Australian governments protecting children in detention

A view through the looking glass

Max Liddell and Chris Goddard

This article analyses the Australian Government's communications on children in immigration detention, particularly those detained at Woomera and Baxter Detention Centres. The authors examine paradoxes and 'double-bind' theory; theory which analyses communications which continually put the target of them in the wrong and allow no escape. The analysis uses selected passages from Lewis Carroll's 'Alice in Wonderland' and 'Through the Looking Glass' to highlight the nature and impact of such communication. The authors conclude that the Australian Government has consistently used paradoxical communication. In doing so it has placed children and families in detention, child protection workers, the South Australian Government, and sometimes external critics in a communication trap from which it is difficult to escape. Other bodies such as Courts have also demonstrated much paradox in their behaviour and communications on detention issues.

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In March 2002 the authors reported the children living in the Woomera Detention Centre to South Australia's Child Abuse Report Line (CARL). We did this after reviewing evidence that the children were being abused (Goddard & Liddell 2002a, 2002b; Liddell & Goddard 2002). There had been previous investigations of individual allegations of child abuse in Detention Centres (DIMIA 2002). However investigating single cases, it seemed, would not identify structural factors in policy or in the Woomera centre itself. We reported the children as a group hoping that those issues would be highlighted.

A detailed review of Australia's immigration policies is beyond our scope. Briefly, 'off-shore' asylum seekers who apply for sanctuary in Australia via established overseas channels are processed and, if their claims are verified, are admitted to Australia (strict quotas permitting). They can eventually become residents and be eligible for Australian benefits. So-called 'unauthorised' or 'illegal arrivals'[1] usually come to Australia by boat, having paid smugglers for passage. When apprehended they are placed in detention centres, frequently located in hot and remote parts of Australia. Their 'on-shore' claims are then processed. Australian authorities do not proceed speedily, and children and families may remain in detention for years. One detainee 'celebrated' his fifth year in detention during 2004.

Estimates of how many on-shore applicants have their claims upheld and are granted temporary protection visas (TPVs) are as high as 94% (HREOC 2004), making the purpose of such a punishing process inexplicable except as an example of Australia's preoccupation with border protection. The logic of this policy is illustrated by Lewis Carroll in his *Alice in Wonderland* discussion between the King and Queen of Hearts about who stole the tarts:

> 'Let the jury consider their verdict', the King said ...
>
> 'No, no!' said the Queen. 'Sentence first – verdict afterwards.'
>
> (Carroll 1998: 107)

[1] The origins of such terms are unclear but they have been used extensively by the Australian Government (see, for example, http://www.immi.gov.au/illegals/border2000/border05.htm)

However, systemic abuse of on-shore asylum seekers does not end there. Particular restrictions are applied to people arriving by boat if they have resided for a continuous period of seven days en route to Australia in a country where they could have availed themselves of protection. We will leave aside whether seeking protection from some such countries and under those circumstances would be a wise option. 'Unauthorised arrivals' whose claims are verified are granted TPVs for three years. These visas can be renewed, but this group of asylum seekers were not able, until recently, to become permanent residents in Australia. They were, and most still are, condemned to a life of impermanence and uncertainty.

> Situations elsewhere suggest that this is not a very sensible approach even in pragmatic terms. It is unlikely to force many back to their homelands, though some might return voluntarily ... It is a minor disincentive to future undocumented arrivals who may not be fully aware of the policy. But it will definitely drive many on to private charities and some into crime or destitution (Jupp 2003: 7).

The impact of the abuses suffered by the parents and children in detention, then, is likely to increase over time.[2]

The story that unfolded after our report to South Australia's child protection system occurred in the highly-charged aftermath of the arrival of several boats bearing asylum seekers in 2001. In one incident, the Norwegian ship *Tampa* rescued 438 people from the *Palapa*, a 20-metre Indonesian fishing boat, in August 2001. The Federal Government attempted to prevent the *Tampa* entering Australian waters at Christmas Island, then attempted to force it to leave, while delaying provision of medical and other services to the asylum seekers. The 'Pacific Solution', involving use of off-shore detention facilities, was developed. This led to claims by Julian Burnside QC that the Pacific Solution 'debauches the Constitution of Nauru', which provides that no one can be detained without trial (Singer 2003: 21).

