

No. 377 June 2010

Don't Panic, it's only Prophecy

By Owen Harries

22 June 2010

Today's university graduates are going out into the world in less than optimistic circumstances, with not one but several predictions of doom hovering over their heads and the world at large. Among them are global warming, the collapse of capitalism, the prospect of more terrorism and further nuclear proliferation.

It seems to me that in the circumstances, they could do with a bit of cheering up. I recently turned 80, and one of the few benefits of growing old can be that, while one's short-term memory may be pathetic, one retains a functioning and commodious long-term memory. This can provide context and a sense of proportion. It can do something to rescue one from what has been well termed the 'parochialism of the present' — the tendency to believe that what is happening now, and to us, must be of unprecedented and transcendent significance.

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This article was published in The Australian Spectator online on 24 April 2010.

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