

**The Formation of Right-  
Wing Anti-Elitist Discourse  
Amongst Australian  
Intellectuals:  
1972 – 1988**

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# Introduction

The final months of 2001 saw the emergence of a fierce debate in Australia over the Howard Government's policy towards boatloads of asylum seekers arriving from Indonesia. The use of military forces to turn back rescued asylum seekers on board the Norwegian freighter *MV Tampa* generated fierce debate not only over the merits and of this particular policy, but also on questions of Australian identity and public morality. Amid such debates came a regular refrain from those sympathetic to the Government's approach. In defending the Government, conservative columnist Michael Duffy gave one such response, stating that 'the contempt with which many well-educated Australians have turned on their fellow citizens in the past week has been intense, if not unexpected. We always suspected the 'elite' despised the people; now we know for sure.'<sup>1</sup> For Duffy, wisdom in the asylum seeker debate lay in majority opinion, as opposed to 'the trans-national elite' that 'continues to separate itself from the rest of the population.'<sup>2</sup> Duffy's use of the pronoun 'we' was telling. The reader was invited into a community of commonsense, from which those critics of the Government's policy were excluded. 'They' - the 'elite' - were portrayed as pushing an agenda completely alien to the interests and worldview of 'the people', and as such were not to be listened to. Such a strategy effectively mobilised a perceived popular anger against the 'elite' while undermining the legitimacy of opposing arguments.

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<sup>1</sup> Michael Duffy, 'Elite Con Australians Over Refugees', *Courier Mail* (8 September 2001), p.28.

<sup>2</sup> Duffy, 'Elite Con', p.28.

Duffy's use of the label 'elite' in the *Tampa* debate was just one example of a common feature of Australian political debate: right-wing anti-elitist discourse. Contemporary right-wing anti-elitist discourse operates on its most basic level by establishing a simple binary between a positively constructed majority of 'ordinary' people and a negatively constructed minority 'elite'. In setting out its target as the elites of the 'left' anti-elitist discourse is thus implicitly a discourse of the political 'right'. In taking up opposition to those constructed as 'elites', politicians, journalists, academics, businesspeople and others position themselves as speaking for 'us' – the ordinary people – against 'them' – the elites, who in turn are associated with the political left.<sup>3</sup> Such a binary also further implies an unequal power relationship between these two antagonistic sides. While numerically superior, the majority community is portrayed in popular anti-elitist discourse as powerless when compared to the elite.<sup>4</sup> On top of this, the majority community is constructed as possessing a commonsense knowledge not shared by the elites who try to impose their own worldview on them.<sup>5</sup> While anti-elitism takes as its substantive target groups defined as 'elites', it also takes aim at the attitudes held by those elites. In other words, anti-elitism is not just about opposition to elites, but the opposition to the perceived *elitism* of the left itself.

Right-wing anti-elitism has become an area for scholarly analysis for the very reason that it has been so successful. In the hands of right-wing participants in public

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<sup>3</sup> Barry Hindess and Marian Sawer, 'Introduction', in Barry Hindess and Marian Sawer, eds., *Us and Them: Anti-Elitism in Australia* (Perth: The API Network, 2004), p.1.

<sup>4</sup> Carol Johnson, 'Anti-Elitist Discourse in Australia: International Influences and Comparisons', in Barry Hindess and Marian Sawer, eds., *Us and Them: Anti-Elitism in Australia* (Perth: The API Network, 2004), p.125.

<sup>5</sup> Damien Cahill, 'New-Class Discourse and the Construction of Left-Wing Elites', in Barry Hindess and Marian Sawer, eds., *Us and Them: Anti-Elitism in Australia* (Perth: The API Network, 2004), pp.80-82.

debate, anti-elitist discourse serves to critically frame opponents, and to undermine the legitimacy of their arguments and claims. Particularly for those on the political left, anti-elitism has significantly circumscribed the limits of public debate.<sup>6</sup> Anti-elitism has already been defined as a distinct 'discourse' in Australian politics, and has been open to study as such.<sup>7</sup> In responding to the success of anti-elitism, and the associated continuing hegemony of John Howard's Coalition Government and its conservative neo-liberal program, the still-small stable of scholarly literature dealing with anti-elitism maintains a predominantly present minded focus, in that the scholarship deals in the main with the last ten years since Howard's election. Thus the only significant collection dealing with Australia right-wing anti-elitism to date, Marian Sawer and Barry Hindess' *Us and Them: Anti-Elitism in Australia*, concerns itself predominantly with explaining how anti-elitist discourse works in the twenty-first century, and who is involved in its dissemination.

Analyses of right-wing anti-elitism – both within *Us and Them* and in the remainder of the small collection of critical literature – often start by pointing out what appears to be a glaring contradiction: the fact that such a discourse is used by people who themselves could reasonably be classified as 'elites'. The identification with the powerless by those associated in the leftist tradition as real sources of power – media, political and business elites, not to mention other entrenched class interests – is met with almost universal unease by those individuals – academic and otherwise – who have turned a critical eye towards right-wing anti-elitism. As Carol Johnson points out, the

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<sup>6</sup> Cahill, *Us and Them*, p.83.

<sup>7</sup> Hindess and Sawer, 'Introduction'.

populist anti-elitist discourse of the last decade in many ways represents an inversion of how the left (and a large amount of the relevant scholarship) views class, inequality and oppression.<sup>8</sup> As a result of such contradiction, it has been argued at one end that anti-elitism serves as a tool of ideological enforcement to obscure class, gender or race based ways of seeing social division.<sup>9</sup> At the other end, it has been argued that anti-elitism entails a more subtle critique of the 'power/knowledge' wielded by the left-leaning, tertiary educated middle-class.<sup>10</sup>

Viewed ahistorically, the apparent contradiction of 'elites' attacking 'elites' is difficult to explain. If the aim of scholarship is merely to 'debunk' right-wing anti-elitist discourse, then perhaps it is sufficient to dismiss it as being 'fundamentally incoherent'.<sup>11</sup> While none of the scholarship on anti-elitism has merely ended at this analytical point, there remains a continuing lack of work that looks deeper into a critical opportunity created by the inherent contradiction of attacks on 'elites' by people who themselves could reasonably be classified as such. Such a contradiction opens up space for questioning how anti-elitist discourse has come to be accepted by vast sections of the political and cultural right. While outsiders may see anti-elitism as a confused and illogical, or even deceptive, form of pseudo-class analysis, those who subscribe to it certainly do not. The key question that thus needs to be answered is how anti-elitism has been compatible with the various political ideologies present on the Australian right. To effectively answer such a question, one must take a deeper historical view.

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<sup>8</sup> Johnson, 'Anti-Elitist Discourse in Australia', *Us and Them*, pp.117-118.

<sup>9</sup> Marian Sawer, 'Populism and Public Choice: The Construction of Women as a "Special Interest"', refereed paper presented to the Australasian Political Studies Association Conference, University of Tasmania, Hobart (29 September - 1 October 2003), p.2.

<sup>10</sup> Johnson, 'Anti-Elitist Discourse in Australia', p.125.

<sup>11</sup> Cahill, 'New-Class Discourse', pp.83-84.

## *Historiography*

A reasonably consistent narrative is evident within the limited number of historical writings on right-wing anti-elitism in Australia. The emergence of populist labels such as ‘chardonnay socialist’ and ‘chattering class’ – those that have played a central role in the anti-elitist populism of the last ten years – is perceived as a relatively recent phenomenon, with such labels appearing sporadically in the late 1980s and consistently only in the 1990s.<sup>12</sup> This emergence coincides with the appearance of a number of related ideological tendencies often labelled the ‘new right’, primarily comprising radical free market libertarians, or neo-liberals, and those influenced by the American neo-conservative movement.<sup>13</sup> The entry of the new right came first at an elite academic level, through think tanks, journals, universities and debating societies before gaining ascendance within the Liberal-National Coalition and right-wing sections of the popular media.<sup>14</sup> In the 1990s, anti-elitism became the province of a small number of journalists and writers within the Australian news media, of which the most significantly analysed has been Rupert Murdoch’s News Corporation.<sup>15</sup> The resulting picture shows that when new right-inspired anti-elitist discourse burst into the

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<sup>12</sup> Tim Dymond, ‘A Political and Intellectual History of the “New Class”’, PhD thesis, University of Western Australia, 2003, pp.17-25.

<sup>13</sup> Damien Cahill, ‘The Radical Neo-Liberal Movement as a Hegemonic Force in Australia, 1976-1996’, PhD thesis, University of Wollongong, 2004, pp.106-8.

<sup>14</sup> Cahill, ‘The Radical Neo-Liberal Movement’, pp.102, 185-86; Tim Dymond, ‘A History of the ‘New Class’ Concept in Australian Public Discourse’, in Barry Hindess and Marian Sawer, eds., *Us and Them: Anti-Elitism in Australia* (Perth: The API Network, 2004), pp.292-97; Murray Goot and Sean Scalmer, ‘Elites Constructing Elites: News Limited’s Newspapers 1996-2002’, in Barry Hindess and Marian Sawer, ed., *Us and Them: Anti-Elitism in Australia* (Perth: The API Network, 2004).

<sup>15</sup> Murray Goot and Sean Scalmer, ‘Elites Constructing Elites: News Limited’s Newspapers 1996-2002’, Hindess and Sawer, ed., *Us and Them: Anti-Elitism in Australia*, (Perth: The API Network, 2004), pp.137-59.

mainstream by the early 1990s, it had first been incubated in the more rarefied environment of learned debate.

The so-called 'new right' was by no means a united movement. As I will explore in this thesis, neo-conservatives and neo-liberals held divergent views on such fundamental principles as private morality, the role of the state and the organisation of the economy. On the broadest level, neo-conservatives concerned themselves with society, while neo-liberals concerned themselves with the economy. Neo-conservatives saw their role as maintaining social order, while neo-liberals saw their role as promoting individual liberty, particularly in economic affairs. These objectives were not always complimentary, and often clashed. On the one hand, the central place of individual liberty in neo-liberal thought often put them in opposition to neo-conservatives' emphasis on traditional morality.<sup>16</sup> On the other hand, the neo-conservatives' concern with maintaining social order led them to criticise the 'extremes' of individualism promoted by neo-liberal economic policy.<sup>17</sup> It has already been argued that anti-elitist discourse provided a bond between these two ideological strands, by allowing them to cohere against a common enemy.<sup>18</sup> In examining right-wing anti-elitist discourse, it is important to be mindful of the differences between these two intellectual trends, and how such coherence could have been made possible.

Not all analyses of anti-elitism see the new right as the only force shaping anti-elitist discourse. Sawyer and Hindess, for example, argue that although right-wing anti-

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<sup>16</sup> Andrew Gamble, *Hayek: The Iron Cage of Liberty* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1996), pp.112-3.

<sup>17</sup> Dymond, 'A Political and Intellectual History', pp.218-9.

<sup>18</sup> Dymond, "'New Class' Concept in Australian Public Discourse', pp.74-75.

elitism came to be augmented by new right ideas, it was essentially a continuation of a longstanding tradition of Australian populism, stretching from the rural populism of the nineteenth century. However, Sawyer and Hindess give no evidence for such an assertion.<sup>19</sup> Also with an eye to populism, Sean Scalmer argues that right-wing denigration of elites is in part merely an adaptation of the long-standing Australian political tradition, particularly prevalent in moderate Labourist rhetoric, of 'an historical valorization of the practical over the intellectual'.<sup>20</sup> Despite being supported by more evidence than Sawyer and Hindess' argument, Scalmer's own populist explanation is nonetheless brief.

Examinations of anti-elitist discourse that have looked to the new right have been more thorough. Thus Sawyer's exploration of the new right ideas behind anti-elitist discourse is far more detailed than her approach to the populist tradition. For Sawyer, as well as Damien Cahill and Tim Dymond, the two main contributions of the new right have been public choice theory – associated with neo-liberalism – and 'new class' discourse.<sup>21</sup> Sawyer's focus is for the most part on neo-liberalism and public choice theory. Public choice theory argues that the free market is the most efficient, and therefore most just, mechanism for allocating resources, including public goods. Advocacy groups seeking resources or regulation from the government do so out of self-interest; and since such rent-seeking necessarily entails encroachment on the domain of the free market,

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<sup>19</sup> Hindess and Sawyer, 'Introduction', p.1.

<sup>20</sup> Sean Scalmer, 'The Battlers versus the Elites: The Australian Right's Language of Class', *Overland*, no.154 (1999), p.12.

<sup>21</sup> Marian Sawyer, 'Populism and Public Choice in Australia and Canada: Turning Equality-Seekers into 'Special Interests'', in Barry Hindess and Marian Sawyer, eds., *Us and Them: Anti-Elitism in Australia* (Perth: The API Network, 2004), pp.33-34; Cahill, 'New-Class Discourse', pp. 77-95; Dymond, "'New Class" Concept in Australian Public Discourse', pp.57-75.

any claim to the greater good by such groups is illegitimate. Moreover, by using their privileged position of access to the state, such groups exclude ordinary people by limiting their market choices. For Sawyer, public choice theory provided right-wing intellectuals justification for dismissing the likes of women's, welfare, environment and indigenous groups as 'special interests' opposed to the interests of ordinary people.<sup>22</sup>

The most detailed studies, those by Dymond and Cahill, have placed more emphasis on the influence of 'new class' discourse in their treatment of the development of anti-elitism. Dymond presents the most detailed history of new class discourse. For Dymond, contemporary new class discourse has followed four stages of development. The term 'new class' started off as a label for the non-proletarian 'intellectual' leaders of nineteenth-century European socialist movements, who were suspected of using those mass movements to gain power for themselves. Following World War II, Yugoslav Marxist dissident Milovan Djilas in turn adapted the label to denote what he saw as a corrupt bureaucratic elite constituted by the Yugoslav regime. Such an idea of the new class was in turn adapted by some American Trotskyists and others on the Western anti-communist left in their criticisms of the Soviet Union, to give a name to the bureaucratic *nomenklatura* formed under Stalinism. As sections of the anti-communist left gradually became neo-conservatives, the new class critique followed them, changing from a merely a criticism of the Stalinist bureaucracy to an attack the growth of the welfare bureaucracy and the supposedly socialist leanings of intellectuals in Western capitalist democracies.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Sawyer, 'Populism and Public Choice', pp.33-37.

<sup>23</sup> Dymond, 'A Political and Intellectual History', pp.33-38.

