

How drunk were those who took the ‘pub test’?



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Lead Editorial

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Soon after the ALP and Liberals combined to ambush Christine Holgate in Parliament, the Licensed Post Office Group tweeted this heartfelt response to the insulting political claim she deserved her fate because her actions failed the “pub test”. In fact, Holgate’s undeserved fate demonstrates the deep corruption in both major parties.

The release of the Maddocks Report on Christine Holgate is a critical victory for the “three Rs” campaign to save Australia Post—Release the report; Replace the board; Reinstate Holgate. Unexpectedly however, the benefit of the report is not that it exonerates Holgate (although there’s a serious question over whether it was doctored to suit the government before being made public, p. 3), but that it is so transparently corrupt in how it technically “convicted” her.

As the release (p. 3) explains, the judgement hinges on a ridiculously specific definition of the “crime”, and the word of the Liberal-stacked board, who didn’t have to tell the truth as they weren’t under oath, so they shamelessly gave a version of events that supported the Prime Minister. It also hinges on a political ruse—the vague, undefinable and unverifiable standard of “public expectations”, the so-called “pub test”. It is emphasised in the report as if it is some defined legal requirement, but it isn’t. It is a convenient political device that all politicians cite to support their arguments precisely because it is undefinable and unverifiable. Get the patrons drunk enough, and they’ll accept anything a politician tells them.

In this case, the pub patrons were told by Labor Senator Kimberley Kitching, Labor leader Anthony Albanese, Liberal PM Scott Morrison, and the media, that Christine Holgate was a profligate CEO who splurged precious taxpayers’ money on luxury Cartier watches for fat cat executives while the rest of Australia were suffering job losses and economic hardship in the pandemic recession. “Sack her!” the pub patrons predictably screamed. They weren’t told that Holgate’s predecessor, NAB banker Ahmed Fahour, who was paid more than double her salary and left on a \$11 million payout, had run Australia Post into the ground, racking up big losses and selling assets like Sydney’s historic GPO to try to make profits, all the while he and his executive team had dined out on big salaries and junkets, like their \$2.5 million junket to the 2012 London Olympics, and Christine Holgate turned it all around while reducing executive remuneration by \$40 million. Or that Christine Holgate had not purchased the Cartier watches in the 2020 pandemic recession, but two years earlier in 2018, as a reward for a brilliant deal on which the executives worked nights, weekends and holidays to negotiate with the major banks and made them cough up \$220 million (\$20 million GST) to finally pay the actual cost of post offices serving the customers of those banks in rural and regional Australia and low income suburbs, whom the banks had abandoned when they shut branches to maximise profits. Or that Christine Holgate ensured this deal financially benefited the small business families who run the 2,900 licensed post offices (LPOs) and who were going bankrupt under her predecessor, making them viable

for the first time. By not telling the truth, the outcome of the pub test is conveniently predictable.

This case is everything everyday people hate about politics and politicians. The combined assault on Holgate by the Labor and Liberal parties bespeaks the entrenched corruption of the major parties, which are both owned lock, stock and barrel by vested interests, especially the banks. For their own dirty political reasons, conniving politicians like Kimberley Kitching and Scott Morrison have been induced to destroy someone who was simply good at her job. Christine Holgate took over Australia Post with one intention—to solve problems—and she did, in a brilliant way that proved its viability as a public institution and as a provider of financial services. But in doing so she innocently wandered into the firing line of the corrupt vested interests controlling the major parties.

The fight to save Holgate is about achieving a post office people's bank, which is crucial. But, it's also an excellent opportunity to expose and root out this entrenched corruption destroying Australia.

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