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ABC IWAKI AUDITORIUM

11am Keynote: Amanda Platell (UK)

Our woman in Fleet Street: Amanda Platell, columnist for the New Statesman, discusses her experiences as a Fleet Street editor and Conservative Party spin-doctor
Moderator: Keith Moor, MPC Committee.

Keith Moor (KM): If I was introducing Amanda Platell to an English audience I literally could use the old cliché that my guest needs no introduction because in Britain she's the "Jana" or the "Ray Martin". Everybody knows who she is. The equivalent of *Four Corners* did a documentary on the four most powerful women in Fleet Street. Amanda was one of them.

She's also simply crossed the line to work for a political party: the Tory Party. She was named in a number of articles as the most powerful woman in British politics since Margaret Thatcher and Margaret Thatcher was obviously a pretty formidable woman. Various newspaper articles... if you'd checked *Google* you'd find she's been called "Killer Bimbo from Oz". And it says something about Amanda that she actually hates the "bimbo" term but doesn't mind the "killer" one. She's been called the "mistress of the make-over", the "Aussie bitch from hell." She's been fodder for all the gossip columns and regularly stalked by the paparazzi, particularly when one of her boyfriends was romantically linked with Princess Diana. Cameramen were camped outside Amanda's flat for many hours.

She's had to make a number of tough decisions as you would as an executive including, would you believe, being responsible for, if not ordering, a wave of sackings on *The Daily Mirror* when she had a high position there. And one of those people is now a very senior executive at *HWT* and also used to be her boyfriend when they grew up together in Perth but it didn't stop her sacking him. He's actually come out quite well out of it because he ended up suing *The Daily Mirror* and got quite a sizeable payout.

But because she isn't so well known here, I will just take a moment to read through her impressive CV. It started off with she and I walking into the Perth Daily News, which is an afternoon tabloid, together in January 1979. One of us has kicked on since then, I'd hasten to add. And it ain't me, unfortunately. She is the daughter of a well-known Perth journalist who at the age of 77, I think, he is now still writes for the *West Australian*: her father, Frank Platell. She then went to Sydney to run the Sydney Bureau for *The Daily News* for two years... became a sub-editor on *The Sydney Sun*. In 1985 she did what a lot of young Aussie journalists do and I highly recommend it to all of you. She put a backpack on her back and spent six months travelling to get to Britain and then started touting around for shifts in Fleet Street. The very first shift she got was on the *Sunday Express* which sells about a million copies and which she later went on to edit and was ultimately sacked from. But I'll leave her to talk about the sacking. She then became marketing director for *The Mirror* and *Independent* newspapers. She worked for the *Today* newspaper... became its deputy editor. She's been acting editor of the *Sunday Mirror*, managing director, *Independent* and the *Independent on Sunday*. She is currently a political commentator, writer and

broadcaster. She writes columns for the *Evening Standard* and *New Statesman*. She writes for *The Guardian*, *The Observer*. She emailed her copy to *The Times* from my office only about an hour ago, so she's still working while she's here for the prestigious *Times* in Britain, *Sunday Telegraph*, *The Mail*, *Mail on Sunday* and *GQ* magazine. She also does a lot of radio and television work and is about to have two shows on the BBC go on air in the next few months.

The bit I missed out of her CV there was when she decided, after being sacked as the editor of *The Express*, she was approached by the Tory Party to be the head of media for the Opposition. And basically her job was to try and make William Hague, the Opposition Leader, look good. And if any of you know much about William Hague, you would know how hard that would be because the poor chap is a bit bookish and a bit bald. If he stood next to John Howard it would make John Howard look tall, handsome, powerful and charismatic.

One of the first things she didand being a good Australian girl she remembered that Bob Hawke won quite a few votes because one of his claims to fame was that he was able to sink a yard of ale in an incredibly short period of time when he was a Rhodes scholar. And actually he is still in the *Guinness Book of Records* for that. So Amanda thought 'hey I could do something with this'. And one of the first things William Hague did was start bragging about how when he was a young chappie he used to drink 10 to 14 pints of beer a night while playing darts. It didn't win him many votes and Amanda was then astute enough to realise that despite her best efforts there was no way the William Hague was ever going to become Prime Minister. So in probably what was the most controversial part of her career while she was on the campaign trail making him look good, every night in the privacy of her hotel room she recorded a secret video diary, warts and all... everything that happened. Who was backstabbing him, the works. Had he become Prime Minister, one suspects and Amanda certainly says that that would never have seen the light of day. But basically he didn't and Amanda then had that aired on the prestigious channel 4 in what some described as a stroke of genius but many others thought it was the ultimate act of betrayal...