For American neo-conservative writers such as Irving Kristol the 'new class' comprised tertiary educated intellectuals, who had emerged as a natural consequence of the growing complexity of liberal capitalist society.<sup>24</sup> Originating in the campus ferment of the 1960s and 1970s, the new class was perceived as politically inclined to support the growth of the welfare state and the pursuit of 'social justice' agendas articulated by the new left radicalism on universities at that time.<sup>25</sup> In promoting welfarism, the new class was seen as encouraging dependency on the state, and thus undermining the relevance of the family unit and the cohesion of society more broadly.<sup>26</sup> For Dymond, new class discourse took hold in Australia in the 1970s and 1980s through right-wing think tanks and journals. Although new class discourse had its roots in the social criticisms of the American neo-conservatives, its most significant role in Australia was in its use by neo-liberals in their efforts to implement free market policies.<sup>27</sup>

While Dymond stresses its neo-conservative roots, Cahill's briefer approach treats new class discourse as part of the neo-liberals' already consolidated ideological outlook. Cahill argues '[w]hat the radical neo-liberals provided that the other groups [on the right] did not was: the concept of marketisation; new class discourse... and a discursive framework that combined neo-liberal economics with conservative social values.'<sup>28</sup> For Cahill, the essential ingredients for right-wing anti-elitism - namely, new class discourse, libertarian market principles and a socially conservative vision - arrived

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<sup>24</sup> Dymond, "'New Class' Concept in Australian Public Discourse', p.57.

<sup>25</sup> Dymond, "'New Class' Concept in Australian Public Discourse', p.66.

<sup>26</sup> Dymond, "'New Class' Concept in Australian Public Discourse', p.76.

<sup>27</sup> Dymond, 'A Political and Intellectual History', pp.33-38.

<sup>28</sup> Cahill, 'The Radical Neo-Liberal Movement', p.305.

as a developed package, and presumably came forward with the coming of the supremacy of neo-liberals within the Australian right. Such an approach is hardly surprising given that the ostensible aim of his scholarly work is to provide an historical account of the rise to hegemony within the Australian right of the radical neo-liberal movement. However, such an approach appears too simple in light of Dymond's more detailed approach.

Dymond's narrative is compelling. However, it also raises some fundamental questions that need to be answered. Firstly, and most obviously, Dymond does not explore fully the relationship between ideas of the 'new class' and broader right-wing anti-elitist discourse. Indeed, while Dymond argues in *Us and Them* that anti-elitism draws on ideas of the new class, he has written elsewhere that anti-elitist labels merely constitute 'outrider' variations on the new class label.<sup>29</sup> Secondly, Dymond does not sufficiently explore the distinction between neo-conservative and neo-liberals' use of new class discourse, and does not adequately explain when and how the social and cultural critique of 'new class' developed by American conservatives came to be adopted by neo-liberals. Similarly, Sawyer's attribution of a key role to public choice theory is light on the details. In light of these ambiguities, it is hard to gain a full picture of who was involved in the formation of anti-elitist discourse, what traditions and bodies of thought they were drawing from, and exactly how they constructed and imagined the 'elites' of the left.

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<sup>29</sup> Dymond, 'A Political and Intellectual History', p.10.

Having identified the gaps and ambiguities in current scholarship, the aim of my thesis is to construct a narrative of the early formation of anti-elitist discourse among the intellectuals of the Australian right. While the consensus view is that anti-elitist discourse derives from the ideas of the so-called new right, I intend to unpack the meaning of this assertion. Was anti-elitism the product of 'neo-conservatives' or 'neo-liberals'? How did these discrete ideologies interact? What role did the 'old' right play in imagining the elites of the left? In what debates were left elites imagined? How was the 'mainstream' imagined, against which elites were defined? In attempting to answer these questions, I hope to arrive at an explanation of right-wing anti-elitist discourse that clarifies both the discourse's ideological roots and its internal assumptions. While it may be enough for some writers to dismiss right-wing anti-elitism's contradictions, the aim of this thesis is to obtain an understanding of its consistencies.

## *Approaches*

Since think tanks and journals were the key sites for the dissemination and negotiation of new right ideas, they are also necessarily important locations of analysis for understanding how attendant concepts – such as new class discourse and neo-liberal critiques of the welfare state – interacted with the existing right-wing intellectual milieu in the formation of anti-elitist discourse.<sup>30</sup> In the small Australian right-wing intellectual community of the 1970s and 1980s, this means the sources under examination are predominantly Sydney and Melbourne based, the most of important of which are *Quadrant* magazine, and the publications from the think tanks the Institute of Public

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<sup>30</sup> Cahill, 'The Radical Neo-Liberal Movement', p.102.

Affairs Victoria (IPA) and the Centre for Independent Studies (CIS), which I have read in their entirety – where available – between 1972 and 1988. I have also researched the popular media, particularly the *Australian Financial Review* from 1982 to 1988 and the *Sydney Morning Herald* from 1986 to 1988, as a supplement to my research on the material generated by think tanks.

I have conducted interviews with three people involved with the abovementioned think tanks and journals: Senator Rod Kemp, Director of the IPA from 1982 to 1989; Greg Lindsay, Director of the CIS from 1976 to the present; and Robert Manne, editor of *Quadrant* from 1989 to 1997, and contributor before that time. The interviews have played an important role in guiding this study. Given the limitations of memory, the interviews for the most part have not been used for establishing facts or dates. Instead, the interviews have proved most useful in reconstructing conceptual debates, and understanding the backgrounds and relationships between writers on the intellectual right. Also, while I have had to take care to critically analyse responses, the interviews have been useful in gaining an understanding of how interviewees perceived their role in influencing public debate, and their motivations for taking stands on certain issues.<sup>31</sup>

The periodisation I have used in this essay is somewhat arbitrary, but has been set up to give a clear narrative of significant changes in anti-elitist discourse. Developments on the ‘new right’ have been key to this periodisation, as have my

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<sup>31</sup> Beth M. Robertson, *Oral History Handbook* (Unley, South Australia: Oral History Association of South Australia, 2006), p.4.

observations of discursive shifts in the primary material. I have chosen 1972 as a starting point for a couple of reasons. Firstly, the year saw the election of the Whitlam Labor Government and the beginning of significant changes in Australian politics, particularly the rise of the Australian cultural left. 1972 also sits a few years shy of the entry of neo-liberalism as a major ideological force in Australia as a response to economic crisis. The second period marker used in this essay is the election of the Hawke Labor Government in 1983. While the previous ten years saw the gradual rise of the new right, as will be explored further in this thesis, the years following the election of the Hawke Government were marked by the new right's dramatic growth, and the acceptance of neo-liberalism as the dominant paradigm for economic policy making.

The scope of this thesis ends in 1988. My main reasons for stopping my analysis here are related to the limitations of space and the present scholarship. As I have already illustrated, the existing studies have already shown that the widespread popular use of anti-elitist labels began in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Since the purpose of my thesis is to examine the early growth of anti-elitism amongst intellectuals, an examination of anti-elitism's use as a populist tool in more recent times is beyond the limited scope available in a 20,000 thesis. In addition to this, historical events at the end of the 1980s reconfigured the Australian right, and hence the intellectual context in which anti-elitist discourse was employed. As has already been argued, the removal of anti-Communism as a binding cause for many of the tendencies on the right brought many erstwhile intellectual allies into conflict.<sup>32</sup> While such a change no doubt impacted on anti-elitist

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<sup>32</sup> Cahill, 'The Radical Neo-Liberal Movement', pp.140-2.

discourse, an examination that would fit into this thesis would be too cursory to be of any use.

An historical analysis of the development of anti-elitism amongst right-wing intellectuals must trace two processes. The first process to explore is how a certain group of people – in the eyes of some intellectuals – came to be defined as an ‘elite’, perceived as possessing all the influence and power such a label entails. The second process that needs to be examined is how such an ‘elite’ came to be identified in anti-elitist discourse with certain political tendencies, cultural values and moral standards. Such processes can by no means be treated as discrete categories, subject to separate examination. However, they provide an important narrative framework for tracing the relevant intellectual developments.

The use of the term ‘discourse’ to label right-wing anti-elitism deserves clarification. In this essay, political discourse is used to denote a system of language and practice through which a set of political beliefs and ideological positions are put into action. Discourse is, in Ruth Wodak’s words, ‘the very stuff of politics’; in other words, it is the meaningful action by which politics occurs. Moreover, like politics by any other name, discourse is also in turn shaped by various actors’ access to power.<sup>33</sup> While such a definition implies the possibility of studying ‘techniques and rationalities of

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<sup>33</sup> Ruth Wodak, ‘The Power of Language in Political Discourse’, *Journal of Language and Politics*, 3, no.3 (2004), p.381.

government' and other forms of action in addition to language, this essay will focus on anti-elitist discourse as it was expressed in debate within a community of intellectuals.<sup>34</sup>

Since the focus of this essay is on intellectuals, the historical study of 'discourse' in this thesis necessarily overlaps with approaches to the history of ideas. Right-wing anti-elitist discourse is treated in this essay as an often contradictory and changing set of ideas, articulated by individuals drawing on multiple ideological backgrounds, and buttressed by varying degrees of institutional power and the favour of changing historical events. As such, this essay will draw on an approach to intellectual history articulated firstly by J.G.A Pocock that any historical understanding of ideas must take into account the broader debates in which the writer being analysed was engaged, and the language on which they drew.<sup>35</sup> Such an approach has recently been articulated further by Siep Stuurman, whose framework has been used by Dymond in his research into the new class concept.<sup>36</sup> Stuurman argues that an historical study of political thought 'should be the history of a plurality of competing, overlapping and interacting political languages. The focus must shift from the exposition of finished theories to the reconstruction of polemical, frequently unresolved, arguments.'<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Carol Johnson, *Australian Political Science and the Study of Discourse*, refereed paper presented to the Disciplinary History of Political Science stream of the Jubilee Conference of the Australasian Political Studies Association, Australian National University, Canberra, October 2002, p.5.

<sup>35</sup> Melvin Richter, *The History of Political and Social Concepts: A Critical Introduction* (New York & Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), pp.127-28.

<sup>36</sup> Dymond, 'A Political and Intellectual History', pp.30-31.

<sup>37</sup> Siep Stuurman, 'The Canon of the History of Political Thought: Its Critique and a Proposed Alternative', *History and Theory*, 39 (May 2000), p.161.

## *Towards a New Narrative*

It is my intention to argue in this essay that the formation of right-wing anti-elitism in Australia involved more complex processes than the simple importation and application of new right ideas. While such ideas were important, their entry into the Australian context was contingent on particular debates, and the interaction with existing criticisms of the left coming from Australian conservative intellectuals. Rather than placing right-wing anti-elitism as the outspring of any 'ism' or particular notion like the 'new class', the aim of this essay is to locate the roots of anti-elitist discourse in a broad conservative counter-attack against the perceived values, attitudes, and techniques for achieving hegemony of the left-wing counter-culture and its inheritors.

Australian right-wing anti-elitist discourse evolved initially amongst cultural conservatives writing in *Quadrant* magazine. As a magazine primarily concerned with the cultural defence of traditional values and liberal capitalist civilisation, *Quadrant* played host to both Australian and foreign writers to articulate an objection to the influence of left-wing intellectuals. While some of this critique drew on the 'new class', and some didn't, there emerged a reasonably consistent discursive construction of the Australian mainstream and the intellectual elites of the left that opposed them. In such a divide, the key marker of difference between elites and the mainstream was in the area of culture, while the key type of power being exercised was intellectual. In other words, the tertiary educated left was conceived as using knowledge, and access to institutions for influencing popular culture, to exercise power over the conservative mainstream.

The story of anti-elitist discourse told in this thesis is of a rise in tandem with the rise of the new right. Beginning as a conservative cultural critique with a foreign neo-conservative influence, right-wing anti-elitism expanded in its definition and reach throughout the 1980s. While it was initially ignored by the nascent neo-liberal movement of the 1970s, as the 1980s progressed anti-elitist discourse came to be applied more regularly in critiques of the welfare state and other targets of neo-liberals' radical reforming project. Despite this expansion into economic debates, the fundamental character of right-wing anti-elitism remained. Right-wing anti-elitism was first and foremost a discourse of cultural opposition and a critique of cultural power. On the one hand, the discourse constructed a commonly imagined culturally conservative Australian mainstream, defined by the virtues of bourgeois individualism. On the other hand, right-wing anti-elitist discourse constructed as its enemy the antagonistic intellectuals of the left-wing 'elite', who were characterised by their authoritarian disregard for anti-leftist dissent and their antipathy to the values of the mainstream. It is in understanding how such a discourse of 'cultural war' developed and spread, we can get at a better understanding of the assumptions at the base of anti-elitist discourse.

# Chapter 1

## Old Right and New Right: 1972-1988

### *Introduction*

The formation of anti-elitist discourse occurred during a period of intellectual change and conflict on the Australian right. At no point has there ever been a homogenous intellectual 'right'. Rather, the Australian right has been home to a variety of intellectual traditions, from traditional conservatism and liberal anti-communism through to neo-conservatism and neo-liberalism. Such traditions have often been in conflict. However, their adherents have also cohered around common issues, and in common opposition to the forces of the left.

Nonetheless, the period between 1972 and 1988 is distinctive because of some key changes that developed on the intellectual right during this time. The period saw the rapid growth of think tanks and their associated journals as 'ideas brokers' for the right's various ideological tendencies. This growth was linked to the increasing acceptance of the new right ideas of neo-conservatism and neo-liberal economics within in the broader right, and the move away from the Keynesian consensus – named after the British economist John Maynard Keynes – comprising industry protection and subsidies, government stimulation of demand, and support for labour unions, that had characterised conservative policy making in the post-war years. In the broadest terms,

the years between 1972 and 1988 saw the intellectual right get bigger and more confident. Those years saw the right transform from conservative defensiveness into an intellectual force that was for the most part assertive, reforming and radical.

### *The Old Right: Liberal Conservatism, the AACF and Quadrant*

In the post-war years, the dominant tradition on the Australian right was a pragmatic and non-ideological mix of conservative and liberal thought. Such labels have often been confused, both through the pejorative use by political adversaries, and by the interchangeable use of the terms by adherents. Broadly conceived, the Australian conservative tradition was characterised by the absence of any overarching ideological commitment. Instead Australian conservatism stressed the value of evolved institutions and cultural practices drawn from Australia's British heritage. However, whereas British conservatism had its background with the British landed gentry, and defended inherited privilege, patterns of class inequality and deference, Australian conservatism did not. Unlike their British cousins, Australian conservatives did not have centuries of established class privilege to draw on. Moreover, whereas British conservatives often positioned themselves against modernity and capitalism associated with the rise of the bourgeoisie, Australian conservatives traditionally adopted some liberal ideas. For example, Australian conservatives had been committed to the principle of universal manhood suffrage as early as the pre-Federation era.<sup>1</sup> Conservatism was in this sense more of an attitude stressing scepticism to change, augmented with a belief in the virtues of limited free enterprise, rather than a concrete ideology.

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<sup>1</sup> Judith Brett, *Australian Liberals and the Moral Middle Class: From Alfred Deakin to John Howard* (Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp.1-3.

