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# The Role of “Economic Education” in Achieving Capitalist Hegemony

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## **The Role of 'Economic Education' in Achieving Capitalist Hegemony<sup>1</sup>**

Sharon Beder

Free enterprise has become the prevailing idea of our times, an idea without serious rival although not without critics. During the 20th Century business coalitions conducted two major propaganda campaigns to promote free enterprise using the media, and every other communications venue available including school education.

The first campaign occurred after the second world war when American business interests felt threatened by government intervention and controls on the one hand, and union activity on the other. They responded with a massive 'economic education' program, aimed at the public, school students and employees, which taught the fundamentals of free enterprise economics. Business values, such as the rewards of hard work and enterprise and the benefits of capitalism were equated with patriotism and American values.

A similar media and school-based campaign was undertaken when capitalism came under attack during the late 1960s and early 1970s when a proliferation of public interest groups challenged the authority of business and sought government controls over business activities. This time the campaign spread to Australia and other nations.

Antonio Gramsci used the term 'hegemony' to describe the phenomenon by which the majority of people accept the values and political axioms that ensure their own subordination to the ruling elite. Elites reinforce this hegemony through social conditioning, aided by leading social institutions, as well as by

rejecting and marginalising those who propose radical change. They promote the virtues of the existing system and denigrate alternatives as unworkable, disastrous, undesirable.

Nowhere has more effort been put into creating a capitalist free market hegemony than in the US, where advocates of free markets have sought to identify every major institution with free enterprise. The free market “remains the sacred cow of American politics and has become identified with America’s claim to be a model for a universal civilization.”<sup>ii</sup> However this hegemony is not stable and requires constant reinforcement. The proliferation of corporate propaganda during the 20<sup>th</sup> Century shows that ideology has played a vital role in supporting and legitimising capitalism.

The capitalist system has undergone several periods during which its legitimacy has been questioned. Business people have responded each time with propaganda and public relations efforts to regain their legitimacy. This paper focuses on two of those periods: following the second world war when government controls, economic planning, and the public provision of welfare protection had been shown to be effective; and during the late 1960s and early 1970s when the counter-culture movement brought with it a proliferation of public interest groups, including environmental and consumer groups, that challenged the authority of business and sought government controls over business activities.

## **COUNTERING GOVERNMENT REGULATION AND THE UNIONS**

In the immediate post war period, key business organisations in the US were concerned about government intervention and controls on the one hand, and

union activity on the other. Proposals for further government intervention included price controls, a rising minimum wage, expanded unemployment insurance and tax reforms. Unions were active and in some cases demanding not just improved pay and conditions, income security and full employment through government spending, but also a say in corporate decisions in areas such as pricing and investment.

Polls generally confirmed business fears that the public did not believe in the free enterprise system as wholeheartedly as business would wish. Although most people were in favour of private ownership and thought well of large corporations, a majority also thought that most businessmen did not have the good of the nation in mind when they made their decisions and therefore government oversight was necessary. Many believed that businesses made huge profits and, business leaders felt, few understood the relationship between profits and investment.

Business sought to deal with these threats by selling free enterprise on the basis that “if you control public opinion you have the government in your hand and labor behind the eight ball.”<sup>iii</sup> Public relations consultants, eager for business, promoted the need for their services. Large amounts of money were spent on lobbying, institutional advertising, philanthropy, research sponsorship and other public relations activities. But the core of their efforts was ‘economic education’, that is, the selling of free enterprise.