Then, in a more aggressive policy shift, the Australian Government sent ships into international waters to turn back boats bearing more asylum seekers. When warning shots were fired in October 2001 at the *Olong*, a 25-metre boat overloaded with asylum seekers, violence broke out. Allegations were made that children of asylum seekers were thrown overboard (Goddard 2001).

It is not feasible to examine the bureaucratic and political communications on the 'children overboard' affair here (see Marr and Wilkinson [2003] for more analysis). However, these communications occurred in the context of an election campaign which was heavily influenced by the Australian Government's tough line on border protection. Confusion about whether children were thrown overboard continued throughout, and after, the campaign until it became clear there was no evidence that they were. Allegations were rife during 2004 that the Government knew this before the 2001 election and concealed it for electoral purposes (Walters 2004; Grattan & Forbes 2004).

The numbers of 'unauthorised arrivals' rapidly diminished thereafter; and if policy 'success' is measured on these grounds then the policy could indeed be regarded as successful. However it is the Australian Government's subsequent communications and the impact of these and its policies on detainees which is the focus of our arguments.

... the evidence shows many children have been traumatised, become psychotic, and self-harmed.

SUBSEQUENT EVENTS

The abuses suffered by children detained at Woomera in particular are well documented (Liddell & Goddard 2002; HREOC 2002, 2004). In short, the evidence shows many children have been traumatised, become psychotic, and self-harmed. For example, they observed and were caught up in violent episodes – hit by water cannons, blinded by tear gas, and terrified by the noisy entry of guards conducting head-counts in the middle of the night. The list of abuses and their consequences is lengthy and distressing (Liddell & Goddard 2002; HREOC 2002, 2004).

The following summarises key developments following our notification to CARL (South Australia's Child Abuse Report Line).

Several days later South Australian Social Justice Minister the Hon. Stephanie Key announced that a team of child protection workers would visit Woomera to investigate the notification. The delay violated the response times required in South Australia for even the less urgent cases. This slowness probably resulted from requirements for consultation between the South Australian and Australian Governments outlined in a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) signed by these governments regarding the handling of allegations of abuse in detention centres. Child protection in Australia is a state responsibility. Our report was to a state service about child abuse occurring on Federal premises. The MOU was an attempt to resolve inevitable jurisdictional ambiguity.

[2] In another publication Jupp traces Australian policies back to the racist policies of Pauline Hanson's One Nation Party, which attracted considerable publicity and electoral support in the late 1990s. Jupp suggests the Federal Government adopted some aspects of One Nation's policies to attract back the large vote recorded by One Nation in 1998 (Jupp 2002: 192-194). Marr and Wilkinson (2003) advance a similar thesis.

The MOU was signed in December 2001. It allows the South Australian Government to investigate allegations of child abuse in detention centres, but allocates duty of care for detainees to the Federal Department of Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs (DIMIA). It restricts follow-up action (the real responsibility for ensuring children are safe) to the Federal Government. The MOU also restricts the state government from commenting publicly on related issues unless the Federal Government agrees.

In apparent contradiction of the MOU, Stephanie Key issued a brief statement on the child protection team's findings on 15 April 2002 (Key 2002). The statement cautiously confirmed many allegations (Debelle 2002: 6; O'Brien 2002). Key indicated she would ask the Federal Government to develop new guidelines for managing detention centres – an obscure outcome. The Premier also pressed the Federal Government to take action (Rann 2002), but South Australia's protests can hardly be said to have been vigorous.

The Australian Government's responses were not surprising. The Justice Minister indicated disappointment that the investigation's findings were made public without the Federal Government being notified (Debelle 2002: 6). A spokesman for then Immigration Minister, Philip Ruddock, suggested the report contained 'unverified allegations' (O'Brien 2002). Later Ruddock, clearly irritated at the public airing of allegations of abuse through the media, suggested that people with concerns should report them to the appropriate authorities (Ruddock 2002), a suggestion with interesting consequences which will be outlined shortly.