Combining with Australian conservatives was the Australian liberal tradition. The defining goal for Australian liberals was to secure the liberty of the free-thinking individual in personal, political and economic affairs. However, with such freedom also came with responsibility. Individuals were expected to exhibit virtues of self-sufficiency, independence and private morality. Moreover, while the liberal individual was free to join any organisation or association, such group membership was not to take precedence over membership of the national community. For Australian liberals, class or religious identity subsumed the individual, and undermined the coherence of the liberal polity.<sup>2</sup> Throughout the first half of the twentieth century this manifested itself in liberal suspicion that Catholics and the organised working-class – groups whose membership often overlapped – were slave to an allegiance outside that of the nation. As such the liberal tradition came, like conservatism, to be associated with the British inheritance of the Protestant middle-class.<sup>3</sup>

Australian conservative and liberal traditions proved to be compatible. Australian conservatism's embrace of democratic ideals, and liberals' identification of positive individualist values with the Anglo-Protestant middle class meant there was considerable overlap between these traditions.<sup>4</sup> The Australian Labor Party (ALP) split of 1955, when the anti-communist Catholic Industrial Groups split from the Party to form the Democratic Labor Party (DLP) and helped to shatter the identification of liberal

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<sup>2</sup> Brett, *Australian Liberals and the Moral Middle Class*, p.54.

<sup>3</sup> Brett, *Australian Liberals and the Moral Middle Class*, pp.54-56.

<sup>4</sup> Brett, *Australian Liberals and the Moral Middle Class*, pp.1-3.

and conservative politics with one side of the nation's sectarian divide.<sup>5</sup> Instead, the key cohering principle for the right, which included the Catholic social democrats of the DLP, was opposition to Communism.<sup>6</sup> Consequently a broad liberal conservative ideological outlook emerged in which each tradition tempered the other. The tendency of liberalism to embrace free markets and notions of progress was counterbalanced by conservative suspicion of ideology and notions of social obligation and the value of tradition. Similarly, the tendency of conservatism towards a justification of inherited inequality and privilege was offset by the idea of the equality of individuals in the liberal polity.<sup>7</sup>

Although some writers, such as Judith Brett, have gone the opposite direction, I have for the purpose of clarity decided to use the term 'conservative' to label this broad tradition in this essay.<sup>8</sup> Moreover, whilst I will refer to conservative writers' invocation of liberal principles and ideas of the liberal polity, the term 'conservatives' will be used in order to make a distinction from the reforming radicals of the neo-liberal movement.

*Quadrant* magazine proved to be the key site for the debate and articulation of the broad conservative tradition in the period under examination in this thesis. Founded in 1956 by Polish refugee Richard Krygier, the magazine set out to counter the perceived dominance of communists and fellow travellers within Australian intellectual circles. In pursuing this fight, *Quadrant* magazine was a lonely advocate for the intellectual right. Founded at the time of the height of the Keynesian consensus, *Quadrant* saw its role as

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<sup>5</sup> Brett, *Australian Liberals and the Moral Middle Class*, p.130.

<sup>6</sup> Peter Love, 'The Great Labor Split of 1955: An Overview', in Brian Costar, Peter Love and Paul Strangio, eds., *The Great Labor Schism: A Retrospective* (Melbourne: Scribe, 2005), p.17.

<sup>7</sup> Brett, *Australian Liberals and the Moral Middle Class*, pp.1-3.

<sup>8</sup> Brett, *Australian Liberals and the Moral Middle Class*, pp.1-3.

influencing cultural debate to defend the intellectual respectability of political and cultural freedom against the rising tide of communist totalitarianism. In keeping with this aim, the early days of *Quadrant* were unconcerned with economic debates.<sup>9</sup> *Quadrant* magazine's approach drew on the non-communist left strategy formed by the Congress for Cultural Freedom (CCF). Funded by the US Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), the CCF's initial goal was to counter the influence of communist intellectuals on the European left. Through publications and conferences, the aim of the CCF was to counter the 'fellow travelling' of much of the left, and to promote a robust anti-communism amongst the intelligentsia. The CCF hoped to shift left-wing intellectuals away from economic critiques of capitalism to a cultural defence of Western civilisation.<sup>10</sup>

In keeping with the CCF's strategy, *Quadrant* at its foundation was primarily a literary magazine intended to articulate opposition to the supposed communist sympathies of Australian intellectuals, particularly in the journal *Meanjin*.<sup>11</sup> In 1951 Krygier approached the CCF in Paris to offer his services in Australia, gaining permission from CIA Michael Josselson to found the Australian offshoot of the CCF, the Australian Association for Cultural Freedom (AACF). Shortly thereafter, the AACF began by distributing CCF publications and producing its own newsletter. However, after receiving criticism from Josselson for the overly political tone of the AACF's bulletins, Krygier proposed setting up his own literary magazine in Australia under the editorship of DLP supporter James McAuley, with a small amount of CIA funding.<sup>12</sup> The

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<sup>9</sup> David Kemp, 'Liberalism and Conservatism in Australia', in Brian Head and James Walter, eds., *Intellectual Movements in Australian Society* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1988), p.333.

<sup>10</sup> Dymond, 'A Political and Intellectual History', pp.126-38.

<sup>11</sup> Cassandra Pybus, 'Quadrant Magazine and CIA Largesse', *Overland*, no.155 (1999), p.9.

<sup>12</sup> Pybus, 'Quadrant and CIA Largesse', p.9.

magazine would also over time come to accept US government money in the form of contributions from the Ford Foundation.<sup>13</sup>

*Quadrant* proved to be one of the few areas for unashamedly conservative and anti-communist expression. The magazine continued to emphasise its literary credentials and continued to avoid any serious entry into economic debate. The most important battle for *Quadrant* was to head off the perceived cultural appeal of totalitarianism.<sup>14</sup> Such a cultural focus attracted intellectuals such as the 'New Critics', including such writers as Peter Coleman and Donald Horne.<sup>15</sup> Politically, the New Critics were inclined to a philosophical defence of liberalism. For the New Critics, the Australian suburban middle class embodied the desirable characteristics of the liberal tradition. The Australian middle class was taken to be the bearer of social stability, the backbone of society. The middle class was not conceived of having interests against any other class.<sup>16</sup> Despite this, the New Critics were also highly cosmopolitan in focus, and were critical of post-war Australia's static social life.<sup>17</sup> The worldview of the New Critics was not the only tendency in *Quadrant*, Horne in particular could deviate widely from other *Quadrant* writers, and the magazine became less cosmopolitan throughout the 1970s and 1980s. However, the New Critics' approach was representative of much of the magazine's focus. *Quadrant's* *raison d'être* was to fight a cultural battle against the appeal of Communism. Regardless of the intellectual sub-set to which its contributors belonged,

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<sup>13</sup> Pybus, 'Quadrant and CIA Largesse', p.14.

<sup>14</sup> Dymond, 'A Political and Intellectual History', p.156.

<sup>15</sup> Dymond, 'A Political and Intellectual History', pp.154-62.

<sup>16</sup> Tim Rowse, *Australian Liberalism and National Character* (Melbourne: Kibble Books, 1978), pp.198-203.

<sup>17</sup> Dymond, 'A Political and Intellectual History', pp.158-9.

this proved to be the binding cause for *Quadrant* writers.<sup>18</sup> In this fight, the magazine was intellectual in style, traditionalist in sympathies, and utterly convinced of the importance of the defence against totalitarianism.

### ***The New Right: The Rise of Neo-Liberalism and Neo-Conservatism***

The defining intellectual trend throughout the years 1972-1988 was the rise of the so-called new right. Comprising the distinct philosophies of neo-conservatism and neo-liberalism, the new right was neither a coherent ideological tendency nor a united political movement. Rather, the new right can best be used to describe the combined phenomenon of the rise of these two distinct philosophies, both of which served the purpose of boosting the intellectual confidence of the Australian right.

The first of these trends, neo-conservatism, had its origins in the United States. The early neo-conservatives were for the most part members of the American left who had gradually come throughout the 1960s and 1970s to a spirited defence of Western capitalist liberal democracy. Neo-conservatives were firstly defined by their opposition to communism, and fierce advocacy for the prosecution of the Cold War. For some neo-conservatives, such opposition originally came from within the socialist left. Prominent neo-conservative Irving Kristol was in his youth briefly a disciple of the heretical American Trotskyist Max Shachtman, who was already committed to fierce opposition

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<sup>18</sup> Robert Manne, 'Left, Right Left...', in Robert Manne, ed., *Left Right Left: Political Essays, 1977-2005* (Melbourne: Black Inc. 2005), p.2.

to the Soviet Union and 'entryism' into the US Democratic Party.<sup>19</sup> Daniel Bell too was a Marxist – yet even a critic of the Shachtmanites – while others such as Norman Podhoretz and Midge Decter never identified themselves as such.<sup>20</sup> Regardless of their ideological background, all future neo-conservatives did hold in common the notion that the American left should commit itself to the fight against communism.

The formation of neo-conservatism as a distinct ideological tendency, as the name implies, involved the abandonment by this group of the political left. Neo-conservatives' anti-communism led them to become disenchanted in the 1960s and 1970s with the rising tide of the so-called 'new left'. Protests against the Vietnam war were criticised by neo-conservatives as betraying a moral blind spot on the part of the new left in its attitudes towards communism and related overseas 'national liberation movements'.<sup>21</sup> For the neo-conservatives, the left had become lost in idealistic and impractical thinking. As a response to this perception, the aim of the neo-conservatives was to 'de-utopianize political thinking'.<sup>22</sup> Western liberal democracy may not be perfect, argued neo-conservatives, but it was the best available political system. Such a suspicion of 'utopian' thinking also led neo-conservatives to become suspicious of President Lyndon Johnson's 'Great Society' welfare programs. While neo-conservatives in the period under analysis were not overall critics of the welfare state, their basic

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<sup>19</sup> William F. King, 'Neoconservatives and "Trotskyism"', *American Communist History*, 3, no.2 (2003), p.251; Dymond, 'A Political and Intellectual History', p.131.

<sup>20</sup> King, 'Neoconservatives and "Trotskyism"', p.252.

<sup>21</sup> Dymond, 'A Political and Intellectual History', p.206.

<sup>22</sup> Irving Kristol, 'New York Letter', *Quadrant*, 22, no.5 (1978), p.28.

philosophical position was of scepticism of rational, planned government efforts at social engineering.<sup>23</sup>

Neo-conservative suspicion of intellectually-inspired efforts at social change also led them in the 1970s to opposition to the 'identity politics' pursued by the likes of the Women's and Gay liberation movements. It was in this fight over culture, in which the neo-conservatives positioned themselves most strongly against the left. The key concern of neo-conservatives was to rein in what they saw as the counter-culture's promotion of the rampant pursuit of individual desires. Neo-conservatives sought to restore social order, stability and collective interest, and sought to do this through opposition to both the atomising effects of the politics of personal liberation, and to the dependency inducing effect of an overly interventionist welfare state.<sup>24</sup> However, this did not lead the majority of neo-conservatives into the embrace of the free-market, as untrammelled capitalism too was equated with the socially destructive consequences of excessive individualism.<sup>25</sup>

The main influence of neo-conservatism in Australia came through the pages of *Quadrant*. The writings of Irving Kristol in particular were reprinted in *Quadrant* from the 1960s.<sup>26</sup> This is hardly surprising as Kristol had been involved in the original launching of the CCF as an effort to promote the anti-communist left in the 1950s.<sup>27</sup> Australian writers too were to take up the neo-conservative torch, including Frank

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<sup>23</sup> Dymond, 'A Political and Intellectual History', pp.217-19.

<sup>24</sup> Dymond, 'A Political and Intellectual History', p.217.

<sup>25</sup> Dymond, 'A Political and Intellectual History', pp.218-19.

<sup>26</sup> Dymond, 'A Political and Intellectual History', p.206.

<sup>27</sup> King, 'Neoconservatives and "Trotskyism"', p.251.

Knopfelmacher, Owen Harries, Patrick Morgan and Patrick O'Brien.<sup>28</sup> However, neo-conservatism remained only one influence in *Quadrant*, with many traditional conservative writers, while adopting some neo-conservative ideas, avoiding much of the neo-conservatives' radicalism.<sup>29</sup>

While the aim of neo-conservatism was to 'de-utopianize political thinking', the thrust of neo-liberal thought was decidedly utopian. Neo-liberalism, with its fundamental emphasis on individual freedom, presented a striking contrast to both traditional conservatism and neo-conservatism. Most strongly associated in Australia with the economist Friedrich Hayek, neo-liberalism was the inheritor of the 'Austrian School' of classical *laissez faire* economics. While the consensus view within the Western world was to follow the Keynesian consensus, Hayek was a dissenter.<sup>30</sup> For Hayek, along with other key neo-liberal thinkers like Milton and Rose Friedman, economic freedom was fundamental. Without a free market, argued Hayek and the Friedmans, there can be no free society.<sup>31</sup>

Neo-liberalism in its purest form was about the promotion of individual liberty, particularly in economic affairs. Neo-liberals favoured the dismantling of the welfare state, the abolition of tariffs and subsidies and privatisation, as well as expressing hostility towards organised labour. For the key neo-liberal thinkers, such a platform was to be advocated with no room for compromise. Hayek argued that there were only two

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<sup>28</sup> Kemp, 'Liberalism and Conservatism', p.349.

<sup>29</sup> Manne, 'Left, Right, Left...', pp.4-6.

<sup>30</sup> Cahill, 'The Radical Neo-Liberal Movement', p.60.

<sup>31</sup> David Edgar, 'The Free or the Good', in Ruth Levitas, ed., *The Ideology of the New Right* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1986), p.57.

ways of organising society: a centralised command economy or a free market. Any attempt at a mix between the two would resort in the worst of both worlds.<sup>32</sup> For Hayek, the difference between capitalism and socialism was equated to that of freedom and totalitarianism. For Hayek, 'socialism' was a broadly conceived term used to denote state intervention in the economy. Left socialism, communism, fascism and Nazism were, for Hayek, manifestations of the same totalitarian impulse, and had the same implications for individual freedom.<sup>33</sup>

Hayek's ideological commitment to individualism put him at odds with conservatives. On one level, Hayek approved of conservatives' respect for evolved institutions and customs.<sup>34</sup> On the other, however, Hayek believed that conservatives were too sanguine about the results of coercive authority. Hayek believed conservatives did not sufficiently value individual freedom, and would turn a blind eye to coercion used in favour of 'conservative' principles.<sup>35</sup> Moreover, Hayek believed that conservatives lacked any coherent ideological principles, and were being swept along with the tide of the Keynesian consensus into support for the growth of 'socialism' and hence, totalitarianism.<sup>36</sup> Hayek was also critical of British conservatives' hostility towards popular democracy, believing instead that the chief danger lay in untrammelled government, regardless of who was in charge.<sup>37</sup> However, Hayek's belief in democracy also belied the limited nature of Hayek's concept of liberty. Since, Hayek believed that the free market was the most basic insurance for individual liberty, democracy could

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<sup>32</sup> Gamble, *Hayek: The Iron Cage of Liberty*, p.84.

<sup>33</sup> Gamble, *Hayek: The Iron Cage of Liberty*, pp.76-7.

<sup>34</sup> Friedrich Hayek, *Why I Am Not a Conservative*, (St Leonards: Centre for Independent Studies, 1992), pp.3-4.