...Amanda has already had a very racy novel called *Scandal* published, which I believe has a fair hint of truth in it and it involves shenanigans in newspaper newsrooms around the world. I didn't want to praise Amanda too much because I've known her so well that I decided to troll amongst my fellow cadets to see if I could find something that would embarrass her. And I did find quite a lot from the 13 of us that started our careers with her. But because of the laws of defamation, I can't mention most of them.

But one that I will mention is of all of the cadets that walked into that room together, and I'd say there was 14 of us, Amanda was the only one that was immaculately dressed, well groomed, bright red lipstick and incredibly long black hair down to her waist. Our shorthand and typewriting teacher was a formidable Germanic woman by the name of Maria Gabor who seemed to take, dislike is probably too strong a word, but I think she looked at Amanda and thought this girl is from middle class, she needs to be brought down a peg or two, and used to pick on her a bit. And this is showing both my age and Amanda's. We were actually learning to type on a typewriter. Some of you may not even know what one of those is. But we used to type stories on them. And one day Maria came up to Amanda who had been a bit slow in learning how to do it and threaded her long hair into the roller of the typewriter and as Amanda tried to pull up, Maria went wizz. About eight times to the extent of the letter K can still be seen just about there, above her eyes. We sat there thinking she's going to break, she's

going to cry, she's going to run out. To her credit, and this shows the powerfulness of Amanda, she just shrugged it off, saw it as a rite of initiation and eventually won over Maria Gabor and I believe became good friends.

One other, Andrew Main, who many of you would know is an influential financial journalist for *The Financial Review* based in Sydney and an accomplished author. I spoke to him yesterday and he said, 'ah you've got to tell them about the time that she and I were choppered out to a US warship with 10,000 sailors on board just off Perth to do the usual color piece about all these chappies coming down to Perth.' And Andrew says he will never forget the look on those sailors' faces who hadn't seen any women for 45 days. Amanda's wearing the stilettos, the black stockings, the pencil skirt with a slit up the side, a fairly tight top and had to get out of the helicopter and walk down an little gang plank across it and the tongues were just hanging out of all of these sailors. She in her best Bette Midler impersonation, then did the old "hello boys" trick and it was just chaos. Cheers, the works, very popular girl.

Now I've probably embellished some of those stories over the years. I don't think I have but here to tell you the true story is Amanda Platell. Please make her welcome.

Amanda Platell (AP): Thanks very much, Keith. As with all the stories I've heard about me, that one was completely untrue. I was wearing jeans that day. And in those days I had about a size 16 arse so I can tell you there weren't a lots of tongues hanging out that day.

Can I thank the Melbourne Press Club and especially Keith for getting me out here. I too, feel quite nervous about speaking to you all today because I think it is a great honour to speak to your peers but I also know that you guys are going to be my harshest critics.

It's wonderful to be in Melbourne again. It's been 20 years since I've been here and I'd forgotten what a beautiful city it was. And I'm desperate, desperate that in the course of the next five years I'm going to end up living back in this country. When Keith described my career, I mean listening to it then it sounds fabulous. And there have been some bits that were really fabulous. But what Keith leaves out is the long periods that I've spent unemployed. The times that I've been sacked and I seem to have the knack of being very publicly sacked. And it has been an incredible roller coaster. I think if anyone had told me when I left Perth in 1985 on Australia Day that I would still be living there, I would never have had the courage to leave. So it wasn't something that I felt 'oh God I want to have a big career and I want to go on and do all these things in my life.' I wanted to have a big family. I wanted to live around the corner from mum and dad and be like my father and work for the rest of my life with the Perth *Daily News*. Unfortunately, that newspaper closed.