Two teenage boys, the Bakhtiyaris, who had been the subject of a complaint from Premier Rann in August 2002 (Rann 2002), were still in detention nearly a year later. One of the boys, Alamdar, had by then spent almost three years in detention. Since he had run away from Woomera at the instigation of demonstrators who had broken down Woomera fences, he was not allowed to leave the Baxter detention centre (where he was now detained)[3], even to attend school[4]. He was described as bearing 'all the signs of someone completely institutionalised' and reportedly said that he never wanted to leave Baxter, fearing the outside world more than his detention (Skelton 2003a). Yet his position was tragically paradoxical:

> I am not allowed to enjoy freedom like other boys. It makes me crazy, I hate it here. I hate Australia. I am not a criminal. I have done nothing wrong (Skelton 2003a: 1).

So he hated Australia, hated it inside Baxter, but was afraid to leave. He was trapped, physically and psychologically. We will propose an interpretation of such 'traps' later in the paper.

A variety of factors delayed finalisation of this family's situation. Ironically, deportation was delayed due to the security situation in Pakistan (Debelle 2003: 3). Travel documents required by the family were incomplete and it would be months before they might be obtained. 'Currently it is unsafe for officials to travel to Quetta in Pakistan to obtain them' (Skelton 2003b: 1).[5]

At times it appeared the Government was heeding increasing community concerns. Philip Ruddock instructed late in 2002 that priority be given to getting women and children into community housing projects. However, six months later only seven children were in the Woomera residential housing project (no increase in six months); seven children were in foster care; and 110 children were still in detention, only a slight improvement over the previous six months (Gordon 2003: 7). At 7 July 2003 there were 92 children in on-shore detention centres (HREOC 2003).

Rather than chronicling further events in a highly complex story we will concentrate on two significant developments.

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Report of South Australian Review

Around this time South Australia instituted a review of its child protection system. Approximately one-quarter of the review's chapter on children in detention is devoted to listing Australia's international obligations (Layton 2003). While the review did not directly comment on Australia's performance against such benchmarks, the fact that they were listed is a comment in itself. In our opinion many of Australia's obligations under international agreements have been breached, a view taken by others (see, for example, AASW 2002).

[3] Woomera was closed, and a new detention centre opened at Baxter, near Port Augusta. The last detainees left Woomera in April 2003. The original Woomera managers, Australian Correctional Management, lost their contract in December 2002 (Maiden 2002).

[4] Examination of the actions of pressure groups are beyond the scope of this article. It could be argued that any subsequent changes of policy would not have occurred were it not for the activity of pressure groups in drawing attention to the abuses suffered by children in detention. It could also be argued that the actions of some groups caused distress to some detainees.

[5] Mr. Bakhtiyari had claimed the family was from Afghanistan, a claim disputed by the Federal Government which alleged he was from Pakistan, the reason why no TPV was granted. The family was ultimately deported after five years though the Federal Government's rejection of the family's claims was, to be kind, based on flimsy evidence (Ellis 2004).

The review report summarised the evidence of abuses against children in detention. It then noted that children had been moved from Woomera and Curtin detention centres to the newly completed Baxter Detention Centre. It suggested, on the basis of evidence before it, that Baxter certainly had greater levels of comfort, but

> ... many detainees have expressed and displayed greater stress levels as a consequence of the greater restrictions of freedom and surveillance. Most of the detainees spoken to said that ... they preferred detention at Woomera, even though the physical facilities were much less comfortable (Layton 2003: 22.11)[6]

The report recommended that children and their families be released into the community as soon as possible, noting the devastating and lasting consequences of detention (a point reinforced by Jupp's 2003 analysis).

THE ROLE OF COURTS

Australia's courts were under pressure from Philip Ruddock because of their intervention in immigration cases (*Age* 2003: 7), but their role contains paradoxes not fully explained by this.

One dramatic development was the Family Court of Australia's decision that it had power to protect children in immigration detention (Full Court of the Family Court of Australia 2003). The legal complexities forming the basis for this decision and ultimately appeals against it are not central to our main themes, but the Family Court's opinion that indefinite detention of children (which in our view has happened) would be found to be unlawful has been echoed by others. For example, John Tobin of Melbourne University Law School branded the detention of children not only as in violation of various international agreements but also as unlawful (Tobin 2002).