<sup>35</sup> Hayek, *Why I Am Not a Conservative*, p.5.

<sup>36</sup> Hayek, *Why I Am Not a Conservative*, p.7.

<sup>37</sup> Hayek, *Why I Am Not a Conservative*, pp.6-7.

only truly ensure freedom if the will of the majority, when inclined towards socialism, could not impose control on the market. In such cases, an authoritarian, non-elected government could, paradoxically, ensure greater liberty than a democracy. As Hayek stated, 'a democracy may well wield totalitarian (read: socialist) powers, and it is conceivable that an authoritarian government may act on liberal principles.'<sup>38</sup>

The emergence of neo-liberalism on the Australian political scene came as part of a reaction throughout the English-speaking world to the perceived failures of the Keynesian consensus. The 'oil shock' of 1973 – the raising of oil prices by the Organisation of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) – precipitated an economic crisis. In Australia as well as much of the West the effect of this price shock on the heavily regulated capitalist economies was stagflation – a combination of high inflation, low economic growth and high unemployment.<sup>39</sup> Neo-liberalism gained an intellectual stature by offering an apparent solution to this crisis in the form of the deregulation of the labour market, and reductions in taxes, industry subsidies and government expenditure among other things. In the face of crisis, neo-liberalism was proffered as capitalism's saviour.<sup>40</sup>

The 1970s saw the limited acceptance of neo-liberal policy prescriptions in both right-wing intellectual circles and in the broader policy debate. Although the Labor Government of Gough Whitlam was well known for its high spending, Whitlam also

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<sup>38</sup> Friedrich Hayek, *The Constitution of Liberty* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1960), p.103.

<sup>39</sup> Cahill, 'The Radical Neo-Liberal Movement', p.150.

<sup>40</sup> Henk Overbeek and Kees van der Pijl, 'Restructuring Capital and Restructuring Hegemony: Neoliberalism and the Unmaking of the Post-War Order', in Henk Overbeek ed., *Restructuring Hegemony in the Global Political Economy: The Rise of Transnational Neoliberalism in the 1980s* (London & New York: Routledge, 1993), p.2.

introduced a number of policies in line with neo-liberal prescriptions. The Whitlam Government was the first since Federation to reduce import tariffs, as well as implementing competition legislation and deregulation of the finance sector.<sup>41</sup> Despite these reforms, economic crisis under the Whitlam Government was received by neo-liberal activists as evidence of the economic mismanagement and the failure of Keynesian economic policies.<sup>42</sup> On being elected in 1975, the Fraser Coalition Government adopted strongly neo-liberal rhetoric in its confrontation of the sources of stagflation. However, in practice the policies of the Fraser Government departed only a little from the fracturing Keynesian consensus, much to the displeasure of neo-liberal activists.<sup>43</sup>

The gradual growth of neo-liberalism in this period underpinned by the incremental growth and re-invigoration free market think tanks. The CIS was the first of these organisations set up to promote neo-liberalism in Australia. Founded in 1976 by Greg Lindsay in his own suburban garden shed, the CIS did not see itself as an organisation of the 'right'. Rather, the CIS saw itself as imparting expert knowledge to the political and intellectual elite, both sides of which were mired in the old paradigm of state intervention.<sup>44</sup> A similar project, with a more technocratic aim, was undertaken at Monash University, where economist Professor Michael Porter founded the Centre of

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<sup>41</sup> Cahill, 'The Radical Neo-Liberal Movement', p.152.

<sup>42</sup> Greg Lindsay, Interview with the Author, pp.3-4.

<sup>43</sup> Dean Jaensch, *The Liberals* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1994), p.73; Ed Kaptein, 'Neo-Liberalism and the Dismantling of Corporatism in Australia', in Henk Overbeek, ed., *Restructuring Hegemony in the Global Political Economy: The Rise of Transnational Neoliberalism in the 1980s* (London & New York: Routledge, 1993), pp.90-91.

<sup>44</sup> Cahill, 'The Radical Neo-Liberal Movement', pp.114.

Policy Studies (CoPS) to carry out economic modelling of neo-liberal economic policies and to bring prominent free market intellectuals to Australia.<sup>45</sup>

The mid 1970s also saw the establishment of the Workers' Party, the first organisation to attempt to bring neo-liberalism directly to the Australian electorate. Founded by eccentric advertiser John Singleton, famed for bringing the 'ocker' into Australian advertising, the Workers' Party saw itself as promoting a neo-liberal platform that broke the mould of Australian party politics, and in line with its Hayekian inheritance, derided the established parties of all pursuing 'socialism' in practice.<sup>46</sup> The Workers' Party was to prove electorally unpopular, achieving little over 5% of the vote in its highest polling results.<sup>47</sup> Renamed in 1977 the Progress Party everywhere but South Australia, the party continued to poll poorly. Although the organisation soon faded into obscurity, it was widely credited with helping to put neo-liberal policy on the political agenda.<sup>48</sup>

Another key point for the dissemination of neo-liberal ideas was the IPA. Unlike the CIS, CoPS or the Workers' /Progress Party, the IPA was an organisation solidly identified with the right, particularly the Victorian Liberal Party. The organisation had been set up since 1943, in order to provide the business community with policy advice. Originally an organisation promoting a mix of Keynesian and some Hayekian policy

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<sup>45</sup> Cahill, *The Radical Neo-Liberal Movement*, pp.118-9.

<sup>46</sup> Marian Sawyer, 'Political Manifestations of Libertarianism in Australia', in Marian Sawyer, ed., *Australia and the New Right* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1982), p.5.

<sup>47</sup> Sawyer, 'Political Manifestations of Libertarianism in Australia', p.4.

<sup>48</sup> Sawyer, 'Political Manifestations of Libertarianism in Australia', pp.5-6.

prescriptions, the IPA shifted to a solidly free market agenda by the late 1970s.<sup>49</sup> With the appointment of Rod Kemp as director of the organisation in 1982, the IPA began to broaden its ambit considerably, releasing the quarterly magazine *IPA Review* and increasingly intervening in debates outside of economic policy.<sup>50</sup> Unlike the CIS, the IPA consistently combined neo-liberal economic policies with social conservatism.<sup>51</sup>

While the right-wing intellectual community continued to experience internal division in the years between 1983 and 1988, the intellectual confidence of the right was in a significant upswing. While the Liberal-National Coalition lost office in 1983, the continued electoral successes of both Margaret Thatcher in the United Kingdom and Ronald Reagan in the United States, both of whom embraced a combination moral conservatism and free market neo-liberalism, put the new right firmly on the political radar.<sup>52</sup> In Australia, the Hawke Labor Government was somewhat anomalous in this rightward trend in the Anglophone democracies, as it pursued neo-liberal economic policies tempered by a socially progressive agenda and a corporatist, consensus-based approach to policy making.<sup>53</sup> In such an environment, the Liberal Party in opposition turned in the direction of the new right, in particular embracing free market ideas.<sup>54</sup>

The continued rise of neo-liberalism in the 1980s produced sharp division within the right. The main impetus for neo-liberal reform came from the 'Dries' led by John

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<sup>49</sup> Cahill, 'The Radical Neo-Liberal Movement', pp.112-3.

<sup>50</sup> Rod Kemp, Interview with the Author, p.1.

<sup>51</sup> Cahill, 'The Radical Neo-Liberal Movement', p.133.

<sup>52</sup> Marian Sawer, 'Introduction', in Marian Sawer, ed., *Australia and the New Right* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1982), pp.viii-x; Ruth Levitas, 'Introduction: Ideology and the New Right', in Ruth Levitas, ed., *The Ideology of the New Right* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1986), pp.1-2.

<sup>53</sup> Cahill, 'The Radical Neo-Liberal Movement', p.44.

<sup>54</sup> Brett, *Australian Liberals and the Moral Middle Class*; Paul Kelly, *The End of Certainty: The Story of the 1980s*, (St Leonards: Allen & Unwin, 1992), pp.95-97.

Hyde within the Liberal-National Coalition, groups such as the National Farmers' Federation, and, most importantly in terms of ideas, the think tanks the IPA, the CIS, and later on the H.R. Nicholls Society.<sup>55</sup> Both Rupert Murdoch's newspapers and the Fairfax press also became significant conduits and advocates for neo-liberal reforms.<sup>56</sup> Other actors were far less sanguine about the neo-liberal revolution. While *Quadrant* under editor Peter Coleman published many articles promoting neo-liberalism, others involved with the journal were strongly critical of the reforming ideology. Many in the Liberal-National Coalition itself were wary of neo-liberal policy prescriptions, and the tension between the parties' 'Dries' and opposing 'Wets' only found itself fully resolved with the Dries' victory by the early 1990s.<sup>57</sup>

## ***Conclusion***

It was in the intellectual environment of competition between the 'old' and 'new' right that right-wing anti-elitist discourse was to be articulated. The interaction of ideologies within the right was a three way process of conflict and exchange. On one hand, there was the pragmatic traditional conservatism that had been held by the majority of the Australian right for much of the post-war years. Unconcerned with debates over economics, the conservative cultural tradition found its greatest expression in the pages of *Quadrant* magazine. On top of this, from the mid 1970s onwards there arrived the increasing influence of neo-conservatism and neo-liberalism. The influence of the former tendency – a much more strident defence of capitalism than Australian

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<sup>55</sup> Kelly, *The End of Certainty*, pp.252-255.

<sup>56</sup> David McKnight, "A World Hungry for a New Philosophy": Rupert Murdoch and the Rise of Neo-Liberalism', *Journalism Studies*, 4, no.3 (2003), pp.347-358; Cahill, 'The Radical Neo-Liberal Movement', pp.234-264.

<sup>57</sup> Brett, *Australian Liberals*, pp.176-177.

traditional conservatives were used to – was felt mainly through *Quadrant*. The latter tendency arrived predominantly through the efforts of think tanks such as the CIS, CoPs and, later, the re-invented IPA and the H.R. Nicholls Society. While all three ideological strands varied, and were often in conflict, they all would prove to play a part in the formation and further articulation of anti-elitist discourse by the end of the 1980s.

## **Chapter 2**

# **The Formation of Cultural Anti-Elitism: 1972-1982**

### *Introduction*

The decade between the advent of the Whitlam Government 1972 and the last days of the Fraser Government 1982 saw the early stages of the development and articulation of anti-elitist discourse by right-wing intellectuals. As I have already explored in the previous chapter, this period was marked by the entry of Australia of the ideas of the so-called new right. However, the entry of the new right did not automatically entail the adoption of anti-elitist discourse by right-wing intellectuals. In some ways an examination of this period is revealing through its silences. While neo-liberalism was on the rise amongst intellectuals at this time, the airing of such policy prescriptions entailed very little in the way of attacks on elites. Rather, it was in cultural debates that the formation of anti-elitist discourse can be found.

Conservative intellectuals writing in *Quadrant* were the first to articulate an attack on the 'elites' of the left. This anti-elitism had its roots in conservative critiques of radical intellectuals, students, members of the media and bureaucrats. In the formation of such a critique of cultural elites, cultural conservatives drew on both domestic and international inspiration. Reactions to the perceived assault on tradition and national

identity by Australian radicals came to be supplemented and given meaning by 'new class' ideas imported from American neo-conservatives.

The cultural anti-elitist discourse formulated in *Quadrant* rested on the conflict between two imagined communities, that of the Australian mainstream and that of left-wing intellectuals. For the cultural conservatives writing in *Quadrant* the Australian mainstream was imagined as traditionalist, British in its cultural inheritance, suspicious of intellectualising, and bourgeois in its aspirations. The left-wing intelligentsia, on the other hand, was conceived as radical, culturally destructive, absorbed in abstraction, and collectivist. In the contestation between the two, *Quadrant* writers aligned themselves with the side they constructed as powerless: the mainstream. The cultural anti-elitist discourse of this period thus entailed a critique of the coercive power of the left-wing intelligentsia, a power which was supposedly held by their dominance through institutions for shaping public culture. While the anti-elitism of this period was a shadow of what it would become by the late 1980s, the dominance of cultural critiques of left-wing elites, and the absence of anti-elitism from economic debate, foreshadowed the tone of later anti-elitist discourse.

### ***Neo-liberalism and the Absence of Elites***

Notable amongst efforts to popularise neo-liberalism between 1972 and 1982 was the lack of anything resembling the type of anti-elitist critique associated with neo-liberalism by the likes of Cahill, Dymond and Sawyer. Although the advocacy of neo-liberal policy in this period did entail criticism of the bureaucracy, such attacks were for

the most part couched in the terms of technocratic debate, and were separate from imputations of the political or cultural motivations of any kind of bureaucratic class. Moreover, unlike in the 1980s, the advocacy of neo-liberalism in this period was far removed from notions of cultural conservatism.

While the 1980s were to earn many neo-liberals the tag of membership of the 'new right', the 1970s neo-liberals in Australia attempted to position themselves as a third force in politics.<sup>1</sup> The establishment of the CIS in 1976 provides an example of this. The initial activities of the CIS were aimed at the spreading of free market economic ideas, drawing particular direct philosophical inspiration from Hayek, to academics working in Australian universities. Rather than positioning itself as against the 'left', the CIS saw itself as pushing forward free market ideas that had been neglected by all sides of public debate. As a result, the CIS' position lay - ostensibly - outside of right and left.<sup>2</sup>

The early years of the CIS saw the very limited output of material for popular consumption. Between 1976 and 1984, the CIS busied itself with advocacy on specific policy issues and the organisation of seminars by prominent free market intellectuals. The organisation's only efforts at mass communication came through its brief newsletter, which carried little in the way of detailed policy or argument. Notable however in the early years of the CIS *Newsletter* was its focus on promoting basic awareness of neo-liberal ideas. Despite the earlier adoption of some of these ideas by the Whitlam

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<sup>1</sup> Cahill, 'The Radical Neo-Liberal Movement', pp.246-47.

<sup>2</sup> Greg Lindsay, Interview with the Author, p.5.

Government, and Fraser's 'dry' rhetoric, there remained a sense by neo-liberal activists of continued marginalisation from the intellectual mainstream.

Such a sense of facing overwhelming orthodoxy came out in a *CIS Newsletter* interview with Wollongong University Philosophy Professor Lachlan Chipman. Chipman, who was to become a vocal supporter of neo-liberalism in the following years, only became aware of the classical liberal revival in 1974. In 1977, after his own conversion, Chipman argued that these views still remained outside of the consensus of both the Australian left and right. In an interview with the CIS, Chipman stated that intellectual debate was almost entirely tilted towards government intervention in personal and economic affairs to such an extent that he could argue with no hyperbole that 'intellectuals in Australia are, almost to a man and woman, socialists and welfarists.'<sup>3</sup>

A natural consequence of the perceived vast orthodoxy on both left and right faced by neo-liberals in this period was the rise of the bureaucracy. Critiques of this bureaucracy came as a natural part of the stable of argument for neo-liberals, yet they were divorced from any notion of the bureaucracy being of the 'left'. At the *IPA*, despite the organisation's strong links to the Liberal Party, there was a disquiet that the policies of all parties led to the growth of bureaucracy and the continued progression towards big-government 'socialism'.<sup>4</sup> Similarly, there was a strong sense that the public policy orthodoxies of the Keynesian consensus had set the stage for the possibility that

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<sup>3</sup> Anon, 'An Interview with Lachlan Chipman', *Centre for Independent Studies Newsletter*, (Spring 1977), p.2.

