

Border Teacher's Dinner Forum—A “Historical” Success

By Martin Dickens

After its inaugural dinner in 2010, the *Border History Teacher's Network* Second Annual Dinner Forum on Friday 20 May 2011 proved to be another successful and engaging event for both history teachers and the local community. Held at the New Albury Hotel's Crown Lounge, the night proved to be a great networking event for local educators, students and members of the public. For a student like me, the opportunity to speak with teachers was valuable in gauging an understanding of what to expect in the workplace as a history teacher.

The highlight of the night came when La Trobe Albury-Wodonga's Dr Ben Habib delivered his keynote address on North Korea. Entitled *The North Korea Story: Confucianism, Communism and the Bomb*, Dr Habib provided the audience with interesting insights into North Korean history and the events which have brought about the state's current decline. In particular, the address focused on the stringent military controls which the North Korean government exercises over its people. Through tight rationing of food supplies (examined through the 1994 food famine shortage) and the strict monitoring of energy supplies, Dr Habib alluded to many of the environmental and humanitarian disasters the country faces both now and in the future.

Whilst social issues proved central in Dr Habib's address, the dominant theme of his presentation related to North Korea's capacity for nuclear proliferation. According to Dr Habib, the development of North Korea's nuclear arsenal can be linked to the collapse of the Soviet Union. Without the external assistance of this major power, the North has sought the creation of nuclear weapons as an international bargaining tool for access to grain and cash. From external aid, the regime has then been able to continue its pursuit of a unique form of communism. This state of communism privileges the close advisors of Kim Jong-il by providing them with cash and material wealth whilst average citizens are forced to live in sub-standard and prison-like conditions.

Overall, the BHTN dinner forum was a successful and enjoyable night for all. As a student, the event provided a fantastic opportunity to not only to engage with local members of history faculties, but also to become more aware of political and cultural diversity in another country in Australia's neighbouring Asia-Pacific region.

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*The views in this story are those of the author and not necessarily those of **Our Voice: Politics Albury-Wodonga**.*