But I think it is in my blood, journalism. And I did witness with my father It is true at 77 he's still working two days a week at the *West*) it is a brilliant career. For those many of you here today who are starting out and who are anticipating your profession ahead of you - it's a wonderful, wonderful life. It's very tough. It's very brutal these days. I think the average job expectancy in Britain is about the same length now as one in two marriages, which is just under four years. So you have to get quite used to getting sacked just as some of us have had to get used to getting divorced.

I've always wanted to be a journalist ever since I was a kid. And my mother just was determined that she would do everything to stop me. And she used to sit me down and say, 'darling, you'll end up smoking, drinking and divorced.' And she was right. And I have now given up smoking.

When I finally finished university, I had some very good advice. I'm going to try and pass on some bits of advice that I had that were decent along the way. I wanted to be a cadet straight after school. And I went to see the wonderful Jim Dunbarand he just basically said, go away and grow up a bit and get a decent education and then come back when you've learned a few things about the world. It was a very good piece of advice. I did an honours degree in politics and philosophy and when I finished that I sat down. I had three offers: the cadetship on the Perth Daily News; I was offered a research job with an MP which would have been a political career for me and I was offered a job as a junior tutor in the philosophy department. And I sat down with mum and dad that night and I said 'look, I'm really sorry to disappoint you but this is all I've ever wanted to do, 'This is going to be my life'. And mum burst into tears and was very upset about it all and dad burst into tears because he'd also tried to deter me. And in the end he said 'well actually I think it will be a wonderful career but I think it will be very, very hard for you. And I think it will be especially hard for women'. And today, I don't think I'm speaking out of turn here ,but from the moment I knew I was coming out here I've asked that question. How many women editors do you have in this country? How many women do you have in senior positions? And I'm shocked that the situation for women in this country, as in Britain I have to say, in journalism has hardly changed in the 18 years I've been away. I'm going to have to get some water, excuse me. We had a very big dinner last night. My father gave me some great advice. He told me to work hard, bloody hard. Never to say no to a job and the dress thing was one of his as well. And he said 'always make sure you go along dressed as though you could go to the opening of parliament'. And my first break actually came one Saturday morning when I was the only person who wasn't wearing jeans and there was some big story to cover and the news editor.. you could see was thinking 'oh god ,not Platell, she's useless. All she ever does was beauty and makeovers', which was all they would give me. And I was the only one they could send. And I know that also feeds a fetish that I had for high heels and nice clothes but I know that there have been a lot of times in my career that I've actually got jobs because I looked as though I meant it. I looked as though I was professional. And I think that's very, very important. And I don't think that's changed at all. And increasingly in the jobs that you will do, you will be interfacing with the most senior businessmen, the most senior politicians in this country. So much of the work of a journalist is at that very top level. So I followed dad's advice.

The class of 79, it was a brilliant year. All I can say to you is just learn the things you'll learn in whatever media courses you're doing, especially the really boring stuff like shorthand and typing. The other day someone phoned me up and said 'would you go and interview a person who'd taken part in this big TV series?'. And I didn't have a tape recorder and I sat down and after all these years I could still do my shorthand. They're great skills. I don't know if you guys learn shorthand any more. You probably don't.

And one of the other things is you make wonderful friendships. Julie, we met at university and then went on to be my bridesmaid for that disastrous marriage. But friendships, like with Keith, I think is one of the really important things. Friendship in journalism, just as in life. is really crucial because you're all going to get sacked. You're all going to end up on the bones of your bum at some stage and unless you have a good group of friends around you, you won't survive.

In 1985 I arrived in Britain with a husband, a backpack and 100 Australian dollars between us. And as I said, if you'd told me then that I would still be living there it would have just completely terrified me. It was a very difficult place to work, Britain

in those days. I remember late one night I was working on doing some shifts. And everyone used to take the piss out of my accent. But I was determined that I would not be one of those Australians who would turn up and within six months speak like Princess Diana. You know I was proud of being an Australian. And I was determined I wasn't going to lose it. But it was pretty brutalising. And they used to ask me pretty stupid questions like, 'Amanda, would you have sex with all three of us right now?' And I'd say no. And they'd love the way I said no because they said it had six vowel sounds in it. And there was this wonderful guy there. I will always remember him. Frank Petersen. He was a Scot. He had big sort of whiskers and he was smoking a pipe. In those days you could in the office. And he sat me down and he said, 'don't worry about it girl, you've got two great things going for you.' He said, 'one you're a woman. And the other is you're Australian and that will make everyone think that you're stupid.' And he said, 'you'll be able to sneak up on them.' And I did sneak up on them. Having said that, I must say that Australians are much, much loved in Britain. But they think we're stupid.

