitlam, who told the audience - which spanned the Labor generations, from Kep Enderby to Sam Dastyari - that he was representing the family not just as the second child but as the favourite. It can get infectious, but proceedings drew to a close before everyone started lowering their voices and addressing each other as "comrade". But only just. "It's time," Bramston intoned at the end, "for you to buy the book."

Together at last

FOR Streuth at least, what gave the book launch a nice frisson was the presence in the same room of The Sydney Morning Herald columnist Gerard "King Tut-tut" Henderson and writer Bob Ellis. The two have been foes for what feels like roughly 300 years, though it may be longer. Hendo denounces Ellis as "the false prophet of Palm Beach" and Ellis describes Hendo as, for example, "a haughty flapping half-arsed buffoon". Truth be told, we were a little disappointed to have it confirmed that Ellis and Hendo are separate people and not, as we'd hoped, two alter egos of one extravagantly gifted performance artist. Ellis worked the room in a black tracksuit, such a striking contrast to the general sartorial standard that it took our mind off a merry observation by NSW Opposition Leader John Robertson about "terrible photos of Hawkie in Speedos on banana lounges". Hendo took up his position with a copy of The Whitlam Legacy, reading and listening to the speeches, a rather full edition of the energetic charge sheet that is his weekly Media Watch Dog probably taking shape as we watched. If Ellis and Henderson actually ran into each other, we didn't see it. Perhaps that's for the best. As they say (particularly tourists who've just seen Hollywood for the first time), it's better to travel in anticipation than to arrive.

The better to see you

WHEN Julia Gillard put some spectacles on her face early this year, it caused a stir. Here is one



Christopher Pyne. Source: TheAustralian

media description of that moment: "When the prime minister took the stage at the National Press Club on Wednesday, the nation buzzed with excitement ... Ms Gillard may have announced the election date, but, for a moment, the glasses threatened to overshadow the news." The same article described them as "dark-framed" and "hipster". So, all in all, it would be remiss of us not to mention that Education Minister Christopher "Teachers' friend" Pyne was wearing specs yesterday. We can't say if they were hipster - largely because we have no idea - but we can confirm they were dark-framed. But were they new? "Very," Pyne replied to Strewth. We'll do another eyewear update when he dons a monocle.

Quantity v quality

STREWTH is only too familiar with the disappointments of discontent. In September, having been warmed up by anti-News Corp protesters from the Construction Forestry Mining and Energy Union retiree division, we were let down that same week when another protest was organised on Facebook, only for it to amount to nothing, leaving your Strewth columnist on the street at the appointed hour, a borrowed office clock in our hands and a sense of hurt in our heart. So hopefully staff in Malcolm Turnbull's Sydney office were buoyed when an event spawned on Facebook - the presentation of a National Broadband Network petition - at least produced a few people. It was part of a "Save the NBN" day of action, and petitions were to be delivered to MPs across the nation. Alas, only 23 of the nearly 400 invited managed to RSVP. Still, some came - even to Turnbull's neighbourhood - so all in all it was a bigger hit than the time co-organiser Vladimir Lasky very courageously went before the inquisitors of Australian Idol. (Those bums robbed you, Vlad.)

strewth@theaustralian.com.au (*mailto:strewth@theaustralian.com.au*)