The Family Court's views received massive publicity. Not surprisingly Philip Ruddock appealed the decision, claiming it was seriously flawed (Shaw 2003a). The High Court subsequently held in 2004 that the Family Court had no jurisdiction.

In a later split decision the High Court also found the Federal Government had the right to detain failed asylum seekers indefinitely, even if no country could be found to take them (Shaw 2003b). In one bizarre case a failed asylum seeker and his guards took 17 flights between them over 13 days at a cost of nearly $A24,000. He was born in Kuwait of Sudanese parents, had spent a year in Sudan, but left after refusing to join the army. Sudan refused to accept him back as a citizen and, after an attempt to 'dump' him in Sudan, he was returned to detention in Australia (Frenkel 2004).

[6] One of us (Chris Goddard) has visited Baxter and can personally confirm the high level of security and the prison-like environment.

The role of the Courts contains other paradoxes. Some judges criticised both government policy and cases put to them by government lawyers (Morris 2003; Debelle 2003). Yet these would-be protectors have adjourned cases for weeks, even months, reflecting the Court's sense of time and not the child's. In a further judgment the Federal Court held that once asylum seekers had exhausted every avenue of appeal, government officials carrying out the deportation order did not have to consider conditions in the country to which the asylum seekers were returning. The Court ruled:

> Even if it is virtually certain that he or she will be killed, tortured or persecuted in that country ... that is not a practical consideration going to the ability to remove from Australia (Shaw 2003b: 3).

Once a decision has been made, then, its manifest incorrectness is irrelevant, as long as the legal processes available have been followed.

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THE IMPACT OF PARADOXICAL COMMUNICATION

In order to attribute further meaning to events we will highlight the Federal Government's communication patterns, particularly as these affect children in detention. Insight is assisted by studies of paradoxical communication, and particularly from 'double-bind' theory. The double-bind has the following features (Watzlavick, Beavin & Jackson 1967)[7]:

- There is a strong relationship between various parties. These may be family members, but the relationships may have been formed in captivity, or via loyalty to a creed, cause or ideology. These latter relationships are the focus of our analysis.
- In the context of this relationship a direct or indirect order is given, or a statement made. The expectation is that the order or statement must be obeyed or agreed with. In the process of reacting, however, the

[7] In the process of researching this paper we revisited the work of Watzlavick et al. (1967) on paradoxical communication and double-bind theory. While other authors (for example Marr and Wilkinson 2003) have drawn brief parallels with Alice in Wonderland, Watzlavick et al. (1967) first drew our attention to the implications of Lewis Carroll's illustrations of paradoxical communication.

respondent also has no choice but to *disobey* or *disagree*.

- Respondents, being the less powerful parties in the relationship, are also unable to step outside the double-bind and challenge it – for example, by commenting on it. In an effective double-bind, the person trapped in it will be unable to mount a successful challenge.

This is the kind of bind in which the Australian Government has placed children and parents in detention, child protection workers, governments, and external critics.

A simple example explaining the double-bind is provided by a sign hung from a bridge spanning an American freeway (Watzlavick et al. 1967: opposite p. 225). The sign reads 'Ignore This Sign'. To obey you must first notice the sign. However, noticing it disobeys the instruction to ignore it. You are trapped; whatever you do will be wrong.

The trap can be set in many ways. In *Alice in Wonderland*, Alice's communication with the Red and White Queens provides an example. Prior to the following dialogue Alice had been subjected to what can only be described as brainwashing by the two Queens:

> Here the Red Queen began again. 'Can you answer useful questions?' she said. 'How is bread made?'
>
> 'I know *that*!' Alice cried eagerly. 'You take some flour –'
>
> 'Where do you pick the flower?' the White Queen asked. 'In a garden or in hedges?'
>
> 'Well, it isn't *picked* at all,' Alice explained. 'It's ground –'
>
> 'How much acres of ground?' said the White Queen. 'You mustn't leave out so many things.'
>
> 'Fan her head!' the Red Queen anxiously interrupted. 'She'll be feverish after so much thinking.' So they set to work and fanned her with bunches of leaves...