And why do I stay there? I stay there because there are 11 newspapers every day, 11 newspapers every Sunday. They sell 13 million copies every day. You have 35 million people read them every day. It's a fantastically exciting place to work. And I think that Britain especially is at the forefront of those kinds of multimedia type of journalists now. I mean it is true that I write as much as I do television and I do radio. And I had no training in any of the broadcasting skills. They're things I had to pick up myself. So I would advise also if you get any chance to pick up those skills, even boring old things like talking off an autocue, they're fantastically useful later on. The only tragedy about newspapers in Britain at the moment is that they are, like here, declining. And the only paper that is actually doing well is a little paper called *The Star*, which is everything I love and everything I hate about newspapers now. It's only got about six people working on it. They've cut the guts out of the costs. And it's just about sex and football and soaps. They call them the football and fucking formula. And it works really, really well. I love the fact that you have any kind of little paper that you just have a small number of people work their arses off and they produce something. But it's a real shame that that's thing that people in Britain most want these days or it's the only growth area.

I'm often asked if being an Australian is a deterrent or an advantage when you're working abroad. And the truth is they do think that we're sort of cheeky chappies, you know, and we're fun all the rest of it and we're good at cricket. But I think there is a sense that they don't really take us that seriously. But I've tried very hard not just to maintain my accent and if it doesn't sound strong to you the BBC complained recently that I was still too Australian and I said 'well, you know, take it or leave it I'm not changing.' And thank goodness they decided to take it. But there are great Australian qualities and they are a sense of humour. They are a real kind of fearlessness and a gutsiness and, as I said, this wonderful sense of mateship that will support you throughout your career.

I think the downside of that is that, I think, you can be a bit reckless like I have been on occasions. It usually ends up with me losing my job. But it's also the brilliant thing about Australians is that we are marvellously egalitarian. And that was one example when I was sacked from *The Sunday Express*. And it is true that was the first shift I ever did and we were so poor in those days, well not poor but we just didn't have any money and John, my then husband, and I went out and bought one outfit each. And we had to go to one place and then another place so that they wouldn't realise that we only had one outfit that we were wearing to work. And I ended up editing *The Sunday*

Express and falling out very badly with the management because I ran a piece aboutone of the most powerful men in the cabinet at that time. And there was a huge stink and the editor-in-chief called me in and she said, 'look Amanda I've got to have a head for this'. And I said 'I completely understand this. You know you make the call. You're in overall charge. I'll give you my resignation now.' She said 'no, no, no, no not you'. She said, 'we'll sack the news editor'. And I said, 'but I'm the editor and it was my decision to run this story and whatever flack there is, I'm going to take it.' And she said 'that's the problem with you Amanda, you're always worried about the little people.'

And I am proud of the fact that I have always been worried about the little people, partly because I have been little myself lots of times. And this is a very, very volatile profession and a lot of you will reach the top of it and a lot of you will end up at the bottom of it again. And I think if you value yourself and if you view yourself with the qualities of your position, then you really are lost. I think the little people are what makes the whole thing go around. It's what my father said to me the first day I walked into *The West Australian* group. He said 'you treat the guy who runs the lift with exactly the same dignity that you treat the editor.' And I think that's very good advice too. Thank you, dad.

Constantly people talk of me. They say that, you know, that I am a deeply ambitious woman. I think that it's one of those things you get that's written about. There are lots of women here today and if you get to do the kind of jobs I've done you'll find that not only are the criticisms of you as a woman more much vicious than they are of men - it's just a fact of life. Something you'll just have to live with. But also the worst kinds of criticisms will come from other women. And if there's one thing I could ask of you today....you know people say you know what can we do to help women in this profession? We can give each other a break and treat each other with the respect that we actually deserve and stop thinking that being a woman is a unique selling point for you. The more women you have around you the better, I've found. And they've been the greatest colleagues to me in my career. I now have three girlfriends who are really senior journalists in Britain and we call ourselves the coven. And we do really look after each other because the men aren't particularly good at doing it for us. Although people like Keith are brilliant and marvellous.

