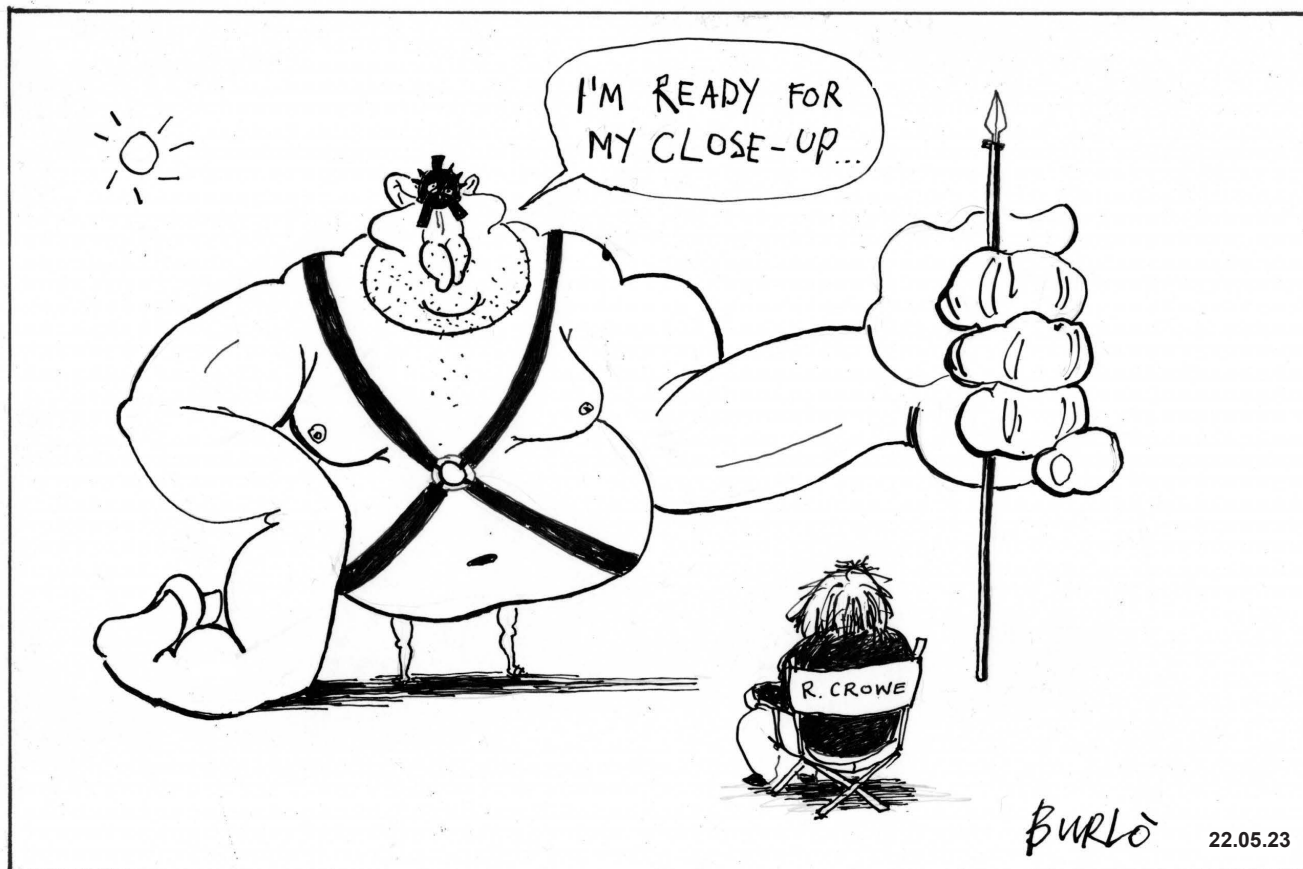


COMMENTS AND LETTERS



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Sheeple worshipping gold

DANIEL XERRI



When a nation's prime minister publicly derides writing and criticism and claims that nothing is more valuable than the generation of wealth, one would do well to question his respect for the people he leads.

History shows us that those political leaders who ridiculed the value of the written word – especially when this was used to criticise their policies and behaviour – are the ones who had a very poor opinion of the intellect of a country's citizens.

If you see the electorate as being largely made up of sheeple, then you are likely not to worry so much about those who seek to make their readers think critically in relation to how the country is run.

Your self-assured hubris convinces you that those criticising you are lone voices in the wilderness who have foolishly refused to buy into the narrative

that you have carefully crafted for the nation's voters.

Just as the biblical King Nebuchadnezzar erected a massive gold statue and expected everyone to worship it on pain of being thrown into a blazing furnace, our prime minister expects everyone to unquestioningly idolise the generation of wealth.

This comes at the expense of forgoing any form of dissent upon witnessing a long series of political screw-ups, from the mishandling of corruption scandals to the pillaging of the environment and to the perpetuation of ineptitude and mediocrity among ministers and government officials.

Fanning the ardour of myopic supporters by telling them that they should only care about how much money they make rather than how transparently and efficiently a country is run is nothing but a flagrant display of contempt for the electorate.

A leader who harbours such cynicism must be convinced that the people have willingly chosen to lead a blinkered existence as long as they are living comfortably.

The prime minister's attitude suggests that if the country's standard of living is adequate, then all sins committed by those governing it should

be forgiven. This is especially so if people are encouraged to believe that these sins are merely an excusable by-product of the generation of wealth or even an intrinsic part of how it is produced. If this wealth is for everyone's benefit, then surely no one is entitled to complain.

However, politicians who believe that people are content as long as a country is doing well economically fail to realise that wealth is not the only indicator of well-being, nor might it be the most important one.

A fervent belief in the supreme value of wealth is to disregard the significance of rule of law, good governance, public trust in government and government accountability.



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The prime minister's capacity to jeer at the Gahan mentality of those who voted him into power must have no bounds if he is willing to tell them that any criticism they read has no value in the face of the country's strong economic indicators.

He seems to imply that once you demur in an outspoken manner, you will be disparaged by the powerful forces that you criticise.

Rather than engaging with criticism in mature, humble and transparent ways, the chosen approach seems to be that of belittling critical voices and dismissing their views as inconsequential.

The attempt to silence criticism through trivialisation might not sound as violent as the tactics of political censorship, book burning and imprisonment utilised by those who historically wanted to quell all opposition to their rule.

Nonetheless, when a prime minister tells people that the words of those who write critically of the government's policies and actions are unimportant, then this becomes a denouncement of one of the core values of a democratic society.

Daniel Xerri is an educator.