They continue this, reinforcing the one-down position they have assigned to Alice, until they are convinced she is fine.

> 'She's all right again now,' said the Red Queen. 'Do you know Languages? What's the French for fiddle-de-dee?'
>
> 'Fiddle-de-dee's not English,' Alice replied gravely.
>
> 'Who ever said it was?' said the Red Queen.
>
> Alice thought she saw a way out of the difficulty, this time. 'If you'll tell me what language 'fiddle-de-dee' is, I'll tell you the French for it!'
>
> But the Red Queen drew herself up rather stiffly, and said 'Queens never make bargains.'
>
> (Carroll 1998: 223)

Such communications constantly put the target in the wrong, allowing no escape. Alice is expected to agree or comply, but cannot. There is another crucial element; the Red Queen's closure of the exchange about 'fiddle-de-dee' exemplified it; Humpty Dumpty illustrated it even more clearly:

> 'I don't know what you mean by 'glory'', Alice said.
>
> Humpty Dumpty smiled contemptuously. 'Of course you don't – till I tell you. I meant 'there's a nice knock-down argument for you!''
>
> 'But 'glory' doesn't mean 'a nice knock-down argument'', Alice objected.
>
> 'When *I* use a word,' Humpty Dumpty said, in a rather scornful tone, 'it means just what I choose it to mean – neither more nor less.'
>
> 'The question is,' said Alice, 'whether you *can* make words mean so many different things.'
>
> 'The question is,' said Humpty Dumpty, 'which is to be master – that's all.'
>
> (Carroll 1998: 186)

Paradoxical communication then is about asserting and maintaining power. That is where the emotional abuse of Alice by Lewis Carroll's characters sheds light on the behaviour of the Federal Government towards children in detention.

The following examples of exchanges over children in detention are paraphrases of statements or actions of Federal politicians (see Liddell & Goddard 2002 for fuller details):

- CARL (the South Australian Child Abuse Report Line) may investigate child protection allegations but is automatically wrong when it finds the Federal Government is at fault (O'Brien 2002; Debelle 2002). The MOU prevents CARL from publicly challenging Federal Government rebuttals.
- CARL can investigate allegations of abuse. But Minister Philip Ruddock alleged that incidents of self-harm and exhibitions of collective depression increased with the number of visits from pressure groups (Madigan 2002). When visits decreased the condition of the detainees improved. The pressure groups are to blame. This assertion cannot be challenged because the child protection experts (who are not Federal Ministers) and their government cannot comment.
- The Australian Government accepted duty of care for detainees and ultimate responsibility for their welfare, and CARL can investigate allegations of abuse of children in detention. But the Australian Government has the responsibility to follow up, not CARL. This, combined with confidentiality provisions in the MOU, effectively prevents CARL or the South Australian Government from testing Federal culpability under child

protection legislation in either the Courts or the media, thus undermining the mandate in South Australia's *Children's Protection Act 1993*.

- Parents remain legal guardians of children in immigration detention. Parents are fully responsible for their children (DIMIA 2002: 97). How full responsibility can be exercised by parents in detention defies explanation, and since CARL cannot test the Federal Government's culpability in court or even comment, it cannot expose this contradiction.
- The Federal Government, duty of care aside, believes it is in the best interests of the children to stay with their parents, therefore it is not violating their rights (DIMIA 2002).[8] And where children have emotional difficulties, suggests the Government, they might have parents with pre-existing dispositions towards depression and/or poor coping skills (DIMIA 2002). So the Federal Government has duty of care, but the parents are to blame. Again, South Australian authorities cannot test these contradictions.

The above binds have been aimed at children, parents, CARL, and the South Australian Government. Attempts have also been made to trap external critics:

- The Minister urged the public not to report allegations of abuse and neglect to the media, but to appropriate authorities. These have the right and duty to investigate them (Ruddock 2002). But the MOU ensures the Federal Government alone can respond. Confidentiality provisions also ensure that any reports will never see the light of day.