<sup>4</sup> Anon., 'Every Man his own Architect', *Institute of Public Affairs Review*, 29, no.1 (1975), p.14.

'Australia may be on the way to becoming a union-dominated society.'<sup>5</sup> As for the political preferences of bureaucrats themselves, the *IPA* argued that those working in the growing bureaucracy – 'one of the institutional "monstrosities" of contemporary Australian society' – invariably supported big government policies, be they provided by the parties of the left or the right.<sup>6</sup>

Even the most populist Australian advocates of neo-liberalism fell short of an anti-elitist critique of the bureaucracy. In his 1977 book *Rip Van Australia*, John Singleton turned his idiosyncratically 'ocker' style towards the promotion of a neo-liberal formula for an Australian renaissance. Singleton saw the libertarian platform of his Workers' Party – which had links with the CIS – as falling outside of traditional divisions between left and right.<sup>7</sup> Instead, neo-liberals offered a politics of the centre, consistently arguing for personal freedom in both economic and social affairs.<sup>8</sup> In addition to arguing for *laissez-faire* capitalism, *Rip Van Australia* aligned libertarianism with social causes associated with the political left: opposition to the monarchy, the promotion of women's rights, and opposition to discrimination against homosexuality, amongst other causes.<sup>9</sup> However, Singleton was dismissive of groups that pursued these agendas, such as the Women's Electoral Lobby, arguing through the lens of public choice theory that the true purpose of such groups was to seek handouts from the state.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Anon., 'A State within a State', *Institute of Public Affairs Review*, 30, no.2 (1976), p.49.

<sup>6</sup> Anon., 'The Bureaucracy', *Institute of Public Affairs Review*, 34, no.2 (1980), pp.29-35.

<sup>7</sup> Greg Lindsay, Interview with the Author, p.1.

<sup>8</sup> Bob Howard and John Singleton, *Rip Van Australia* (Sydney & Melbourne: Cassell, 1977), pp.9-12.

<sup>9</sup> Howard and Singleton, *Rip Van Australia*, pp.121, 163-64, 273-75.

<sup>10</sup> Howard and Singleton, *Rip Van Australia*, pp.273-5.

The contradiction between the Workers' Party's support for socially progressive agendas and its opposition to groups that looked to the state for the satisfaction of those demands revealed the organisation's overarching antipathy to the bureaucracy and non-market mechanisms. For Singleton, bureaucratic organisation was non-productive and restrictive of private enterprise. Bureaucracy was theft and fraud.<sup>11</sup> However, like other neo-liberals of the period, Singleton's populist attacks on the bureaucracy entailed little in the way of an anti-elitist critique of the power they held. Rather Singleton's critique of the bureaucracy came as part of an argument *in favour* of elites. Bureaucracies and economic and social regulations were to be attacked because they restricted the formation of natural elites based on merit. Bureaucracies were indeed viewed by Singleton as possessing too much power. However, this power was figured as the dominance of an impersonal 'political totalitarianism' that held back positive social dynamism and its inevitable consequence: a positively constructed meritocratic elite.<sup>12</sup>

### *Cultural Critiques and the 'New Class'*

Throughout the years between 1972 and 1982, *Quadrant* served as a hothouse for the development of a critique of radical intellectuals and the gradual positioning of them as an illiberal cognitive elite. While *Quadrant's* original mission as a cultural journal of the non-communist left had led it initially to cosmopolitanism, the Whitlam era saw the magazine shift its cultural emphasis to a defence of a conservative and often Anglo-Saxon image of Australian cultural tradition and identity.<sup>13</sup> In defending this cultural

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<sup>11</sup> Howard and Singleton, *Rip Van Australia*, pp.21-27.

<sup>12</sup> Howard and Singleton, *Rip Van Australia*, pp.14-6, 267.

<sup>13</sup> Dymond, 'A Political and Intellectual History', pp.241-42.

tradition, writers in *Quadrant* constructed a reasonably consistent division those who embodied these conservative ideals, and those who threatened them. On the one hand, conservatism was placed with the bourgeois individualist and non-intellectual mainstream. On the other hand, the threat of radicalism was placed with the left-wing intelligentsia, whose definition was heavily complimented by the importation of neo-conservative ideas of the 'new class'.

For writers in *Quadrant*, conservative values were defined by tradition, and the conservative mainstream was in turn defined by values of individualism, material acquisition and suspicion to change. For *Quadrant's* founding editor, James McAuley, Australian tradition was characterised by Christianity, organisation and rationality, technological advancement, the welfare capitalism of the Australian settlement, and private morality.<sup>14</sup> For economist and longstanding *Quadrant* contributor H.W. Arndt, such a tradition also included the desire for prosperity and material acquisition, and a respect for British traditions and the monarchy.<sup>15</sup> Such values and institutions derived their moral authority from gradual evolution, as opposed to radical reform or abstract planning.

The anti-intellectual and anti-cosmopolitan definition of Australian identity and mainstream cultural values built off the conservative emphasis on the value of evolved social change. For the poet Les Murray, genuine Australian identities could be found amongst the unarticulated 'vernacular cultures' of the Australian mainstream.

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<sup>14</sup> James McAuley, 'Culture and Counter-Culture: A Personal View', *Quadrant*, 20, no.9 (1976), p.12.

<sup>15</sup> H.W. Arndt, 'A Nation of Hornes?', *Quadrant*, 21, no.4 (1977), pp.71-72.

Vernacular Australia embraced both rural and urban populations, as well as Anglo-Australians, Aborigines and migrants.<sup>16</sup> Despite its internal differences, vernacular Australia was united by a conservative distrust of progressive intellectualism, and favoured the evolutionary cultural values of lived experience. Distrust of the cosmopolitan ideological left was to such an extent, argued Murray, that vernacular Australia moved further towards conservative political attitudes than it otherwise would support. In the case of the republic debate, Murray argued that the only reason the majority of the Australian population opposed Australia becoming a republic is that they associated the republican cause with the 'educated classes' of the left.<sup>17</sup>

Having constructed an image of the traditionalist mainstream, *Quadrant's* cultural conservatives imagined its polar opposite in the counter-culture. Understandings of the counter-culture tending to eschew class-based explanations in favour of an identification of the counter-culture with education, intellectualism, generational conflict and socialist subversion. Cultural elites were identified as of the 'left', anti-mainstream, anti-tradition, and comprising a minority which only managed to hold onto its position through a combination of institutional dominance and illiberal and authoritarian means of argument. For McAuley, the counter-culture was associated with the campus left, and the youth culture of the preceding decade. Counter-cultural moral permissiveness was the response of youth rebellion to the dullness of an affluent society. The counter-culture was unworkable because, unlike the gradual evolution of Western tradition, it was the mere venting of emotion, the psychological need for a life of

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<sup>16</sup> Les Murray, 'The Coming Republic', *Quadrant*, 20, no.4 (1976), pp.40-41.

<sup>17</sup> Murray, 'The Coming Republic', p.37.

meaning being fulfilled through social destruction.<sup>18</sup> Such an argument was carried on by Arndt, who argued that counter-cultural critiques of the materialism of the Australian mainstream and enthusiasm for causes such as environmentalism were, particularly amongst the young were 'the luxury products of affluence.'<sup>19</sup>

Common to critiques of the counter-culture and its legacy was the notion that its radicalism was a form of cultural suicide and political betrayal. Radical demands that went against any part of traditional morality were construed as a threat to the whole of Western society. Writing on the gay and lesbian rights movement, Andrew Lansdown argued that the pursuit of an equal rights agenda linked to a broader project of subversion. For Lansdown, 'homosexuals\* are increasingly using homosexuality as an ideological weapon to attack the values and institutions of our society [asterisk his].'<sup>20</sup> Lansdown's inclusion of the asterisk in his article led to a qualification of who he meant by the label 'homosexual'. Lest his statement lead to accusations of homophobia, Lansdown stated that the majority of homosexuals probably did not wish to attack society. Rather, subversion was the business of 'radical homosexuals' who were both allies and a subset of the 'intelligentsia of the liberal left'.<sup>21</sup>

H.W. Arndt took the link between left-wing politics and cultural subversion into an examination of the ABC. For Arndt, leftist intellectuals' antipathy towards mainstream culture was becoming even more soured by the rising fortunes of the political right in late 1970s. Responding to a 1980 retrospective of the previous decade on

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<sup>18</sup> McAuley, 'Culture and Counter-Culture', pp.12, 19.

<sup>19</sup> Arndt, 'A Nation of Hornes?', p.72.

<sup>20</sup> Andrew Lansdown, 'Homosexuals on the Offensive', *Quadrant*, 24, no.6 (1980), p.26.

<sup>21</sup> Lansdown, 'Homosexuals on the Offensive', p.26.

the ABC current affairs program *Four Corners*, Arndt believed that the pessimistic tone of the program reflected a lashing out against the majority society against which the intellectual left were becoming increasingly alienated. Arndt argued that

no one would pretend that the 1970s have been an unqualified success story for western civilisation, in Australia or in the world at large. But the *Four Corners* programme reflected the extreme unhappiness of the Lateliners, left-wing intellectuals of the Whitlam generation for whom things have not gone right and who seek comfort in the fact that, as they see it, the West, the USA, capitalism, the Fraser Government and all their other enemies are in ubiquitous and massive trouble.<sup>22</sup>

While conservative cultural critiques identified the threat to tradition with leftist intellectuals, such an understanding was supplemented by the importation of new class discourse. Notions of the 'new class' made their first appearance in the pages of *Quadrant* courtesy of the writings of American neo-conservative Irving Kristol. As Tim Dymond has argued, *Quadrant* and the AACF were the entry point for new class discourse into Australia.<sup>23</sup> Kristol, like other American neo-conservatives, had moved steadily across the political spectrum, from anti-Stalinist Trotskyist, through the anti-Communist cultural left of the CCF, through to self-described neo-conservative.<sup>24</sup> Perhaps drawing on his own Marxist heritage – and in contrast to the more diffuse understanding of the intellectual left in much of the Australian cultural conservatives'

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<sup>22</sup> H.W. Arndt, 'The Nineteen-Seventies: Some of the Good Things that Happened', *Quadrant*, 151, no.24 (1980), p.5.

<sup>23</sup> Dymond, 'A Political and Intellectual History', p.206.

<sup>24</sup> Dymond, 'A Political and Intellectual History', pp.126-90.

critique – Kristol’s ‘new class’ was defined primarily as an economic class, with its attitudes and political preferences seemingly determined by its objective class position.

In socio-economic terms, Kristol’s new class was the non-productive segment of the upper middle class. It was the class of ‘intellectuals’ – tertiary educated professionals, college teachers and students – who did not earn their income through private enterprise.<sup>25</sup> The new class was defined by its social progressivism and support for the redistributive welfare state. The new class’ independence of the market for its livelihood, according to Kristol, made it for the most part antagonistic to the free market and led it to view bourgeois ideals of personal liberty, prosperity and economic freedom as vulgar.<sup>26</sup> Moreover, the overwhelming support for the welfare state amongst the new class could be explained by the desire of intellectuals for greater influence over society. As a result, support for greater income equality by the new class came out of a desire to reduce the power of the bourgeoisie. In Kristol’s view,

the simple truth is that the professional classes of our modern bureaucratized societies are engaged in a class struggle with the business community for status and power. Inevitably, this class struggle is conducted under the banner of “equality” – a banner also raised by the bourgeoisie in *its* revolutions.<sup>27</sup>

The push towards greater equality was figured as a concern for the affluent intellectual. While working class Americans were quite happy to aspire towards bourgeois ideals,

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<sup>25</sup> Irving Kristol, ‘About Equality’, *Quadrant*, 16, November-December (1972), pp.74-75.

<sup>26</sup> Kristol, ‘About Equality’, p.76.

<sup>27</sup> Kristol, ‘About Equality’, p.75.

the 'radical egalitarians' of the upper middle class were bent on the millenarian destruction of the economic system that ensured their own comfort.<sup>28</sup>

Australian adaptations of the new class initially varied from the thrust of Kristol's attack. Whereas Kristol figured the anti-bourgeois new class as comprising intellectuals, Alan Barcan – the first Australian to write about the new class in *Quadrant* – located the new class more directly with public sector employment. Barcan, himself a former member of Sydney University's radical left, made first mention of the new class in 1974.<sup>29</sup> Like Kristol, Barcan's concern was with the internal threat to bourgeois civilisation presented by growing affluence. However, Barcan's mention of the new class came only in passing as part of the general rise of the salaried middle class, with the main burden of blame for cultural decline falling on youth culture and the rise of television.<sup>30</sup>

Writing one year later, Barcan's notion of the new class had matured into a form of anti-bureaucratic critique. Writing on the economic malaise of Great Britain at the time, Barcan linked both economic and moral stagnation with the rise of the affluent welfare state. The welfare state fostered dependence which in turn promoted moral decline. The welfare state also fostered the 'salaried' – in other words, the non-productive and non-entrepreneurial – middle-class, particularly in the public sector. Such a class was by its very nature dependent, a 'client' class and as such was the

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<sup>28</sup> Kristol, 'About Equality', pp.76-77.

<sup>29</sup> Dymond, 'A Political and Intellectual History', pp.195-96.

<sup>30</sup> Alan Barcan, 'Education and the New Ideology', *Quadrant*, 18, no.4 (1974), pp.65-72.

harbinger of the decline of bourgeois society.<sup>31</sup> However, Barcan's critique did not come simply as an argument for the free market. Rather, Barcan's critique of the British welfare state served as the basis for his own suggestion for a model of industrial democracy, where workers owned and controlled industry, receiving a dividend rather than a wage from the enterprises in which they worked.<sup>32</sup>

Following Barcan's writings on the United Kingdom, critiques of the bureaucratic new class in foreign countries appeared in *Quadrant* as a form of anti-socialist argument. Writing on the rise in the number of public sector employees in Italy, Mauro Lucentini drew directly on Milovan Djilas' critique of the Soviet new class bureaucracy. For Lucentini, Italy was the first non-communist nation to develop a substantial and influential public sector employed new class.<sup>33</sup> The rise of such a class was directly linked to the Italian Communist Party and other left-wing governing parties, who used public sector employment and state monopolies to buy political support and to inculcate the wider population with socialist ideology.<sup>34</sup> The rise of the new class was thus directly linked to internal socialist subversion. Lucentini did not attempt to draw direct links with the Australian bureaucracy, or with the Australian middle class intelligentsia. If there was any link to be made, Lucentini's article merely served as a warning of the dangers to political freedom of a too large and too corrupt public sector, and the potential subversion of a strong socialist movement.

