

## ***'A Sector with no Clothes' by Craig Robertson***

Two-score years ago in a far-flung land, the clothes its people wore were in disarray.

Clothes were important. They showed what someone could do and those with the best of clothes got the best of jobs.

*The cleverest wore long flowing black gowns, with brightly coloured sashes and quaint floppy hats. They loved to parade these clothes in special processions.*

For everyone else, the clothes were in various states of disrepair, different shapes and sizes. No one looked smart. No one got good jobs.

They needed new clothes because the ones they had were suited for jobs that were being sent overseas. New clothes for new smarter jobs were needed.

So, the emperors of the far-flung land bought a new way of tailoring clothes for all its citizens.

It was a special approach - it was *Competency Based Tailoring* – or CBT for short.

All that was needed was to set the tailoring patterns and citizens could buy the clothes. “Each style will get you into jobs across the land,” the emperors promised.

The emperors needed assistance to get the job done, to make sure patterns were made for each type of job across the land. So, they established the *Antipodean National Tailoring Authority* – or ANTA.

The patterns were designed by special committees. Through tri-partite arrangements, or the fashion partners in the European tailoring tradition, committee members represented employers, the citizens and the emperors.

Those representing the employers wanted only the most basic of clothes. “Who needs a thinking-hat when the boss does all that?” they said.

Those who looked out for the workers fought for the best of clothes. But they took care not to copy designs from other committees, lest there were demarcation disputes among the comrades. This was called pattern bargaining, which the Emperors eventually banned.

Soon patterns were designed for almost ninety per cent of jobs across Australia.

ANTA called on their clothes production houses to start making clothes for all the citizens. They started with the ones which were the most experienced and skilled - *Tailoring and Fitting Experts*, or TAFEs.

The emperors were most proud.

Over time, in-fighting started. Some of the committees thought they had better, smarter clothes and workers with their clothes should be paid more.

A very smart man solved the problem.

Affectionately known as Bert, he established a benchmark. All patterns would be compared to a benchmark in the Fashion Award, called C10. Clothes smarter than C10 would get the workers more pay. Clothes not as smart as C10 got less pay.

They called this the new settlement or the accord. And the land was at peace.

Australia compared well with other lands. The *Organisation of Empirical Clothes Data* (OECD) in its report - *Fashion at a Glance* - showed that more Australians had special clothes compared to other lands.

*Still, the cleverest in the land kept their beautiful black gowns and floppy hats. They did research and epistemological analysis of the clothes the rest of the citizens wore.*

But the emperors worried that it was costing too much to make the clothes.

They had discovered a new way. "It will lead to quality and innovation," they said. It was new public tailoring or tailoring rationalism. The citizens just called it "fashiontestability".

The emperors closed the Antipodean National Tailoring Authority 'because they thought they could do a better job'.

They also wanted to transform the Tailoring and Fitting Experts - TAFEs.

They welcomed new clothes makers into the sector –*registered tailoring organisations*.

Many were owned by the employers or employee organisations from the committees. They knew best about the clothes their members needed!

So pleased that the clothes were of such value, the emperors thought it only fair that the citizens pay for them. They offered loans to buy the clothes. The emperors called it VFH Loans - *Very Fashionable Haute-couture Loans*.

Entrepreneurs saw profit potential and quickly set up clothing outlets under funky labels like Careers, Acquire and Vocation!

They sent sellers to all parts of the country. Thousands of citizens were sold the fashion dream. Some were given special accessories – called *i-purses*.

Many paid \$20,000 or more for the promise of the very best in clothes for the best of jobs anywhere across the far-flung land.

The tailoring and fitting experts (TAFEs) raised concerns. "This doesn't seem right," they warned.

"Don't worry," the fashion partners said, "we've made patterns for all the jobs in the land, and then some. All you need to do is follow the patterns and all will be right."

Meanwhile, the bosses and citizens were wondering if the clothes were worth it.

Many bosses complained that the clothes didn't meet what they needed. So, the emperors allowed the tailoring organisations to mix and match the patterns.

The bosses were happy, but the workers were not. "The clothes don't fit and don't suit me!" they said. "And when I change jobs I have to get new ones, at my cost."

So now we come to this present day.

The fashion houses have closed and left many in little more than rags, but the TAFEs have taken them in.

Most citizens are unhappy about the clothes the emperors have designed for them. "Patchwork and unflattering at best, incomplete and immodest, or nothing at worst," they said.

"But only if you had exercised better choice," the emperors chastised them.

The OECD is warning that the fashions are falling behind world standards.

The emperors will assemble in the capital of the land to think about what to do next.

Many Australians (oops, citizens of that far-flung land) will be wondering what clothes they'll be offered in the future.

Most are not hopeful.

Some have been heard to ask – “why is this a sector without any clothes?”

*And the cleverest in the land still parade in their flowing black gowns and floppy hats.*

*THE END*

\* This was part of a presentation to the Australian Education Union in October 2017.