It must be acknowledged that, over a period of time, various professionals have spoken out about the problems in detention. Our concern here is with the Federal Government's apparent intentions.

The federal president of the Vietnamese Community in Australia identified the next paradox:

> Buried deep in the Migration Act ... is a powerful ... clause ... courts are not allowed to correct wrong departmental decisions even if the decision is unjust, even if the decision-maker ignores relevant materials or uses irrelevant ones, and even if the individual has not been given the right of reply (Doan 2003: 13).

The High Court decision cited earlier shows this observation is correct. Doan concluded:

> So when a minister decries 'Judicial activism', read 'Judge move over' ... When a minister says 'Close the loophole' this could mean: 'It's better to wrongly punish the innocent than wrongly free the guilty' (Doan 2003: 13).

Shades of the Queen of Hearts' 'Sentence first. Verdict afterwards' (Carroll 1998: 107).

- The case cited earlier illustrating the physical and psychological trap Alamdar Bakhtiyari found himself in exemplifies the double-bind at an individual level. So does the dilemma of an Iraqi family who had been detained for four years. They were deported and given a one-month tourist visa for Vietnam and open tickets to fly from there to Syria and Iran, though they had no visas for those countries (Miller 2003a: 6). The family hoped to obtain these in Vietnam. However Australian authorities faxed authorities in Thailand and Vietnam before the family arrived, warning they were deportees and to use caution in dealing with them. Not surprisingly they were forced to return to Perth, and detention, after only two days. One of the children was reported as having early psychosis. A spokesman for the Minister blamed the family for contacting the media. 'He said they had been cautioned many times that a high profile would not be helpful in arranging for them to leave' (Miller 2003b: 3). So we forced them to leave, made it impossible for them to do so, then blamed them. The trap *par excellence*.

Finally, amongst all these ironies is this: the Australian Government has done little about child abuse, does not have its own legislation to protect children in its care or living in its facilities, but abuses these children and undermines the efforts of others to protect them.

A STORY WITHOUT END?

Later in 2003, concern about children in detention rose to the point where a major change in public attitudes seemed evident. Philip Ruddock was moved from the immigration portfolio to Attorney-General, and Amanda Vanstone appointed Immigration Minister. A softening of tone seemed to develop and we were informed by a senior member of Vanstone's staff that all children would be out of detention before the next election (held in October 2004). Later in 2004 it was announced that TPV holders would be able to apply for permanent residency.

As welcome as these developments were, the change was short-term. Government anxiety about the electoral impact of children in detention diminished. There were still over 100 children in detention at the end of 2003 (HREOC 2004) and at 5/1/2005 there were still 63 in both on-shore and off-shore facilities (http:/www.immi.gov.au/detention/facilities.htm). The new Minister seemed chronically unable to comment on cases because of privacy reasons.

The Australian struggles of the Bakhtiyari family also ended. The family (father excepted) had been living in the community for some time, but were returned to Baxter on 18

[8] We have not located any publicly reported comments by Ministers on their guardianship of unaccompanied minors so the additional paradoxical elements in this response have apparently escaped them.

December 2004. Minister Vanstone vaguely referred to the mother being overstressed looking after six children (Debelle & Skelton 2004), but speculation was rife that this action was preliminary to the family being deported. This proved correct. They were deported just after 2.30 am on a private charter plane on 30 December 2004.

Senator Vanstone, continuing the Government's communication patterns, indicated she had not read their file, or seen any evidence they were Pakistanis (Ellis 2004). However, they had had a 'fair go' given their twenty legal challenges and other actions on their behalf (Debelle & Holder 2004). Dale West of Centacare, the Catholic agency which sponsored the family's community placement, suggested that the Government was so embarrassed by the affair that it was determined to show no mercy. He also criticised activists who released the two Bakhtiyari boys from Woomera as well as those who had taken legal action on the boys' behalf. It was unfortunate that 'the family became the face of detention in Australia' (Debelle & Holder 2004: 9).

The evidence is clear that the totality of the treatment of detainees has had a devastating impact on many of them.

