



Good day to you. Recently Australia's pre-eminent satirist, cartoonist and artist passed away from a broken tormented heart at just 61 years. Bill Leak pushed the boundaries and through his pen was a champion of free speech. Michael Galak and his family came to Australia from the Soviet Union in 1978 and this is the moving eulogy he wrote for Bill Leak.

*"I can't imagine how Bill Leak coped as bravely and for as long as he did with the authorities and Muslim fanatics each determined to put his head on a pole. This is Australia's disgrace: a relentless, speech-enforcing bureaucracy making common cause with head-lopers. I do not ask, how he died, for medical opinion tells us it was a heart attack. I do ask why he had to die as he did, weary and stressed after months of unconscionable official harassment. Bill Leak, cartoonist extraordinaire is lost to us. No more of that sardonic wit. Gone forever the sharpshooting sniper whose targets were the pompous and the self-righteous and the lies they tell each other and will use any means at their disposal to make the rest of us bow before them too. And if we don't, if we refuse to genuflect before their lies? They'll persecute us and make us pay, in Bill's case with his life.*

*The Inquisition hated to spill blood, it preferred that heretics be racked and broken then quietly expire. Bill's heart exploded, that is what the death certificate says. Yet still he died as countless heretics have died — those who dared to think differently, who dared to speak their heretic thoughts aloud. They died lest they contaminate others with their heresies. What did they accuse you of, Bill, what was your crime? Of telling the truth as you saw it? Of ruffling feathers by whipping idiots into lathers of froth and turmoil? My hands are trembling as I write. My eyes are full of tears. My heart is heavy with foreboding. When an artist, a writer, a poet, a satirist is persecuted, the country that lets it happen slides toward totalitarianism. No, that's wrong. A country that funds a spiteful bureaucracy to punish those of whose words it disapproves is already there. It's just a question of degree. To tolerate that is worse than simply being stripped of the freedom millions died to win and defend. Rather, it is to throw away freedom and liberty like so much worthless rubbish. Today they pick off a cartoonist and a laughing, joyful mob dips its hankies in the blood for souvenirs. Tomorrow? It could be any door — your door, my door, any door — on which the enforcer's fist bangs in the darkness.*

*I state it plainly, people in the USSR, where I lived and grew up. Like Bill Leak, I was hauled in front of the unsmiling, self-righteous, angry, shouting komsomoltsy of the Young Communist League for my desire to emigrate to the West. My wife and I, two thought-criminals together. We were denounced as Western spies and Zionist traitors, criminals who deserved to be shot. We did not know at the time if we would have to find someone prepared to care for our four-year old daughter if we were taken away. In the USSR that was the fate of those who declined to submit to their tormentors. I saw people being accused in front of many of anti-Communist thoughts or deeds or words. I knew people, like Bill Leak, who were taken to hospital with heart attacks. Their friends stayed silent or publicly turned against them. I saw all this and worse. I lived it and survived it. I escaped it. Or so I thought. I am calling on all sane people: **do not let it go any further here, do not let it go any further than it has already.** Do not shut the dissenting mouth and protect that same mouth if anyone tries to gag it, whether you like what it says or not. Do not let totalitarianism's stealthy creep into the public discourse destroy the precious tree of freedom.*

*I know exactly how Bill Leak felt. How exposed, frightened and defenceless he felt in front of his relentless accusers. I can't imagine, however, how much worse it must have been for him to have not only the authorities on his back but Muslim fanatics as well. This is the depths we have reached: a relentless, speech-enforcing bureaucracy making common cause with head-lopers. And, oh, how his persecutors gloried in their righteous omnipotence to punish him with all the extra-judicial power at their disposal. He knew the punishment of the process would never end. He knew that when one complaint had run its course there would be another. I was 27 when I made myself a target of official harassment by daring to disagree. I was younger than Bill Leak, and my heart was younger too. I lived with the stress and escaped here, to Australia. Bill's heart was older and he did not survive. Rest in peace, Bill Leak, Australia's first martyr for free speech."*

[My friends these are the heart rendering words of Michael Galak and immigrant from the Soviet Union and someone who knows how totalitarianism crushes the life out of freedom of speech and democracy.](#)

**Until Next time this is Kent Bayley**