



## DEFENDING THE DARROCH THESIS



*Dr Andrew Moore giving his talk*

**By ROBERT DARROCH**  
**Photographs by John Lacey**



The DHLA held its 12th AGM and the 3rd Margaret Jones Memorial Lecture at Minh's Restaurant in Dulwich Hill on January 30. Andrew Moore, Associate Professor of History at the University of Western Sydney (and author of *The Secret Army and the Premier*), gave the talk. About 20 members and guests attended.

Andrew began by explaining the reason for his talk. He had, suddenly and unexpectedly, found himself recently an unwilling combatant in "the history wars" (a term coined by

At the banquet table at Minh's Restaurant - Evie Harrison (foreground right) chats with Sally and JohnRothwell



Andrew Moore and Beverly Firth tuck into the Vitenamese paper rice rolls



Artist Paul Delprat, in pith helmet, chats with cartoonist Lindsay Foyle

Professor Stuart Macintyre to categorise the academic reaction to what historian Geoffrey Blainey first called "the black armband version of [Australian] history"). (This latter term was intended by Blainey – normally regarded as a right-wing historian – to criticise the contemporary theme of guilt in the historical treatment of the role of Aboriginal matters in Australian history.)

Andrew's portrayal of right-wing extremism in (mainly) the between-wars period as tending towards fascism had come under criticism by, again, a mainly right-wing source, spearheaded by ex-Liberal staffer (and now head of a Sydney think-tank, The Sydney Institute) Gerard Henderson.

Henderson had written that Andrew's portrayal (in, for example, *The Secret Army and the Premier*) was biased by Andrew's openly Labor point of view. Henderson questioned Andrew's main assertion/conclusion that right-wing para-military activity, often behind the scene, had been a major factor in Australian politics and society in the between-war years. According to Henderson there was no fascist activity in inter-war Australia, and no danger of civil war in 1932, the year Governor Game dismissed Premier Lang.

This view was subsequently taken up by an academic historian, Richard Evans. Writing in the the scholarly journal *History Australia* in 2008, Evans had said that Andrew had greatly exaggerated the role and importance of para-military right-wing activity in the period under question, and that in fact what Andrew had called "the Old Guard" did not really exist. Andrew, he argued, was conflating minor, sporadic anti-Labor activism, often by ex-servicemen, into an organisation that had no substantive existence.

Needless to say, this undermined much of Andrew's academic work – indeed, his life's work - and constituted a direct refutation and denial of, among other things, The Darroch Thesis (that DH Lawrence ran across a secret army in Sydney in 1922, and that his Australian novel *Kangaroo* was a thinly-fictionalised account of that encounter).

Andrew began his talk by confessing that it was he who had first coined the term "The Darroch Thesis" (in an exchange with Lawrence scholar Dr Bruce Steele in *Overland*). He outlined the present dispute and reiterated his position as a now combatant in the history wars. He strongly reasserted his belief in the Darroch Thesis.

He then gave a brief sketch of the evidence that supported his account of the Old Guard and their between-wars activity. He said that it had been born out of the activities of "the

farmers' army" that had been recruited in 1917 to combat a transport strike in NSW. He told of how this organisation was turned into a "standing" reserve of secret soldiers that would be reactivated by its leaders whenever Labor activity appeared to become threatening.



He mentioned that Jack Scott was one of its leaders, and he supported Darroch's identification of him as one of the characters portrayed by Lawrence in *Kangaroo*. He told how this organisation spawned Eric Campbell's New Guard in 1931, and that it continued on into the late 1930s after Lang was sacked.

Andrew said that the contrast between the scant evidence Evans and Henderson were advancing, and the overwhelming evidence for the existence of the Old Guard, was so great that it was hardly worth serious attention.

Robert Darroch himself then reported on the latest developments in the Darroch Thesis saga (see Secret Army Diary - cf. DHLA home page). Then the society's AGM was held, with all the existing office-holders being re-elected, en bloc, by acclamation.

And thus yet another pleasant DHLA function came to a satisfactory conclusion.

*(Members may be interested in reading the full text of Andrew's response to Richard Evans in History Australia, December 2009. The title of his article is "Superintendent MacKay and the curious case of the vanishing secret army: a response to Richard Evans". It is available online via Monash University E-Press.)*

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**DETAILS OF OUR AGM HELD AFTER ANDREW MOORE'S TALK - COMING SOON**