In a final cruel twist Vanstone said the family would be presented with a bill for $1 million for detention costs before they could re-enter Australia.[9] And, most extraordinary of all, it appears that, although the government alleged that the Bakhtiyaris were Pakistani, no clear or safe arrangements for receiving them in Pakistan had been set up. The Pakistani *Daily Times* reported an official as saying the family 'might' have gone to Quetta, near the Afghanistan border (*Daily Times, Pakistan*: www.dailytimes.com.pk 5/1/2005). This is the area in Pakistan which was not safe for Australian officials to visit. Later the Bakhtiyaris were claimed to have been sighted in Afghanistan, from where they claimed they originally tried to escape (Richardson 2005).

Conclusion

Watzlavick et al. (1967) suggested there were associations between paradoxical communication and the development of childhood schizophrenia, and some of the sources cited in this paper have noted instances of schizophrenia in children in detention. The causation of schizophrenia is contested territory. We have chosen double-bind theory as a useful lens through which to view the Federal Government's communication; its 'correctness' or otherwise as a theory of schizophrenia is not relevant to our arguments. Nor is it fair, given the range of traumatic experiences suffered by asylum seekers, to suggest that the incidence of schizophrenia amongst them is attributable solely to Australian Government communication patterns or to experiences in detention.

Nevertheless, politicians do understand the power of 'cognitive confusion', if we can put it that way; they practice it constantly. In the case of children in detention they have taken the practice beyond what is moral, decent and defensible. If they do not know some of the worst consequences of creating cognitive confusion, they should. The case examples in this paper show the impact clearly. The evidence is clear that the totality of the treatment of detainees has had a devastating impact on many of them.

Lewis Carroll has a final contribution to the analysis in his dialogue between Alice, Tweedledum and Tweedledee. They were watching the Red King, who was sleeping.

> 'He's dreaming now,' said Tweedledee, 'and what do you think he's dreaming about?'
>
> Alice said 'Nobody can guess that.'
>
> 'Why, about *you!*' Tweedledee exclaimed, clapping his hands triumphantly. 'And if he left off dreaming about you, where do you suppose you'd be?'
>
> 'Where I am now, of course,' said Alice.
>
> 'Not you!' Tweedledee retorted contemptuously. 'You'd be nowhere. Why, you're only a sort of thing in his dream!'
>
> 'If that there King was to wake,' added Tweedledum, 'you'd go out – bang! – just like a candle!'
>
> 'I shouldn't!' Alice exclaimed indignantly. 'Besides, if *I'm* only a sort of thing in his dream, what are *you*, I'd like to know?'
>
> 'Ditto', said Tweedledum.
>
> 'Ditto, ditto!' cried Tweedledee.
>
> He shouted this so loud that Alice couldn't help saying 'Hush! You'll be waking him, I'm afraid, if you make so much noise.'
>
> 'Well it's no use *your* talking about waking him,' said Tweedledum, 'when you're only one of the things in his dream. You know very well you're not real.'
>
> 'I *am* real', said Alice, and began to cry.
>
> (Carroll 1998: 164-165)

Alice's tears illustrate the impact of this kind of communication. The torture of the child and granting her so little significance, so little power: that illustrates the plight of children in detention. It is tempting then to substitute names such as (Prime Minister) John Howard and Philip Ruddock for Humpty Dumpty, the Red and White Queens, and especially Tweedledum and Tweedledee. For Alice we can

[9] Presenting an account for detention costs is now standard procedure.

substitute the names of the many children who have been in detention, and perhaps even the names of external critics who have been silenced or condemned by the Government for their views.

In some respects Alice was lucky. She fell down the rabbit hole and went through the looking glass, and was subjected to emotional abuse and brain-washing. But both times she woke up. The nightmares faded.

Children in detention awaken too. But there the comparison with Alice's torture by the Red and White Queens and Tweedledum and Tweedledee ends. Children in detention *are* real, and for them the nightmares have continued; both in the abuse inherent in the conditions themselves and in the double-bind in which the government has trapped them. It is sad that it has taken the imprisonment of an Australian woman, Cornelia Rau, to re-awaken the public's concern about such treatment (Goddard & Liddell 2005). ❖

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