In her history of this period, Elizabeth Fones-Wolf, explains how business groups countered the perceived trend towards socialism:

The business community... set out to build an agreement around an alternative agenda. In doing so, it sought not only to recast the political economy of post-war America but also to reshape the ideas, images, and attitudes through which Americans understood their world. Employers wanted support for the belief that economic decisions should be made in corporate boardrooms, not in legislative chambers.<sup>iv</sup>

Corporations, and the PR people hired by them, identified business interests with national interest and “the traditional American free-enterprise system with social harmony, freedom, democracy, the family, the church, and patriotism” whilst they identified “all government regulation of the affairs of business, and all liberals who supported such ‘interference’, with communism and subversion.”<sup>v</sup>

Henry Link, head of the polling company Psychological Corporation, argued at the time that what was needed to restore the legitimacy of business and prevent the interference of government was “a transfer in emphasis from free enterprise to the freedom of all individuals under free enterprise; from capitalism to the much broader concept: Americanism.”<sup>vi</sup>

What followed was “the most intensive ‘sales’ campaign in the history of the industry” according to Daniel Bell, then editor of *Fortune* magazine. What was being sold was free market dogma, and the full weight of business resources were poured into it: “The apparatus itself is prodigious: 1,600 business periodicals, 577 commercial and financial digests, 2,500 advertising agencies, 500 public relations counsellors, 4,000 corporate public relations departments and more than 6,500 ‘house organs’ with a combined circulation of more than 70 million.”<sup>vii</sup>

## THE AD COUNCIL CAMPAIGN

In 1947 the Ad Council launched a nationwide public ‘education’ campaign to sell the free enterprise system to the American people. It received “unprecedented amounts of money” from business toward the \$100 million economic education campaign “to ‘sell’ the American economic system” to the public, including large donations from General Foods, General Electric, General Motors, IBM, Johnson and Johnson, Procter and Gamble, Goodrich, and Republic Steel.<sup>viii</sup>

In this campaign free market was described as “the most democratic institution ever devised by man—whereby all the people decide every day what goods and services are to be produced and in what quantities, making their decisions by establishing the prices they are willing to pay”. Competition was depicted as constantly forcing “the seller to keep improving the goods and services he offers”.<sup>ix</sup>

Ironically the individualist message of competition and self interest was sold through a campaign that sought to promote industrial harmony and the idea that we should all cooperate and work together to protect the system and achieve the prosperity it promised. The campaign argued that increased production could be achieved through mechanisation, better efficiency and the cooperation of workers and management.

In the first two years of the Ad Council campaign, 600 pages of ads were published at no cost, newspapers printed 13 million of lines of advertising for free, 8000 billboards were erected, and radio messages were broadcast into “almost every home in America”. The advertisements offered a free pamphlet

“The Miracle of America” and 1.5 million copies of this were distributed by 1950. Many more had been reprinted in magazines and company publications.<sup>x</sup> By the end of 1949, the Advertising Council’s campaign had blanketed the country with over 500 advertisements in national magazines, newspaper supplements and business publications, 8,000 newspaper advertisements, 6,000 outdoor posters and messages carried by almost all the network radio programs resulting in more than 2 billion “listener impressions”.<sup>xi</sup>

The campaign was based on the assumption that if Americans were taught to think correctly about the free enterprise system then they would approve of business activities and not call for government regulation of them. Organisations such as the Opinion Research Corporation (ORC) did studies to prove that Americans were ignorant of economics and the fundamentals of the American economic system and needed economic ‘education’. However these studies were essentially surveys of how strongly business values were held in the community as can be seen in the sample of questions below. The ‘correct’ answers are shown by an X:<sup>xii</sup>

On the whole, workers make more money today than they did thirty years ago.

( ) But they are worse off because prices have gone up

( ) They are a little better off, but not much

( ) They are about 25% better off

( X ) They are about 75% better off

Money invested in new machinery and equipment has increased output. The workers have got some of the increase but the larger share has gone to the owners.

I agree

I disagree

The wealth of this county is becoming more and more concentrated in the hands of the wealthiest 10% of the families

True

False

Consumers don't have much influence on prices. Companies set the price and the customer has to pay it.

