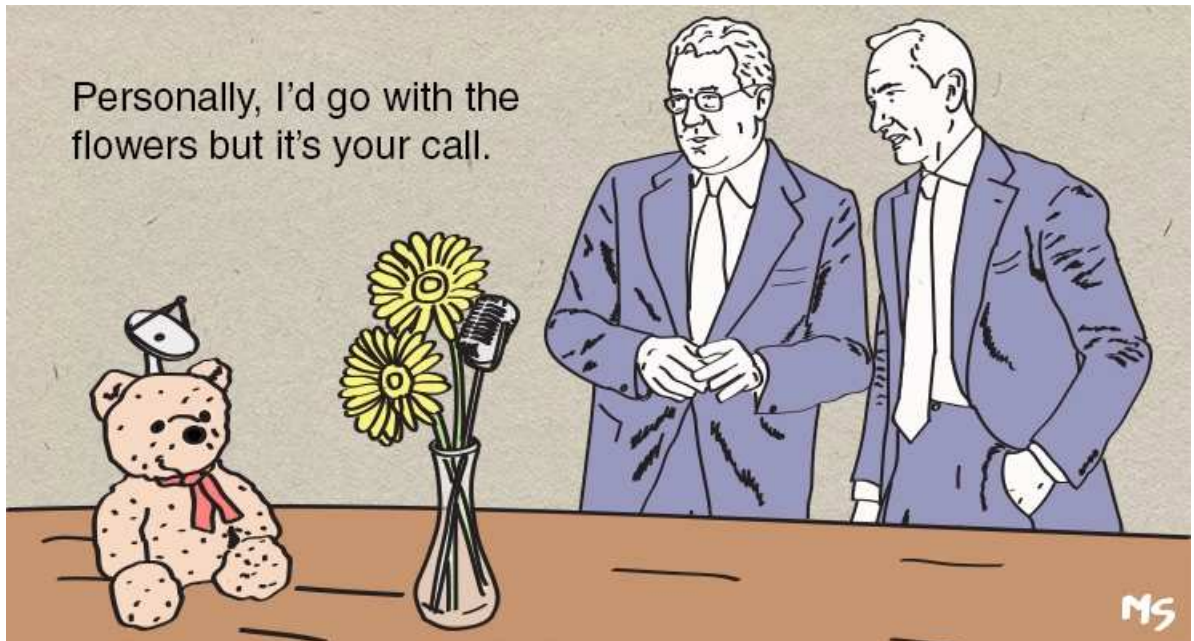


Dave Sharma, Timor-Leste and the importance of speaking power to truth

Bernard Keane in Crikey.com, 22 April 2022

What was Liberal MP Dave Sharma doing from 2003-06? Advising Alexander Downer on negotiating with Timor-Leste over access to resources under the Timor Sea — after they'd bugged them.



(Image: Mitchell Squire/Private Media)

The great majority of candidates in this election will be non-politicians, but of course the handful with a serious chance of winning will be professional politicians.

The ranks of our politicians are -- in spite of the increasing number of women and Indigenous MPs -- becoming less and less diverse in terms of their backgrounds. Our Parliament is now dominated by people who are either former political staffers or party operatives, or former union officials. And the range of occupations of those who are not former political operatives is narrowing -- increasingly it is law or finance.

An important feature of this election is the effort by a large number of non-politicians to challenge professional Liberal politicians in urban seats -- perhaps the biggest challenge the political class has faced since One Nation in the 1990s.

One such contest is in the seat of Wentworth, NSW, where independent Allegra Spender, among others, is challenging Liberal MP Dave Sharma.

On the face of it, Sharma is not cut from the same cloth as standard-issue political professionals. He's an actual person who had a job outside politics, albeit not significantly removed from it -- he was a successful diplomat.

Sharma is less easy to fit into the "outsiders versus professionals" narrative because he's smart (we know this because he insists on telling everyone his high school results), accomplished in a previous career and a self-described moderate.

But do a little digging into Sharma's career and that appearance changes radically. His personal slogan is "Experienced. Delivering" but doesn't spell out in much detail the kinds of things Sharma is "experienced" in.

The people of Timor-Leste, however, have a good idea.

Sharma has never explained his role in what was done to Timor-Leste, and what advice he gave to Downer about it. Did he advise Downer that, under ACT law, there was a chance that ASIS's actions were illegal, in spite of the remit of ASIS's enabling legislation? Did he advise Downer that, should Timor-Leste ever discover it was the victim of a bugging operation, it would have a strong case in international courts to pursue a fairer treaty? Did he express any concern about the damage to Australia's reputation if what we had done was exposed?

Woodside is a recurring theme in Sharma's career. When he was ambassador to Israel in which position he became an enthusiastic supporter of then-prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu (now exposed as corrupt) and backed his government's apartheid policies the moment Sharma arrived, he welcomed [a delegation from Woodside](#).

And as a member of the Morrison government since 2019, Sharma has backed its climate inaction, expanding support for the fossil fuel companies that are such massive donors to his party Woodside, Santos, Origin, Chevron and Scott Morrison's "gas-led recovery".

Sharma likes to tell his voters that he's a moderating, pro-climate voice in Canberra, but he has never once voted against, or spoken out against, Morrison's climate inaction. His record is as a collaborator with fossil fuel interests.

Let's return to where we started with the kind of people we want in politics. At first blush, Sharma looks like the kind of person who would be better than the cookie-cutter professional politicians we see so much of. But what's his record? Helping the Howard government exploit and cheat TimorLeste. Backing the Israeli government in its crimes against Palestinians. Supporting climate inaction and the interests of fossil fuel companies.

Sharma's record is of taking the side of the powerful against the powerless, against the dispossessed, against the exploited and abused. Sharma uses that shining intellect to speak power to truth. He's literally the last kind of politician we need more of.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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