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<sup>31</sup> Alan Barcan, 'The British Sickness', *Quadrant*, 19, no.7 (1975), pp.42-44.

<sup>32</sup> Barcan, 'The British Sickness', pp.46-47.

<sup>33</sup> Mauro Lucentini, 'The New Class', *Quadrant*, 21, no.5 (1977), p.44.

<sup>34</sup> Lucentini, 'The New Class', p.45.

While writers seeking to locate the new class in the bureaucracy looked overseas to illustrate their point, Australian writers wishing to apply the new class label to a left-wing cultural elite found such charges could resonate by Australian example. In November 1975 *Quadrant* used its front cover to introduce a new character by humourist Barry Humphries. In his usual style, Humphries used his own talent for impersonation to provide a satirical insight into what he saw as the Australian national character. Whereas Humphries' former characters such as Barry McKenzie and Dame Edna Everage were held a mirror up to suburban culture, the new character portrayed a different side of Australia. The character, Craig Steppenwolf, represented a new and antithetical addition to the Australian cultural milieu – the radical schoolteacher. Set in a suburban classroom, Humphries' Steppenwolf was depicted as a man on a mission to impose alien values on the children under his care. In an extract from Humphries' forthcoming show, *Quadrant* readers were presented with the efforts of Steppenwolf, a university graduate recently 'retrained' by the Whitlam government, to impose a 'de-educational strategy' on his students – who were thereafter renamed 'participators'.<sup>35</sup>

Under the influence of the university educated Steppenwolf, reading, writing and arithmetic were replaced with a program promoting radical politics, uninhibited sexuality and the subversion of Western bourgeois morality. Using his position as a government employee, and under the aegis of policy from Canberra, Steppenwolf rejected Shakespeare in favour of an understanding of 'Professor Jackie Jacko, a starving aboriginal grants recipient'; taught his children 'guerrilla basket weaving' and the power

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<sup>35</sup> Barry Humphries and Ross Fitzgerald, 'Craig Steppenwolf: A Monologue for the Music-Hall', *Quadrant*, 19 (8), November 1975, p.47.

of incest in undermining patriarchal oppression; and referred his children to the school's 'Marxist dietician'.<sup>36</sup> When called by a parent complaining about the school's promotion of her daughter's sexual promiscuity, Steppenwolf reacted with anger, telling the mother she had no right to criticise the method of her daughter's education.<sup>37</sup>

The thrust of Humphries' satire was clear. Steppenwolf, a young product of the campus ferment of the preceding decade, represented a new force in Australian politics and culture that was determined to take apart established norms, and replace them with a litany of trendy attitudes and minority causes. Despite Steppenwolf's profession of liberationist ideals, he disdained the attitudes of ordinary people, and resorted to bureaucracy and authoritarian means when under threat. Humphries Steppenwolf embodied both the cultural attitudes and the cultural power of the type of left-wing elite. In his attitudes, Steppenwolf embodied a parodied extreme of the anti-traditionalist counter-culture. He was a middle-class employee of the state, whose concerns were far removed from those of the majority, and whose power came through his position of authority within a key institution for the shaping of culture: the public school. While Humphries did not use the label 'new class', the Steppenwolf character embodied the cultural assumptions of a class inflected attack on intellectual elites that was to form by the end of the decade.

Les Murray was the first Australian writer in *Quadrant* to express an explicit critique of the Australian intellectual new class. Like Humphries' Steppenwolf, Murray's

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<sup>36</sup> Humphries and Fitzgerald, 'Craig Steppenwolf', pp.47, 50.

<sup>37</sup> Humphries and Fitzgerald, 'Craig Steppenwolf', p.50.

new class' most salient and confronting characteristic was its radicalism and illiberalism. The new class world view was anti-traditional, in that it opposed Australia's 'vernacular cultures'; while the new class itself was consumed with its own oppositional self-identity. For Murray, a defining characteristic of the new class was its trendiness. Murray argued that 'style, in fact, is probably the broadest common denominator of the new ascendancy, and one of its most important cohesive principles.'<sup>38</sup> The social progressivism for the new class was merely a cover for fashionable antipathy to the Australian mainstream. By way of example, Murray argued that new class criticisms of country people's racism towards Aborigines was merely cover for their desire to undermine the rural bases myths that lay at the heart of the despised mainstream Australian vernacular culture.<sup>39</sup> Like Humphries' Steppenwolf, Murray's analysis stressed the new class' authoritarianism. The new class adopted cultural radicalism as fashion in both language and attitudes as its main tool of defence and attack.<sup>40</sup> Such an approach left the mainstream 'more or less bullied into silence by progressives and radicals.'<sup>41</sup>

*Quadrant's* critiques of left-wing intellectuals as members of the 'new class' were in many ways a direct continuation of non-new class inspired critiques of the counter-culture. Unlike Kristol's Marxist derived definition, Murray's new class was not articulated as part of an objective economic class. Instead, drawing on *Quadrant's* tradition of cultural critique, Murray's new class was defined by both leftism and intellectualism as the markers of its social status. In other words, for Murray,

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<sup>38</sup> Murray, 'The Coming Republic', p.39.

<sup>39</sup> Murray, 'The Coming Republic', p.40.

<sup>40</sup> Murray, 'The Coming Republic', p.39.

<sup>41</sup> Murray, 'The Coming Republic', p.37.

membership of the new class did not come about through birth, income, or occupation. Rather, membership of the new class came through the possession of education and a certain set of cultural values. For Murray, university education played the same role for aspirants to the new class as land ownership did for the aristocracy. Adoption of the correct affectations and attitudes that came as the corollary of tertiary education ensured anyone a place in the new class.<sup>42</sup>

Both Murray and Humphries' identification of the new class as primarily defined by trendy leftist intellectualism set the stage for the consistent identification of a culturally influential cognitive elite. The supposed intellectual fashion-consciousness of radicals continued to be a strong theme. In putting forward the argument that greater equality came at the expense of economic and social freedoms, Peter Coleman was explicit in who he identified as deliberately ignorant of this axiom. For Coleman, concern with equality was the domain of 'salon egalitarians' more interested in clinging on to intellectual fashion than listening to evidence.<sup>43</sup> Such an attitude was the inheritance of the counter-culture. Coleman argued that,

Those days of the sixties were days not of critical thinking but of crude dogma and mob power... for a number of years many intelligent and not so intelligent young people and old people gave up critical thinking entirely and embraced as gospel Jiminy Cricket platitudes about freedom and peace, in the name of which

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<sup>42</sup> Murray, 'The Coming Republic', p.39.

<sup>43</sup> Peter Coleman, 'Inequality', *Quadrant*, 25, no.10 (1981), p.67.

they shouted and stormed and tore and smashed and hated and ridiculed and humiliated and destroyed.<sup>44</sup>

The authoritarianism and illiberalism inherent in the left's 'fashionable' intellectual positions linked into a greater narrative of new class takeover and subversion. For John Passmore, leftist intellectuals used their predominant position in the university as a base for the capture of all public institutions. Intellectual dominance by radicals was perceived as preceding dominance over public culture and, eventually, all institutions of the state.<sup>45</sup> Such logic was simple. Leftist intellectuals, whose predominance over campus culture was premised on their authoritarian approach to argument, carried such an attitude over in their spread through the wider society. Writing at the end of 1982, Anthony McAdam gave the most explicit and succinct definition of such a new class cognitive elite. The new class, argued McAdam, was 'a class which I define as the post-war generation of tertiary educated professionals who today play key roles in most of our institutions – the universities, public service and, most obviously, the media.'<sup>46</sup> Coming from the campus agitation against the Vietnam War, members of the new class developed a conformist intellectual culture that disdained all views outside of its own. This manifested in hostility to the West and the values of liberal democracy. These views in turn were carried by the new class into cultural institutions, both by their own members and by the sympathetic ear of

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<sup>44</sup> Peter Coleman, 'The Roaring Sixties', *Quadrant*, 25, no.9 (1981), p.68.

<sup>45</sup> John Passmore, 'Quality and Equality Reconsidered', *Quadrant*, 25, no.9 (1981), p.3.

<sup>46</sup> Anthony McAdam, 'Journalists and the New Class', *Quadrant*, 26, no.11 (1982), p.62.

sympathetic shapers of public debate such as journalists. The result was the hegemony in popular culture of the “radical chic” politics of the “New Class”.<sup>47</sup>

## ***Conclusion***

Examining writings by both conservative intellectuals and the nascent neo-liberal movement between 1972 and 1982 gives a revealing insight into the foundations of Australian right-wing anti-elitist discourse. In the first instance, there appeared to be no common anti-elitist attack on the ‘left’ by both neo-liberal activists and the cultural conservatives of *Quadrant*. While neo-liberalism was on the rise, such a rise appeared to have been successful without either the construction of a left-wing economic elite, or the adoption of an anti-leftist cultural critique. This was in marked contrast to the types of writing coming out of *Quadrant*. For the cultural conservatives, the decade under examination proved to be a testing ground for the articulation of both a defined Australian mainstream and the authoritarian, illiberal and anti-left-wing cognitive elite that threatened it.

Drawing on experiences of cultural conflict within Australia, and Kristol’s new class critique, this cultural anti-elitist discourse saw debates over values as key sites of contestation, with the ability to shape culture the most salient type of power to be examined, critiqued and contested. While some in the pages of *Quadrant* attempted an attack on bureaucratic elites, they failed to catch on. The example of the years between 1972 and 1982 was that discussions of the cultural were foundational for setting up the

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<sup>47</sup> McAdam, ‘Journalists and the New Class’, pp.61-3.

right-wing anti-elitist discourse of the 1980s. The key themes that were to carry over were the definition of the conservative, inarticulate mainstream; the definition of leftist intellectuals as the anti-mainstream threat; and the definition of that threat as one of cultural coercion.

## **Chapter 3**

# **Cultural Anti-Elitism Spreads: 1983-1988**

### *Introduction*

The years between 1983 and 1988 saw a significant expansion in the use of anti-elitist discourse by Australian intellectuals associated with the political right. If in the decade preceding neo-liberals stayed largely silent while cultural conservatives did the work of developing a cultural anti-elitism, the period under examination in this chapter was decidedly different. The five years between 1983 and 1988 showed an even more dramatic rise in the 'new right' than in previous decade. The election of the Hawke government in 1983, the continued and dramatic growth of neo-liberal think tanks, and the Dries' takeover of the Liberal party, established neo-liberalism as the hegemonic force in Australian economic policy debate. The intellectual confidence of the right, despite the lack of success of the Liberal-National Coalition in federal politics, was in significant upswing.<sup>1</sup>

Not surprisingly, the continued growth of the neo-liberal side of the new right was matched by the adoption and modification of anti-elitist discourse by neo-liberal activists. On one level, this entailed an expansion of the types of debates in which anti-elitist discourse was employed. As part of the pursuit of neo-liberal policies, economic

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<sup>1</sup> Rod Kemp, Interview with the Author, p.3.

elites located in the bureaucracy and welfare agencies became an increasing target, particularly for the newly assertive and partisan think tanks. In such attacks, the cultural conservative anti-elitist discourse was a strong influence. On the other level, attacks on cultural elites gained pace and scope. Organisations such as the IPA entered into the cultural debate, and, along with the continued work of writers in *Quadrant*, worked on the continued articulation of the notion of the illiberal and alienated left-wing cultural elite as the enemy of the Australian cultural mainstream.

### *Cultural Debates and Intellectual Elites*

The years between 1983 and 1988 saw the further development and expansion of the cultural conservative's critique of left-wing intellectuals, including critiques of the new class. Such an expansion mirrored the entry of neo-liberals into cultural debate. By the mid-1980s, culture had become a key battleground in politics.<sup>2</sup> Not only were the cultural conservatives in *Quadrant* engaged in such battles, but also to a lesser extent were the IPA and other neo-liberal advocates. As a result of the rise of the 'culture wars', conflict over language and access to instruments for shaping public discourse such as the mass media were of increasing concern.<sup>3</sup> In such struggles, the cultural warriors of the right continued to cultivate a perception of themselves as cut off from key strategic sites for shaping intellectual debate within the universities, the media, the nation's schools, and government institutions involved in defining national culture. According to IPA Director Rod Kemp, the perception within the leadership of that organisation was

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<sup>2</sup> David McKnight, *Beyond Right and Left: New Politics and the Culture Wars* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 2004), p.143.

<sup>3</sup> Norman Fairclough, 'Political Correctness': The Politics of Culture and Language', *Discourse and Society*, 14, no.1 (2003), pp.19-20.

that public debate was shaped by an orthodoxy that could be described as ‘the cultural left and the left critique of Australian society.’ Such an orthodoxy was held in place by the dominance of the left in cultural institutions and the neglect of cultural debates by the right in the preceding years.<sup>4</sup> Unsurprisingly, the use of anti-elitist labels in this period continued to attack those perceived to be dominant within cultural institutions.

The perception of cultural elites’ institutional dominance drew directly on critiques of left-wing intellectuals developed in *Quadrant* in the preceding decade. For Robert Manne, the new class constituted a ‘new elite’ in professions such as teaching and journalism, who, while still defined by their ‘radical’ stance on issues of morality and the family, were predominantly cast in their relation to political division within Australia over the Cold War. The new class orthodoxy in popular culture, according to Manne, was expressed through anti-capitalism, anti-Americanism, and quiescence over Communist totalitarianism.<sup>5</sup> Intellectual elites’ opposition to the values of private enterprise was perceived as impacting on their position in other cultural debates. Following such a line of argument, *Quadrant* editor Peter Coleman argued that behind much of conservatism ‘lay the hatred of the New Class against all manifestations of capitalism, the market and private enterprise.’<sup>6</sup>

Such an identification of the intellectual left as anti-capitalist quite naturally fitted in with neo-liberals’ contributions to anti-elitist discourse. Amongst the few expressions of anti-elitist discourse by the CIS – an organisation that, unlike the IPA,

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<sup>4</sup> Interview with Rod Kemp, p.2.

<sup>5</sup> Robert Manne, ‘On Being an Editor’, *Quadrant*, 27, no.1-2 (1983), p.88.

