

PETER COSTELLO

blog theage.com.au/blogs



WikiLeaks: Wacky freaks

Now the football season has ended there are slim pickings on Saturday afternoon TV.

That's the only way I can explain how I came to be watching a program about the WikiLeaks political party on the weekend. When I switched on, the WikiLeaks senate candidate for NSW, Dr Alison Broinowski, was telling us how much support the party received in the federal election.

Dr Broinowski is well-spoken and polite. She has represented Australia overseas as a diplomat. But the world she inhabits is quite different to the one that actually exists.

The way she tells it, WikiLeaks gathered enormous support in the last election.

Journalists flew in from all over the world to report about it, which kept her very busy dealing with all the international media attention.

With a little more political experience Dr Broinowski will



WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange (left) at work.

realise that foreign journalists don't vote in Australian elections, and even if they write glowing stories back in Japan or wherever it was that they came from, that doesn't swing votes back here.

In fact Dr Broinowski and the WikiLeaks Party will figure out there is one really accurate way to tell how much support a party has in an election.

It's by counting the number of votes it receives.

In NSW, WikiLeaks was easily outpolled by the DLP, the Christian Democrat Party, the Shooters and Fishers, and even Pauline Hanson's One Nation.

It won nothing. In fact it failed to win a senate seat in any of the states where it contested. This would be a disap-

“WikiLeaks ended up preferring a party headed by a former neo-Nazi”

pointment given the wide and sympathetic coverage it received from the Fairfax media and the ABC.

In May 2012 the Fairfax-owned Age newspaper reported: “WikiLeaks founder Julian

Assange has received encouragement for his senate bid from a poll in which a quarter of voters said they would be likely to vote for him.”

In December 2012 the Age newspaper ran an online poll that showed an incredible

55 per cent of an unusually large sample of people claimed they'd vote for Julian Assange. By April 2013 the Fairfax-Nielsen Poll was estimating support for WikiLeaks in Victoria at around 15 per cent.

WikiLeaks was always going to poll better in Victoria where its leader and spiritual inspiration, Julian Assange, led the party's list of candidates.

The sympathetic media did its best, but WikiLeaks polled a little over 1 per cent of the vote

— actually 124 per cent — coming in behind the Sex Party and Family First. It was a long way from the online polls and the various puff pieces that were designed to boost its vote.

WikiLeaks also suffered from the fact the No.2 on its Victorian ticket (also the holder of a PhD) resigned in disgust at the murky preference deals the party did.

In NSW it ended up preferring a party headed by a former neo-Nazi. It didn't look good. WikiLeaks campaigns on a platform of accountability and transparency.

But Dr Broinowski is still, apparently, unfazed by all of this. Speaking to a sympathetic audience at Sydney University,

which was broadcast at a time when live football should have been showing on my TV, she told how popular Ecuadorians have become in Australia.

It all has to do with the fact they are giving asylum to Assange, who is holed up as a refugee in their London embassy.

It might add romance to belong to a party whose founder is under house arrest. But Assange is not Aung San Suu Kyi. He is on the run from sex charges laid against him — which he denies — in liberal progressive Sweden. You would like to think that left-wing academics would take up the cause of women who claim to be the victims of such conduct.

But Assange has come up

with an impressive backstory that says all this is the work of evil Americans who will grab and persecute him the moment he steps outside the Ecuadorian embassy in London or the moment he sets foot in lovely old Sweden.

The real victims here are not women. The real victim is him, because he is up against the real Satan — the US.

In “progressive” thinking, being an enemy of America (real or imagined) clearly pardons an awful lot.

A few years ago it was David Hicks. Hicks might have supported and fought for one of the most repressive regimes on earth, run by a group that specialises in subjugating women — the Taliban — but once he ended up in an American jail he was regarded as something of a freedom fighter.

Cathedrals hung banners demanding “Free David Hicks”. After he was freed and had done the tour of writer's festivals he lost his political usefulness.

And so too with Assange. TV

footage of the Ecuadorian embassy is getting very tiresome. He needs to refresh his image as a persecuted martyr of American authoritarianism.

Assange would be comforted to know that on the other side of the world Sydney University is running seminars on WikiLeaks: “From an international whistleblowing platform to a global political movement.”

It would be nice to know faithful followers are using such events to extol his brilliant political success.

I fear the problem is there just aren't enough academics to keep his party going. Academics are clever enough to convince themselves of anything. Real voters need something more than delusion.