



2020 MADNESS

Prime Minister Kevin Rudd returned from his overseas jaunt just in time to participate in the Festival of Kevin in Canberra last weekend. Handpicked Kevin-worshipping delegates from across Australia converged on the nation's capital and revealed what Australia really voted for at the last election.

But before examining what happened at the summit itself, it's worth recounting the farcical lead up. The original proposal, of course, was to gather 1000 of the nation's "best and brightest" to "shake the tree" for "fresh ideas."

Apparently though, our 1000 "best and brightest" doesn't include any members of Australia's Jewish community, who were shut out by the careless scheduling of the summit on the same weekend as Passover. Never mind, the Rudd spin machine went into overdrive and a special "Jewish Summit" was convened on April 14.

The problems didn't stop there. Of the ten original "co-chairs" chosen for the summit, only one was a woman. When one of the male co-chairs had to pull out, a female replacement was quickly chosen to fill the vacancy.

When the participants were announced and their names published, organisers had not even issued them invitations or confirmed their attendance. At pains to avoid another gender imbalance cringe, the organisers ensured that the participants were exactly 51% female, almost exactly representative of Australia's population as a whole. Unfortunately, that was the only thing representative of the 1002 "summiteers" who gathered in Canberra on April 19 and 20.

If the ideas put forth by the 2020 delegates are any guide, Kevin 'economic conservative' Rudd is gone and Mr Big Government has taken centre stage to welcome back the elitist cultural agenda of Keating and friends.

Instead of spending their time discussing the everyday issues that concern most Australians – the cost of living, petrol prices and paying the mortgage – Rudd's 2020 summit seemed to spend the majority of its time thinking up new and innovative ways to tax or control us.

Delegates advocated new taxes on junk food, alcohol, cigarettes and gambling. The death tax – supposedly buried years ago – was resurrected. Bizarre new 'traffic-light' food-labelling systems were invented, where all groceries would be tagged as red (bad) orange (intermediate) and green (good), presumably by a bureaucrat in

Canberra. Australians in 'sedentary' jobs should be forced to complete 30 minutes of physical activity per day and all 21 million Australians should have to undergo compulsory government health and fitness tests.

Rudd's creative stream came up with an artistic idea for funnelling more taxpayer's money to themselves: require all federal departments to channel 1% of their funding into the arts. Presumably they'd like the Defence Department to paint murals along the sides of their tanks?

Another artist wished we would "build a society that cares deeply about artists" and "valued citizens who maintain their voice," like Cuba. Tell that to the dozens of political prisoners of the communist Castro regime, who are locked up precisely because their voices aren't sufficiently in tune with the dictatorship.

Consider the proposal to revoke the citizenship of those who don't do their bit for the environment, or how the rental market would be affected by a proposal that all buildings be carbon neutral by 2020.

Kevin Rudd's star recruit, Maxine McKew, even endorsed the fundamentally undemocratic proposal that calls for our federal parliament to be 50% female by 2020.

Aside from a largely pre-determined proposal to review Australia's taxation system, it seems one of the biggest economic ideas to come out of the weekend was to institute a "national happiness index" – perhaps all this talk of interest rates, CPI and GDP is just too much for Treasurer Wayne Swan. Wouldn't it be easier to forget about all these useless measures like unemployment and just ask – are you happy?

The Prime Minister has two clear paths ahead – reject most of these crazy ideas and show that his 2020 Summit was just about spin and not substance, or adopt the ideas so enthusiastically championed by his ministerial co-chairs and reveal to the Australian people his true agenda. Is this, as Alexander Downer has suggested, a reheating of the Keating cultural agenda? Or does Mr Rudd have no intention of implementing the kooky ideas of his anointed 'best and brightest'?

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