<sup>6</sup> Peter Coleman, ‘The Inhumanity of Money Making’, *Quadrant*, 30, no.5 (1986), p.6.

spent the 1980s mostly concerned with economic policy advocacy – Max Hartwell, a member of the CIS Council of Advisers and historian addressed directly the supposed socialist tendencies of left-wing intellectuals. Hartwell’s argument drew on both the *Quadrant* new class influenced concept of the alienated intellectual and arguments about self interest. For Hartwell, the comfortable economic position of middle class intellectuals was what allowed them to criticise capitalism, and the individualism and materialism of the majority, without fear of personal consequence. However, it wasn’t just the lack of direct participation in the market economy that set such intellectuals apart. Hartwell, echoing Les Murray’s earlier critique of the ‘new class’, also saw intellectual elites’ anti-capitalism as part of a recognition of the greater role people like themselves play in a socialist economy. For Hartwell, ‘the intellectuals’ – he always used the definite article – could hope to gain in prestige in power through any growth in the size of government, as they would be the providers of expertise and rational planning behind any such growth.<sup>7</sup>

Although Hartwell’s anti-elitist critique made some arguments about self-interest, the majority of neo-liberals’ contributions to cultural anti-elitist discourse eschewed material motivations as explanations for left-wing intellectuals’ radical views. Neo-liberal philosopher Lachlan Chipman was one of the ideologically committed neo-liberals to take enthusiastically to critique of cultural elites. Chipman’s analysis too drew strongly on an anti-intellectual new class discourse. For Chipman, there was a direct link between cultural elites, particularly in the academy, and the campus radicalism of the

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<sup>7</sup> Max Hartwell, ‘The Death Throes of the Anti-Capitalist Mentality’, *Centre for Independent Studies Policy Report*, 1, no.4 (1985), pp.6-7.

new left. Chipman's link between the two, however, was defined by what he saw as the fundamental illiberalism of counter-culture thought. For Chipman, the expansion of higher education in the preceding decades had, instead of leading to a flourishing liberal academic culture, resulted in the creation of a dominant radical campus culture that defined itself as opposed to a set of near-absolute evils, namely 'imperialism', 'sexism', 'racism', and, not ironically, 'elitism'. Opposition to these four evils was, in Chipman's view, so central to the campus left's moral world view that any violation of liberal principles was justified in the pursuit of these moral ends.<sup>8</sup>

For Chipman, the illiberal campus culture – in which 'unorthodox' views such as support for the Vietnam War, Zionism, or racial explanations for IQ difference – were all but banned from universities through radical protest, created the intellectual raw materials for members of the new class in other culture industries. For Chipman, 'the newly educated would be, in taking up their positions in the cognitive agencies – teaching, the media, law welfare – of the wider community, the vanguard of the newly enlightened orthodoxy, instrumental in reifying the values of the new class.'<sup>9</sup> For Chipman, the radicalism of new class intellectuals was not related to self-interest but rather to their ideological hostility to Western cultural traditions and capitalism. The new left's cultural battles were about subversion. Chipman argued as an example, invoking George Orwell, that university women's studies courses aimed to 'cause middle class women (the typical clientele) to discover their oppression, to become angry about it, to identify the efficient and sustaining causes of that oppression with the

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<sup>8</sup> Lachlan Chipman, 'The Zealots: Australia's Thought Police', *Quadrant*, 28, no.5 (1984), pp.16-17.

<sup>9</sup> Chipman, 'The Zealots', *Quadrant*, p.18.

structures of the major institutions of an exploitative sexist society – the family, the education system, the workplace, the professions, even the language (Oldspeak?) – and to work *collectively*... for the take over or destruction of such institutions as appropriate'.<sup>10</sup>

Naturally, the further development of criticisms of left-wing cognitive elites as the concerns of a specific illiberal groups of intellectuals was matched by the further articulation of ideas of the Australian mainstream. The genesis of the new left on campuses, and the spread of the new class and its ideas through cultural institutions, was also seen as betraying its separation from the mainstream. Conservative English Literature lecturer Philip Ayres argued in *Quadrant* that the strategy of left wing intellectuals to implement their own ideas was fundamentally undemocratic, in that such cultural programs tended to bypass any form of public validation. Ayres argued that:

The greatest weakness of the New Class politics... is their distrust of the electorate in respect to policies on, for example, multi-culturalism, land rights, mining welfare and conservation, non-competitive education and assessment, and so on. Indeed they actively fear the electorate (though they may give voice to the need to 'educate' it) on such issues, will back away from the idea of referenda,

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<sup>10</sup> Chipman, 'The Zealots', *Quadrant*, p.18.

and stress above all the obligation on government to give a responsible lead – to ‘govern’ in a word.<sup>11</sup>

Despite their ideological differences, conservatives, neo-conservatives and neo-liberals cohered in this period around a shared idea of the Australian mainstream. While the cultural mainstream against which left wing intellectual elites were positioned was not homogenously imagined, there were certain traits commonly ascribed to it. As in the traditional conservative view expressed in the earlier period in *Quadrant* as in elsewhere, the Australian mainstream was imagined as imbued with the virtues, aspirations and preferences of bourgeois individualism. Unlike left-wing intellectual elites, the majority of Australians were conceived as unconcerned with intellectualising and abstraction, happy with the inheritance of Western culture and institutions, and comfortable with a life of material acquisition.

For cultural conservatives, the qualities of bourgeois individualism were embedded in the Australian mainstream’s British cultural roots. For Robert Manne, writing in 1983, the Australian mainstream were ‘by and large the unself-conscious inheritors of a highly specific set of British traditions and institutions – ranging from parliament to cricket.’<sup>12</sup> Expression of such a tradition came through the ways in which Australians lived their daily lives. The life of the average Australian was concerned with the maintenance of their family and the moderate acquisition of private property, including ownership of the family home. As such, Australians were conservative at

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<sup>11</sup> Philip Ayres, ‘Locating the Conservative Electorate: There is No ‘Middle Ground’’, *Quadrant*, 19, nos.1-2 (1985), p.93.

<sup>12</sup> Manne, ‘On Being an Editor’, p.88.

heart, fearing drastic social change, and threats to private property.<sup>13</sup> In his response to the Bicentenary issue, Peter Coleman contrasted this British inheritance directly with the new class, arguing that 'the majority of Australians persists (sic) in highly valuing (as the polls attest) those institutions which the New Class despises - the family, free enterprise, the constitutional monarchy, the federal system. Australians, amazingly, remain patriotic and like their flag.'<sup>14</sup>

Even neo-liberal activists within the IPA were able to find support in a notion of the mainstream that deviated somewhat from the more pure form of their own ideological preferences. While personally an avowed opponent of the welfare state, IPA Research Fellow Ken Baker conceded, as part of his attack on the 'radical left agenda' of the Australian Broadcasting Corporation, that the 'agenda of the Australian community' included support for the welfare state and a mixed economy. However, mainstream attitudes were still seen as in line with the key values of the bourgeois individualist mainstream: conservative morality and belief in the value of free enterprise. For Baker, this was manifested in the Australian mainstream's hostility to high taxation and militant unionism, and support for wage restraint, the monarchy, uranium mining, the ANZUS alliance, the traditional family and 'law and order' agendas.<sup>15</sup>

The mid 1980s saw the first concerted efforts by the right to elaborate and campaign on the disconnect between the illiberal intellectual elite and the imagined mainstream. This division was most significantly exploited in this period by the creation

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<sup>13</sup> Manne, 'On Being an Editor', p.88.

<sup>14</sup> Coleman, 'The Great Australian Death Wish', p.8.

<sup>15</sup> Ken Baker, 'Bias in the ABC', *Institute of Public Affairs Review*, 37, no.2 (1983), p.77.

of controversy over plans for the 1988 Australian Bicentenary. Since the appointment of Rod Kemp as Director in late 1982, the IPA turned towards addressing what Kemp saw as the absolute hegemony of the left in cultural debates.<sup>16</sup> In 1985, three years shy of the Bicentenary, the IPA began its cultural attack in earnest with its criticisms of the planning efforts of the Australian Bicentennial Authority (ABA). While the ABA had under the Fraser government been working towards a Bicentennial theme of 'the Australian achievement', with the election of the Hawke Government the official slogan had changed to 'bringing Australia together'. In the opinion of the leadership of the IPA, the new theme for the Bicentenary was an opportunity for the cultural left to use its institutional dominance to force its own version of national identity on the unwilling mainstream. In launching their attack on the ABA's plan, the IPA saw themselves as contributing a voice for the previously silenced 'centre right and mainstream'.<sup>17</sup>

The overarching theme of the IPA's attack on the ABA's Bicentennial plans was the framing of such plans as a reflection of minority concerns. Ken Baker argued that the ABA's focus on multiculturalism, Indigenous heritage, women's history and labour history as part of Australian identity represented a 'sacrifice' of 'tradition to current fashion, and even then only to the fashionable concerns of a minority.'<sup>18</sup> In Baker's view the Bicentenary overlooked the central role of British culture and institutions in Australian history, as well as the central role of the Christian ethic and private enterprise in building the Australian nation. The neglect of such institutions and cultural inheritances in the Bicentenary represented a neglect of mainstream views. As Baker

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<sup>16</sup> Rod Kemp, Interview with the Author, p.1.

<sup>17</sup> Rod Kemp, Interview with the Author, p.2.

<sup>18</sup> Ken Baker, 'The Bicentenary: Celebration or Apology?', *Institute of Public Affairs Review*, 38, no.4 (1985), p.175.

argued, 'the central role of the family, the Federal Constitution, the Monarchy, free enterprise, the legal system all receive overwhelming endorsement by Australians.'<sup>19</sup>

Baker's attack lent itself to further adaptation by *Quadrant* editor Peter Coleman. In May of 1985, Coleman used the editorial column of the magazine to echo his support for Baker's opening salvo. The ABA's agenda was identified with 'New Class regulators who despise the liberal traditions of this country.'<sup>20</sup> For Coleman, these liberal traditions were 'the family, free enterprise, the constitutional monarchy, the federal system.'<sup>21</sup> Coleman was to return to the theme of the Bicentenary in November of the same year, lamenting that the planning of the Bicentenary had fallen in a period in which the new class had reached 'something close to cultural hegemony'.<sup>22</sup> Coleman's call to arms was to rescue the Bicentenary for the mainstream from new class elites, who would supposedly turn what should be a national celebration into a 'festival of self-flagellation'.<sup>23</sup>

The campaign against the ABA's plans was ultimately successful in changing how the Bicentenary was celebrated by the time 1988 came around.<sup>24</sup> While it may be difficult to assess the impact of the success of this campaign on strategies used in ensuing cultural struggles, the Bicentenary campaign demonstrated the broadening and maturation of the cultural anti-elitist critique. Coming out of *Quadrant*, the idea of the

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<sup>19</sup> Ken Baker, 'The Bicentenary', pp.176-177.

<sup>20</sup> Peter Coleman, 'Editorial: The Great Australian Death Wish', *Quadrant*, 29, no.5 (1985), p.8.

<sup>21</sup> Coleman, 'Death Wish', p.8.

<sup>22</sup> Peter Coleman, 'Editorial: A Short Way with Bicentenarians: The Drift of Craig McGregor', *Quadrant*, 29, no.11 (1985), p.6.

<sup>23</sup> Coleman, 'A Short Way', p.6.

<sup>24</sup> Rod Kemp, Interview with the Author, p.2.

disconnected and authoritarian cultural elite found resonance with the newly assertive neo-liberal movement. The continued identification of intellectuals with illiberalism was matched in turn by a developed notion of the mainstream from which they were disconnected. While such a critique was in many ways articulated solely in the pages of *Quadrant* in the preceding decade, the expansion and elaboration of this discourse by the late 1980s was indicative of the rising hold of cultural anti-elitist discourse on the imagination of intellectuals of both the old and new right, and the effectiveness of this discourse in shattering the perceived cultural hegemony of the left.

### ***Economic Debates and Economic Elites***

In addition to the entry of neo-liberals into cultural debates, the years between 1983 and 1988 saw the modification of cultural anti-elitist discourse to serve the economic agenda of neo-liberals. As in battles over culture, economic anti-elitism entailed an attack on both perceived orthodoxies and the groups of people that embodied them. As the reforming economic paradigm at the time, neo-liberalism provided this particular brand of right-wing anti-elitist discourse with its policy prescriptions, and its demonology. In line with neo-liberal aims to reduce the scale of government participation and regulation of the economy, the areas under attack were bureaucracies, those with a supposed self-interest in the welfare state, and other economic 'special interests' such as trade unions. Despite the fact that such an elite was conceived in economic terms, and often attacked for its perceived self-interest, its identification with the left-wing middle class led it, like intellectuals, to be constructed as being illiberal and out of touch with mainstream values. Although the majority of this

attack on economic elites came from the think tanks, particularly the IPA, *Quadrant* under Peter Coleman occasionally lent itself to the pursuit of free market agendas. Unlike in debates over culture, public choice theory was to make a contribution to the economic anti-elitist lexicon.

It is worth noting up front that there was more than one kind of anti-elitist attack being pursued by neo-liberals in this period. For neo-liberal activists, the campaign against Australia's system of centralised industrial arbitration was one of the most important causes of the period. However, even though neo-liberals did utilise a critique of an 'elite' in this debate, such an elite was neither associated with the left, nor with arguments about its cultural attitudes, illiberalism or separation from, and disdain of the mainstream. The battle over industrial relations reached a critical point in 1986 with the establishment of the H.R. Nicholls Society. Founded by future Liberal Federal Treasurer Peter Costello, former Federal Treasury head John Stone, and Western Mining Corporation adviser Ray Evans, the society set itself the goal of dismantling the system of centralised arbitration of wages and industrial matters.<sup>25</sup> The H.R. Nicholls Society argued that the existing industrial relations system served the interests of an elite 'industrial relations club'. While this club included the unions, bureaucrats in the Federal Department of Industrial Relations and the Australian Labor Party, it also included members of the Liberal-National Coalition, and the heads of Australian corporations, particularly in manufacturing.<sup>26</sup> In their attack on the 'industrial relations

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<sup>25</sup> David Kemp, 'Liberalism and Conservatism in Australia', p.347.

<sup>26</sup> H.R. Nicholls Society, *'Arbitration in Contempt': The Proceedings of the Inaugural Seminar of the HR Nicholls Society held in Melbourne 28 February-2 March, 1986* (Melbourne: The Society, 1986); David Kemp, 'Liberalism and Conservatism', p.347; Rod Kemp, Interview with the Author, p.5.

club', the H.R. Nicholls Society could rely on the support of other neo-liberal movement groups such as the IPA and the CIS.

The fault lines of the industrial relations debate – between the neo-liberal movement and the broad special interests of 'the industrial relations club' – clearly did not fit into the kind of narrative of left-right division present in the cultural debate. Moreover, unlike cultural debates, the industrial relations debate produced division rather than cohesion amongst different sections of the right. Individuals such as Robert Manne, who was an active critic of the cultural and Cold War left at the time, found themselves on the opposite side to the neo-liberals on the economic debate.<sup>27</sup> Federal Members of Parliament such as Ian McPhee were also identified as members of the 'industrial relations club', as was C.D. Kemp, former Director of the IPA and father of Rod Kemp.<sup>28</sup> There was thus a clear separation between the type of elite denoted by the 'industrial relations club' and the knowledge elite of the cultural left. While members of the industrial relations club were positioned as an elite by virtue of their economic and political clout, they were hardly characterised as *elitist* in a cultural sense.

Unlike the industrial relations debate, however, neo-liberal critiques of welfare drew heavily on the notion of the left as culturally alienated from the mainstream. Elements of the cultural 'new class' critique coloured the debate over the welfare state, albeit with a strongly neo-liberal analysis of the vested interest of welfare professionals in the continued expansion of the sector. A common refrain in attacks in this period was

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<sup>27</sup> John Carroll and Robert Manne, *Shutdown: The Failure of Economic Policy and How to Rescue Australia* (Melbourne: Text Publishing, 1992); Robert Manne, Interview with the Author, p.1.

