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The big lie

Tuesday, November 21, 1995 - 11:00

The findings of the Marks Royal Commission that federal health minister Carmen Lawrence lied to the WA parliament and the public about her role in the 1992 tabling of the Easton petition should come as no surprise. Lying is endemic to maintaining the capitalist system. Politicians lie routinely to win seats and government. And once their snouts are in the trough, they lie to keep them there. But it is not just those adept at playing the parliamentary game who are the culprits. The party machines, the corporate powers that back them, the bosses' media all lie all the time. They say the private profit system works to the benefit of all people — a lie. They tell us that politicians represent the interests of the masses of people who elect them — a lie. We are told that we live in the most democratic political system possible — a lie. The findings of the Marks Royal Commission was never going to be any different. WA Premier Richard Court was motivated to establish the commission by party political opportunism — Lawrence's bungle made the ALP an easy target for the Liberals. Lawrence, the so-called representative and champion of women's interests in parliament and the ALP, stands exposed as being as much motivated by self-interest and ruthless careerism as any of her male counterparts. And Prime Minister Keating's arrogant dismissal of the commission's findings on the basis that it was "constituted with extravagance and partiality" was just the end-game in a cleverly staged process of whitewashing his minister's foul-up. But recognising the fact that politicians lie as a matter of course is a far cry from accepting that such conduct is OK — which is what large sections of the establishment media have done. Milton Cockburn's November 16 column in the Sydney Morning Herald, for example, described the commission's findings as "extraordinary" and a "dangerous precedent". He said: "A politician, who has not acted illegally, has been found to have acted improperly because she sought to gain a political advantage over her parliamentary opponent. Only a very naive person could come to such a conclusion." Cockburn goes on to damn the commission for passing judgement on politicians' behaviour by drawing a distinction between personal interest and public responsibility. After all, he noted, our "parliamentary democracy requires our representatives to present themselves for election every three or four years"; of course they'll lie! It is this cynicism which characterises the major parties and the political system they represent. Is it any wonder that a Morgan poll conducted in September found that 56% of people said they had lost faith in the political system. In the same poll, 91% agreed that politicians twisted the truth to suit their own purposes. While capitalist politicians have a stranglehold on politics, they can try to get away with their lies. But they won't be able to forever. The big lie — that the majority of people can't fundamentally change this undemocratic system — is slowly being exposed.

From GLW issue 212



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John Pilger

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