Luck, you know it's that old thing that golfers always say. You know, the harder I worked the luckier I got. There is no substitute for hard work and putting the hours in. It is a fiendish profession in terms of the toll it takes on your private life. There are no short cuts. If you take the short cuts you end up in the kind of the ghettos that especially women so often end up in. And I also think that bad luck is the way you respond to things; when you really are down on your knees and you're getting kicked in the teeth by everyone.

There is a wonderful letter I got after one of my sackings. I think it was *The Sunday Mirror*. And Tony O'Reilly, who's a huge newspaper owner, an Irish-faced guy. He just wrote me this note because I used to work on *The Independent* which he co-owned and he said 'Where I come from, we judge a man by how he plays when he's got all the odds against him, not by how he plays when things are going well. And I think you've played a good game against the odds' And I think that's really, really important because it's a damned tough industry. It's a wonderful industry but it's damned tough.

I'm sure that someone's going to ask me about the video diaries. I'm happy to talk about them at any point. The most important thing about them was, I think, the reason I took that job was again a bit of Australianness in me. I just got this phone call

from this bald loser who said, 'everything's going terribly, will you come and help me?' And I think that there's this real love of the underdog that we have. And that's why I said yes to that job. It's very difficult to move back from working in politics into journalism proper. Someone the other day phoned me up and said they wanted to write a profile on me and said, you know 'you're just a blueprint for this most brilliantly successful person who just like that goes from this world of politics into this successful freelance career'. And I just thought to myself if he could have seen me for one year when I didn't earn a penny, when I used to sit looking at the phone like some middle aged out-of-work soap actress just willing for it to ring. And it never did. And the only thing that supported me during that time was my friends who used to cold call for me and say 'you know Platell hasn't got any work. Can you give her something to do?' So it's very hard to get back. But there are times you've got to say OK it's going to cost me X amount of money to get back into the thing that I dearly love. I'm prepared to put the money in. Which is what I did. I went through all my savings and then things just started to go right again at the very end which I'm very grateful for.

For those of you starting out I wish you as much pleasure from the business as I've had and possibly fewer sackings. I think that would be the kindest thing I could wish you all. And just to have the guts to follow your dreams because it will be hard at times but it's worth it.

I'm open to anyone who wants to ask me questions.

KM: Amanda is happy to take questions from the floor.

Linda Edwards: I've just been working for the BBC for the past year and a half. And I think that you're amazing. But at the same time, how did you cope with coming from the colonies, because I was always coming from the colonies and I found it very hard to work in that environment as a news producer and reporter and all of that and I just couldn't. I mean it was a great experience but at the same time it was very confronting. At the end I was just thinking I was crazy.

AP: I think for me the biggest shock came because, you know, I'd been brought up in the days when we still talked about the Far East, you know, and I'd spent all this time backpacking and the only person that I could speak English with was my husband and he even at that stage on the honeymoon wasn't speaking to me. And we arrived on the boat from France over to England and I remember there was a chap who said good morning to me and it was the first time I'd heard someone speak English and I was overjoyed to be in what I considered to be the motherland. You know I really did think it was like that. About three months later, I remember sitting in front of my mirror crying and thinking what's happened. Why are they so awful to me? And I couldn't understand it. They were just so bloody patronising. But you see what it brought out in me was this thing. I just was determined that I wouldn't leave until I'd proved to them that I was as good as they were. But it was at an enormous cost. And I did promise myself that I wouldn't cry in front of them and I never ever did. But I have great sympathy. Can you imagine what it's like always taking the mickey out of your accent? Always saying you're stupid. But the Australian cricket team has helped us in that to get back at them.

Chris Evans, The Age: You're a woman who has reached the top of the profession and the previous speaker talked about Jayson Blair and I remember that one of the

factors there was an affirmative action appointment gone wrong. I was curious given your belief in hard work as to what you've seen happen or if you've seen anything happen when something else is substituted for hard work as the path in a career.

AP: What do you mean casting couch?

CE: No, no. I've worked in an office where I've seen experienced reporters – this is in a small paper in a faraway place – replaced by people who have not been reporters. Kindergarten teacher editing a newspaper with experienced reporting staff, geologist, IT networker. I'm just curious whether you've seen in Britain people put into senior posts who did not come from reporting backgrounds?

