

# OPINION

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## EDITORIAL

### Unshackled union power remains an election danger

It is well-established that more than a few Australians remain unconvinced by Opposition Leader Bill Shorten.

It is hard to nail down exactly why that is the case.

There may be different reasons for different people.

But it is likely that some people are still wary of Mr Shorten's background as a powerful union boss at the Australian Workers' Union.

WA has a history of militant unions and their antics do not play out well in the court of public opinion.

Former Federal Labor leader Kevin Rudd was well aware of this.

He led the charge to have militant construction unionist Joe McDonald expelled from the Labor Party in 2007 after the WA Supreme Court released vision of Mr McDonald abusing company representatives.

Mr McDonald rejoined the party in 2013.

If Mr Shorten wants to convince voters he will govern for all, he needs to convince the nation — especially West Australians — that he will not let the union genie out of the bottle.

Tomorrow, he will address The West Australian Leadership Matters breakfast in Perth. No doubt one of the big questions on the minds of those who will attend, just three days before polling day, will be how does he keep the unions in check?

It is interesting that one of the major figures in the labour movement — the Australian Council of Trade Unions secretary Sally McManus — has not played a major part in Mr Shorten's campaign.

WA thrives when industry is left unfettered to go about what it does best — creating jobs and pumping money into the economy.

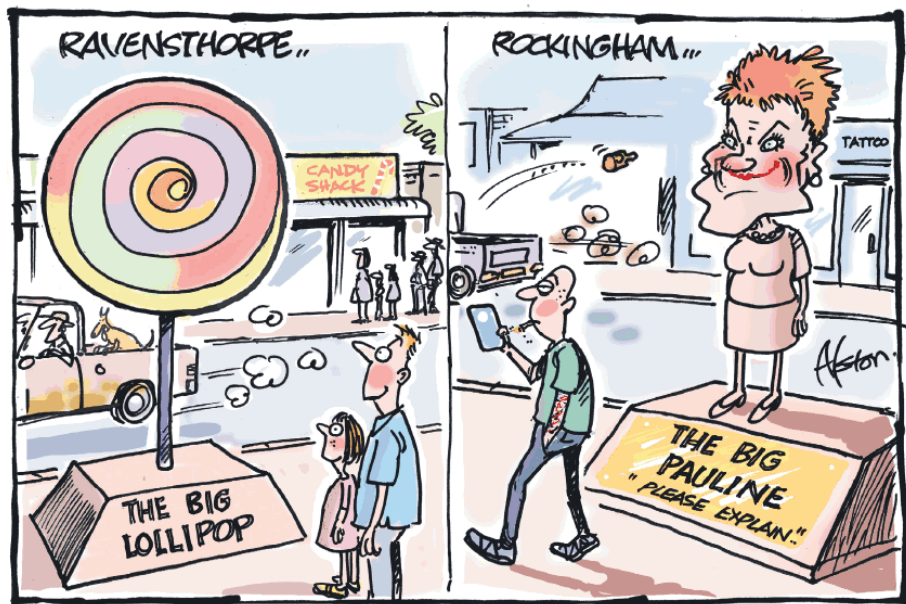
The benefits of that activity flow right through the State — including to everyday hard-working West Australians, union members and non-union members alike.

It is also true that the workforce is a very different place to when union power was at its peak, having become more flexible and in tune with the needs of modern enterprises.

Mr Shorten needs to explain how he will ensure unions under a Federal Labor government will not shackle the State to the whims and demands of the militants' power.

The Federal Coalition has, if anything, underplayed in the election campaign the potential impact of rampant union power. But, in The West Australian today, Prime Minister Scott Morrison warns of a resurgence of union militant activity under a Shorten government that would "cost jobs" and "crush" the local economic revival.

It would be wise to take note.



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## A digital tattoo that can never be erased

GARY MARTIN



Just as our society begins to no longer pre-judge those of us who sport ink on our bodies, it is tattoos of a different — but equally permanent — kind that are catching up with us.

Look no further than the Federal election campaign and the carnage caused by the unearthing of some candidates' digital tattoos from a distant past.

A bit like the ink variety, the words and images that we post on social media can be covered up temporarily but are very difficult to remove permanently.

And these high-tech tattoos have cast a powerful and intense spotlight on a cache of disturbing racist, sexist and homophobic views.

It is those very tweets and posts that can result in personal digital disasters ranging from damaged reputations to missing out on a job opportunity or being fired, through to being cyber-lynched, publicly shunned or despised.

Social media platforms have allowed many of us a level of connectivity not previously thought possible.

Platforms are increasingly becoming hard drives of shameful behaviours with many users — and not just aspirant politicians — logging on and upsetting, offending, shaming and even threatening others.

It is difficult to understand exactly

what sits behind the seemingly burgeoning keyboard warrior movement.

It is a mindset that permits people to jump online and behave so radically different to how they might in a regular face-to-face situation.

A simple explanation is that when social media users stare into a cold glass screen they forget they are still "speaking out aloud" as they tap away.

Maybe it is more complicated.

After all, social media is still a relatively new phenomenon for many and some may not have learnt the rules of engagement.

We have learnt what is acceptable in different social situations and around particular people.

But we appear confused in this newer social setting called "cyberspace", which can appear devoid of real people and their feelings.

Our growing levels of bad behaviour in cyberspace might also be explained by what some experts describe as the online disinhibition effect — a phenomenon that results in people dropping their guard, loosening up and expressing themselves more openly when online.

This often leads to flippant comments, harsh criticisms, anger, hatred and even threats.

Or perhaps it is that we have seen so much of these types of behaviours online in recent times that threats, shaming and mudslinging have all become the new normal.

Even more disturbing, just like a computer virus is passed from one

device to the next, our toxic ways seem to have become contagious to fuel an epidemic of online incivility.

We are dishd up rude or hostile behaviour online from others and we "pay it forward".

However, there is an explanation for this bad behaviour that is even more sinister.

It could well be that platform users are increasingly suffering from social media envy, a condition that causes some users to become so jealous of the heightened levels of attention lathered on others, that they set out to attract a much larger share of the hype by purposely knocking out comments online that they wouldn't dare make (physically) face to face.

Whatever the reasons, as these shameful behaviours move into overdrive, surely it is time to reboot our efforts at curbing their rise.

It starts by turning on "safe mode" and becoming a great "netizen" — one whose online behaviour matches the very best of who they are offline.

In case you have any reason to doubt the need to be an exemplary netizen, it is worth keeping in mind that that just like a regular tattoo, those high-tech digital tattoos are not easily erased.

If they resurface, the increased bandwidth you will receive might reveal more about you than you care to share.

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