<sup>28</sup> Rod Kemp, Interview with the Author, pp.5-6.

the repeated reference to social justice advocates of various types as comprising an 'industry'. Such labelling drew directly on public choice theory, as Marian Sawer has argued.<sup>29</sup> Thus, the Human Rights Commission was dismissed as part of a 'grievance industry', with a vested interest in fostering divisions between ethnic groups, men and woman, and the able and disabled in order to fuel 'Australia's fastest growing industry'.<sup>30</sup> Similarly, mining executive Hugh Morgan argued advocates of Aboriginal welfare and land rights – including members of academia and the media – had a vested interest in creating a 'guilt industry' for the purpose money, jobs, and the ability to influence government policy.<sup>31</sup>

In the first edition of the *IPA Review* under his editorship, Rod Kemp drew explicit links between the growth of tertiary education in the preceding decades and the growth in the 1980s of the welfare and community services sector. Such public sector growth, as opposed to the private growth favoured by Kemp, directly advanced the interests of the tertiary educated middle class.<sup>32</sup> This critique was to be elaborated and expanded over following years, with Kemp invoking a concept of the mainstream that he argued were beginning to see through the rhetoric of 'consensus and compassion' characteristic of both welfare advocates and the corporatist approach of the Hawke government.<sup>33</sup> For Kemp, such social justice rhetoric served as a mere smokescreen for

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<sup>29</sup> Sawer, 'Populism and Public Choice', pp.33-37.

<sup>30</sup> Babette Francis, 'The Grievance Industry', *Quadrant*, 30, no.1-2 (1986), p.104.

<sup>31</sup> Hugh Morgan, 'The Guilt Industry', *Institute of Public Affairs Review*, 42, no.1 (1988), p.17.

<sup>32</sup> Rod Kemp, 'Job Creation Programs for the Middle Class', *Institute of Public Affairs Review*, 37, no.1 (1982-83), pp.34-5.

<sup>33</sup> Rod Kemp, 'Editorial: The New Privileged', *Institute of Public Affairs Review*, 39, no.1 (1985), p.3.

the self interest of a dominant 'stratum of privilege' comprising union leaders and tertiary educated public service professionals.<sup>34</sup>

The connection between the welfare professions and the campuses naturally fed back in to critiques of the campus culture. The same Ken Baker who authored the IPA's attacks on the Bicentenary plans turned his attention in 1987 to the political culture on Australia's campuses. While his focus was on the apparent conservative ascendancy in student politics, and the election of conservative and libertarian editors of the student newspapers *Honi Soit* and *Woroni*, such changes were perceived as linked to broader social change. For Baker, conservative students were the new anti-establishment radicals, with the establishment characterised as 'the left-liberal New Class establishment with its ranks of privileged bureaucrats and union officials, its suffocating welfare state and egalitarian ethic which breeds uniformity and mediocrity.'<sup>35</sup>

The association of welfare advocacy with the culture of the campuses in turn led to the characterisation of welfare advocates as possessing the same authoritarian and illiberal attitudes to debate as their cousins on the cultural left. John Hyde, a self described 'Dry' advocate for neo-liberal policies within the Liberal-National Coalition, invoked notions of both new class self-interest in the welfare debate, and the intellectual left's supposed cultural radicalism.<sup>36</sup> Writing in the *Australian Financial Review*, then under the editorship of fellow neo-liberal P.P. McGuinness, Hyde argued that the

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<sup>34</sup> Rod Kemp, 'The New Privileged', p.4.

<sup>35</sup> Ken Baker, 'Conservatives are Making the News on Campus', *Institute of Public Affairs Review*, 39, no.1 (1987), p.55.

<sup>36</sup> John Hyde, *Dry in Defence of Economic Freedom: the Saga of How the Dries Changed the Australian Economy for the Better* (Melbourne: Institute of Public Affairs, 2002).

combination of high taxes and inflexible labour laws discriminated against the unemployed by effectively shutting them out of the labour market. However, such a perverse system of restrictions and disincentives would not be changed by the existing 'professional bleeding hearts' of the welfare bureaucracy since their position required the continuing existence of unemployment.<sup>37</sup> While such new class bureaucrats were located by Hyde by their objective relation to the welfare system, Hyde could confidently place them with the viewpoints of the cultural left. In illustrating the hypothetical example of an unemployed man being taxed at an excessively high rate on re-entering the workforce, Hyde anticipated the new class response through a nascent idea of left-wing 'political correctness'. Hyde argued that his list of figures 'exemplify the problems of designing a welfare system, but such is the state of the debate that many new-class welfare advocates will be more concerned that I chose the male gender to explain it.'<sup>38</sup>

## *Conclusion*

Right-wing anti-elitist discourse between the years 1983 and 1988 crossed over two distinct areas of debate and two distinct sets of elites. The first area of debate was one of culture, where the elite under attack was perceived as being in a position of dominance within cultural and academic institutions. The second area was economic, with the elite constructed as present in the bureaucracy and various 'special interest' groups. Even though economic and cultural debates were often separate, cultural

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<sup>37</sup> John Hyde, 'In the Present System, Not to Work Can be a Rational Choice', *Australian Financial Review*, 4 January (1985), p.6.

<sup>38</sup> Hyde, 'Not to Work Can be a Rational Choice', p.6.

debates had a way of taking precedence for right-wing writers in this period. While attacks on the cultural agenda of intellectuals and media elites occasionally involved reference to the cultural left's disdain for the market and private enterprise, attacks on economic elites were far more likely to include discussions of the cultural.

For all its variations, there existed a broad anti-elitist discourse amongst intellectuals on the Australian right between 1983 and 1988. Whether attacks came from neo-liberal activists concerned about the growth of the welfare state, or from cultural conservatives concerned with the hegemony of radical left ideas in popular culture, there was a broadly conceived common enemy: the 'left'. While this left's social position, degree of self-interest and labels varied, the left elites were commonly conceived as illiberal, separated from the mainstream, anti-traditional and institutionally dominant.

# Conclusion

The examination of right-wing anti-elitism in this thesis through two distinct periods spanning the majority of the 1970s and 1980s brings us to a new and more nuanced picture of both the development and significance of this discourse in the Australian political context. Anti-elitist discourse formed initially as part of a conservative cultural critique of the tertiary educated cultural left. In the 1970s, cultural conservatives writing in *Quadrant* created an understanding of the intellectual left defined primarily by the attitudes it held, and the perceived position of cultural dominance from which it spread these ideas. Spawned from the campus radicalism of the 1960s and the 1970s, the cultural left was conceived by *Quadrant's* cultural conservatives as a cognitive elite, opposed to the values of the mainstream.

As the 1980s progressed, anti-elitist discourse spread. Neo-liberal activists in the growing think tanks of the IPA and CIS, who had previously avoided such attacks, began to join in on the assault on the cultural left. These neo-liberals would also adapt anti-elitist discourse in their efforts to popularise neo-liberal policies, using the elites of the left as a target in their assaults on the welfare state. In both debates – in *Quadrant*, and from the activists of the IPA and the CIS – the left-wing elite, whether conceived as cognitive or economic, was commonly defined by its institutional dominance, its illiberalism and its hostility to the traditions, values and aspirations of the Australian mainstream.

As a discourse concerned at its base with cultural conflict, right-wing anti-elitism entailed a specific critique of power. This thesis has demonstrated that regardless of the debates in which it was employed, the elite and elitist left was defined by the cultural attitudes it was purported to hold, and the authoritarian manner in which it supposedly enforced these ideas. The power wielded by the tertiary educated left was the power of intellectuals. Right-wing writers constructed an image of the elites of the left as a product of the counter-culture, opposed to the traditional values of the mainstream. In turn these writers argued that the intellectual left pursued this opposition through institutions for shaping mass culture. Even when positioned within debates over issues such as welfare, the primary way in which left-wing elites were perceived to wield their power was through their supposed dominance over mass culture.

Right-wing writers' analysis of the intellectual power of their opponents in the left cultural elite further entailed the construction of an image of the conservative Australian mainstream. While the left was perceived as the culturally dominant force, the Australian majority community with which right-wing intellectuals implicitly associated themselves was constructed as its polar opposite. For writers in *Quadrant*, the IPA and the CIS, the Australian mainstream was commonly defined by the virtues of bourgeois individualism. While writers such as Robert Manne located the bourgeois individualist tradition within Australia's British heritage, and others located it with various other Australian cultural inheritances, such as Les Murray's vernacular cultures, such a tradition was positioned as the opposite of the power and preferences of the left-wing cognitive elite. Where the intellectual left was culturally dominant, the Australian

mainstream was inarticulate; where the left was collectivist, the mainstream valued private material accumulation; where the left sought cultural destruction, the mainstream sought to hold onto what was familiar. In defining the Australian mainstream in such oppositional terms, even the radical reformists in groups such as the IPA could see their own political preferences reflected in an image of 'the people'.

The development of anti-elitist discourse throughout the 1970s and 1980s rested on the important role of right-wing journals and think tanks in shaping ideas. *Quadrant* proved to be a key site for the germination of articulated discontent against the intellectual left. Whether conservatives' feelings of isolation from the intellectual mainstream were justified or not, the pages of *Quadrant* provided a space for the development of a conservative intellectual community which saw itself as opposed to the stultifying orthodoxy of the campus left.

From its foundation through to the period under analysis in this thesis, *Quadrant's* commitment to the cultural fight against communism provided the basis for intellectual exchange amongst key writers of the right. For anti-communist conservatives such as James McAuley and H.W. Arndt, the magazine provided a forum for the confident articulation of both objections to the attitudes and methods of the intellectual left and the praise of the conservative Australian mainstream. Through *Quadrant's* links with the CCF, this cultural critique in turn came to be complemented by the publication of neo-conservative articles, particularly those of Irving Kristol, which developed ideas of the 'new class'. In adapting to the ideas that came through these CCF links, the conservative writers in *Quadrant* were further able to more clearly imagine the

adversarial left as a group defined by both its separation from the mainstream and its intellectual power.

After gradually growing throughout the second half the 1970s, the rapid expansion of neo-liberal think tanks in the 1980s provided greater space for the development of conceptions of the left elites. The entry of both the CIS and the IPA into public debates over culture increased the overall prevalence of the intellectual articulation of cultural anti-elitist discourse. Such an expansion in the use of anti-elitist analysis of the cultural left in turn fed back into *Quadrant*, as in the debate over the Bicentenary, highlighting just how effectively the discourse could be in countering the power of the cultural left. The adoption of anti-elitist discourse by these organisations also entailed its adaptation into economic debates, particularly those over welfare. While public choice theory influenced somewhat the language of neo-liberals in these think tanks, existing understandings of the illiberalism and separation from the mainstream of the cultural left for the most part informed the neo-liberals' offensive on the economic elites of the left.

Understanding how anti-elitist discourse was constructed in the elite debate that occurred in the journals and think tanks of the right in this period can provide the basis for greater understanding of how the discourse works in the twenty-first century. As I have previously stated, the existing literature on right-wing anti-elitist discourse has established that it only appeared in the mainstream media as a populist discourse by the

end of the 1980s and early 1990s.<sup>1</sup> As I have shown in this thesis, *Quadrant* and think tanks such as the IPA and CIS were key sites for the articulation of anti-elitist discourse. However, other writers have pointed out that these organisations have served a far more significant role than as mere debating societies. As Alex Carey has argued, the journals and think tanks of the Australian right have performed as instruments for ‘treetops propaganda’. Having developed ideas amongst themselves through dialogue with each other such ‘treetops’ organisations have in turn aggressively spread those ideas to ‘opinion leaders’ in the media, the academy, schools, politics and business.<sup>2</sup> By understanding how anti-elitist discourse took its shape amongst intellectuals before its populist phase, we can better understand the assumptions and logic behind this discourse in its use today. The apparent contradiction in sources like the Michael Duffy article discussed in this thesis’ introduction – of one kind of ‘elite’ criticising another – can thus be superseded in favour of a more complex understanding of how the Australian right has historically perceived the attitudes and sources of strength of the left.

Rather than uncovering new and startling facts, the value of this thesis lies in The value of this thesis therefore lies in shifting the emphasis of and adding detail to the historical narrative of the development of right-wing anti-elitist discourse. In doing so, this thesis contributes to a deeper understanding of the historical roots of anti-elitist discourse. Such an understanding can in turn contribute both to further historical study and more present-minded analysis. In shifting the emphasis of the historical narrative of

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<sup>1</sup> Dymond, ‘A Political and Intellectual History’, pp.17-25.

<sup>2</sup> Carey, Alex, *Taking the Risk out of Democracy: Corporate Propaganda versus Freedom and Liberty* (Urbana & Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1997), pp.90-91.

right-wing anti-elitist discourse away from concepts like the 'new class' to a focus on a broader right-wing cultural critique of the left this thesis has attempted to fulfil two concurrent objectives.

First, this thesis has sought to unpack and historicise the ideological influences on anti-elitist discourse. While Dymond's assertion that new class discourse was a fundamental building block of anti-elitist discourse is definitely accurate, cultural debates and cultural objections to the radical left drew on more than one source. Rather than locating anti-elitism within the ideas of a monolithic 'new right', this thesis has shown two stages of development of anti-elitist discourse: the formulation of an anti-intellectual critique in *Quadrant* by cultural conservatives, augmented by neo-conservative critiques of the new class; and the further adaptation of this cultural critique by the neo-liberal movement both in cultural debates and in critiques of the welfare state.

Secondly, this thesis illustrates that anti-elitist discourse is not and has never been concerned with the adoption of a single imported or pre-packaged idea. Nor has it been about the simple (re)articulation of insulting labels designed to denigrate political opposition. Rather, anti-elitist discourse draws from a far more detailed understanding of the wider political debate. Right-wing anti-elitist discourse emerged in a debate over cultural values and the power to influence the culture of wider society. In examining anti-elitist discourse, we can gain an understanding of how the writers of the right conceived of both the attitudes and power of their opponents, as well as how they conceived their own political relationship with the wider 'mainstream' society.

Despite the limited scope of this thesis, I believe it creates opportunities for further exploration of right-wing anti-elitist discourse. I have restricted my analysis to elite intellectual debate in a small number of sources between 1972 and 1988. The end of the Cold War and the subsequent realigning of intellectuals forces of the Australian right; the election and continued dominance of the Howard Coalition Government; and the rise of Pauline Hanson and One Nation are all areas that are open for to be examined for continuities with the intellectual anti-elitist discourse explored in this thesis. Similarly, the spread of anti-elitist discourse out of elite debate into the popular media – and populist politics – after the period under analysis here would provide further opportunities for analyses of discursive shifts and continuities. In spite of its inherent limitations, it is my hope that this thesis can lay the foundations for a more nuanced understanding of how right-wing anti-elitist discourse works.

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