AP: There's a very strong tradition in Britain for people to come from either slightly more esoteric writing backgrounds or even from the production background. That's a kind of highly respected route in Britain. But I don't know of a single person who's reached the top in any newspaper that hasn't paid their dues. Some are luckier than others are, but no I don't have any experience in that. And sometimes we don't know the journalists as well as others but we've never had any kindergarten teachers. I think most of the journalists would walk out if that happened.

Rachel Baker, ABC: I just wondered if you could talk a bit more about the competition between women and maybe some examples that you've experienced and just some advice about how women can support each other.

AP: OK. I think the worst thing that women say about each other is that 'oh she's only got that job because she's sleeping with X'. And they know damn well it's not true. And it carries more currency when it comes from a woman. I don't think you should gossip about what people's sex lives are in these circumstances. And if you think someone's getting along well with someone maybe they're just getting along well together. I mean I was appalled once to hear that I was supposed to be having an affair with David Montgomery. I mean he made William Hague look like a God. And I was so insulted to think that (a) anyone would think I would do that but that was something that was said about me. And I can tell hand on heart that I have had an affair in the office. He was a man much younger than me. He was a casual and I pride myself on having slept my way to the bottom, not the top.

In terms of what we can do, and this is really serious, what you can do is whenever you get to a position of influence just – women form groups naturally, people form groups naturally – just try and keep a real lookout. It's just common sense stuff. Keep a lookout and promote other women behind their backs, don't pull them down.

There's a big organisation in Britain called Women in Journalism that started to try and promote women. I have to say it hasn't been very successful. But I think the business dictates against women actually spending a long time at the top in it because it's almost impossible to have children and be an editor.

Question: I was just wondering ...journalists and politics...women and politics

AP: You know it's a good question. And it's been one of the most difficult things for me because a lot of people said when I took that job 'oh, she's just become a Conservative for the job.' I've always been a conservative. Small c. I never considered myself a Tory. But I am a conservative but I always felt that as a journalist

you had an obligation to keep your political leanings to yourself. I thought that you needed that objectivity. So once I literally came out like that it was incredibly difficult. And it meant that over in Britain especially - with the writing it isn't so much because people just assume I'm coming from a right of centre positioning. And that's actually become part of my brand and part of my value. And it's especially valuable in broadcasting because there are very few women and there are very few conservatives who are prepared to say they are these days so I get a lot of work as a result.

Vicki Penko: I worked under you at Mirror Group. I was features Editor at *The Sunday People* while you were there. And yes I was aware of the rumours about you and David Montgomery and...

AP: Did you believe them then?

VP: No, but actually on the subs desk they used to have bets every day as to what colour nail polish you were going to wear.

AP: I always wore red.

VP: I actually left because of a similar rumour that was going around about myself having an affair with Frank Walker who had employed me. And I just didn't have the mettle. And it was a pretty horrible place to work, very stressful. And Alistair Campbell had just left and there was a picket line going on outside. I was just wondering what was going on in your mind at the time and how you were getting into work every day.

AP: I wasn't there during the picket line period. I'm just saying I didn't have to face crossing that. When I look back on it... I'm trying to answer this question for you properly because it's one of the most difficult parts of my career for me to look back on. You know we sacked a lot of people. We paid them very well but it wasn't until my own husband came home having been sacked from another organisation that I saw first hand what it does to a marriage and what it does to a relationship; that kind of dynamic. On the other hand the *Mirror* was one of the most corrupt newspapers that you could imagine. I mean the fiddles that were going on there and the degree of abuse of the whole system. They did bring their problems upon themselves to a large degree. I don't look back on that time as a happy time. I think you kind of got into there and you got into a kind of trench mentality and you almost couldn't see what was going on around you. And I did learn a great deal from that. And when I then went on to be managing director of the *Independent* group and I was asked to do one series of redundancies, which was a very small one, which I agreed to do. And then they came back to me and said 'you have to do a second lot, and I said 'I won't do it because the paper can't sustain it' So always at the back of my mind was the fact that there had to be a proper commercial reason for doing it, but also that you could never cut the journalists so much that you couldn't produce a quality paper. And then I ended up being sacked from that job because I refused to do the second lot of sacking. And then ironically the woman who came in and did it was the one who sacked me from *The Sunday Express*.

And I'm sorry. I think it's a hideous kind of thing to be accused of getting on in your job because you're supposed to be sleeping with some scumbag bloke that you know has probably put the rumour around himself. It's bloody heartbreaking.

Matthew Schultz, Leader Newspapers: I was going to ask you whether you had any regrets about going over to the dark side, but now I want to know whether you think there is a difference: if there is a dark side and a good side when it comes to journalism and PR.

AP: I've never been tempted to go into PR proper. I've been offered at various times ... people to set me up in companies and fund it and things like that. I've never really been interested in that although it's a great development for journalism for lots of other people. It seemed to me not a dark side but a light side. I like the darkness of journalism and I didn't feel as though I was ever doing PR when I was working for William Hague. It was, you know, the chance to go and work for the leader of Her Majesty's Opposition and to sit in a room underneath Big Ben and to hear it go bong every time you were in there. It was just too irresistible an opportunity. I think politics is a far more murky world than journalism is and full of some pretty unpleasant characters.

Rebecca Armstrong, ABC: I just wanted to ask you just in relation to the video diaries whether that was a major ethical dilemma for you to release those? And how you did sort of manage the criticism following?

AP: It was one of the hardest things I've ever done. Channel 4 doesn't like me talking about this. But I had complete copy and editorial control over the product. And the first cut of it I said 'that's not going out.' I was very clear about what I wanted to do with it. The reason I did them was because I thought William would suffer a leadership challenge immediately after the election. It was only very much towards the end that I knew he was going to stand down. And under those circumstances I was prepared to use it because I thought the Party at least ought to know before they chose their new leader, or before they booted William out, what he'd been working with and what his own party had been doing to him. I feel rather vindicated at the moment actually because Michael Portilla and his group of people are doing exactly the same thing to Ian Duncan Smith again. I have no problem with conflict or challenges of leadership but I just wish they had the guts to do it to their faces rather than behind their backs. And I was asked a similar question yesterday. I don't think if someone pays your salary they buy your soul. I don't think they buy your morals or your ethics and if you see something that is wrong sometimes you have to find the guts to stand up and say it's wrong. If I had known at the beginning the personal cost to me of doing the video diary I wish I would have had the guts to do it, but I'm not sure I would have. And I took exactly the same advice myself that I always gave William whenever he was going through a hard time. I said 'leave. Just don't look at anything. Don't look at a newspaper.' Because I remember waking up on the day that they went out and there was one of my, what I thought was one of my closest friends sitting on the GNTV sofa saying 'this woman is absolutely incorrigible. I've always thought there was something very colonial and tricky about her.' And I switched the TV off and I went and got into my car and drove down to Burgundy. And I stayed there. I didn't read anything and I asked one of my very good friends, a guy who took over

my job. I said 'would you give me a read out on the media? Just tell me who my friends are. Tell me who my enemies are.' And I kept the list.

Mary Bowling, RMIT: I'm just interested in how you went about arriving in the UK and getting a job apart from the language barrier. Was it difficult to find something in the first place and how would it compare to now?

AP: There are still shifts going on, on the national newspapers. I think an easier route, if only I'd known it, would have been to one of the regional papers. They've got a huge number of really high quality regional papers now. But I just literally went in, my then husband and I went in and bought every single newspaper and every magazine and we sat down and we wrote to everyone. We wrote to the news editor, the features editor, just anyone we could think of. And we just carpet-bombed them and out of that I ended up getting two offers of shift work and he ended up getting about 200. But you know it's just cold calling. It was quite hard because I'd left a good job here and I didn't know anybody but that's the time when you really have to pluck up your courage and then go in and then have people take the piss out of your accent for five years. But it's worth it.

KM: Just one final one from me. What is the story with Princess Diana and the boyfriend?

AP: He was my boyfriend and we were engaged actually. He was one of my fiances. More than I should have. And we broke up and I had met somebody else and we broke up and then in the tradition of tradition with all these things in Britain they thought it was a much better story if he dumped me for Princess Di. And I have to say if I had to be dumped for anyone she's about as good as they get.

KM: That's all we have time for. If you could just put you hands together for Amanda.