I agree

I disagree

Clearly such questions merely tested the degree to which high school students' opinions coincided with those of business people and conservative ideologues. Many students erroneously thought that owners got too much profit and gained most from new machinery. Worst of all, from a business point of view, over half of the students agreed with the Marxist statement: "The fairest economic system is one that 'takes from each according to his ability' and gives to each 'according to his needs'." This was even though most teachers disagreed with the statement. The failure of students "to see through this Marxist doctrine"



was taken to be evidence of “how little high school Seniors comprehend the fundamentals of our system.”<sup>xiii</sup>

It was economic ignorance, ORC claimed, that led to an anti-business bias. Thus, corrective education and propaganda was necessary and was aimed at schools, universities, company employees and also the public in general. The ORC also argued that corrective education and propaganda was necessary to undermine the faith of the community in government and regulation:

The stress our high schools place on American history and government leads teenagers to believe that a government directed economy, since it operates for the benefit of all, will best assure social and economic justice....

Young people’s support for enlarging the role of government in our lives is not likely to change without economics instruction.<sup>xiv</sup>

The ORC argued that “ignorance and lack of understanding of how the business system works go hand in hand with a willingness to vote for measures that undermine the system.” Clearly it was best to correct such ignorance at school. School children, it found, were more likely to view regulation of business and government control of prices favourably but this could be corrected with simple ‘education’.<sup>xv</sup>

## **SCHOOL ECONOMICS EDUCATION**

Businesses became very active in promoting free enterprise values in schools. The use of school education to educate children to appreciate the free

enterprise system was carefully thought out and a conscious strategy to win people over at an early and impressionable age.

A number of individual corporations developed educational materials to this end. For example, Coca-Cola prepared and distributed eight units of curriculum material on “Our America” to some 30 million primary school children. International Harvester and the American Petroleum Institute sponsored educational materials on the development of the US economy produced by an advertising agency and distributed them for free. General Mills decided that even primary school students were not too young to be taught free market economics and it sponsored materials such as silk-screen panels telling the story of marketing bread; film strips; and a comic book on “Freedom of Choice”.<sup>xvi</sup>

Other companies pumping materials into schools—texts, filmstrips, teaching kits, movies—included U.S. Steel, General Electric, General Motors, American Cyanamid, Standard Oil and many others. In fact one in five corporations did so. In 1954 corporations were supplying about \$50 million worth of free materials to schools compared with an annual expenditure on regular textbooks in schools of \$100 million.<sup>xvii</sup>

Individual corporations were not the only ones providing free market ‘educational’ materials for schools. There were also:<sup>xviii</sup>

1. Business, industry and trade associations of industry who sought to show the role of industry and its products in the economic system. Examples included the American Bankers Association, the American Iron & Steel Institute, the US Chamber of Commerce, the New York Stock Exchange, National Association of Manufacturers (NAM), the American Petroleum

Institute and the Automobile Manufacturers which supplied materials to elementary and/or secondary schools.

2. Organisations advancing a particular economic philosophy such as The American Economic Foundation, Americans for the Competitive Enterprise System, Freedoms Foundation and the National Education Program.
3. Organisations seeking to sell educational materials for a profit such as the Industrial Relations Center.
4. Organisations set up for the purpose of changing people's understanding of economics such as the Joint Council on Economic Education and the Industrial Information Institute.
5. Think tanks and service organisations which concentrate on secondary schools and colleges such as the American Enterprise Institute, the Center for Information on American and the National Foundation for Consumer Credit.

These organisations produced teaching aids and also teaching units consisting of printed materials, films, record sets, text books, activity books, teachers guides, wall charts, and tests. They also provided speakers, tours, awards programs, and career conferences and programs for secondary school students and symposia, seminars, workshops and panel discussions for college students.

A 1951 study found that 89% of teachers surveyed used industry-sponsored materials in their classes. Another, a few years later, found that 77% of all films shown in schools surveyed were donated sponsored films.<sup>xix</sup> The ORC found that same year that three quarter of social studies teachers reported receiving

teaching aids from private corporations on the way business systems operate. Some described the material as “one-sided, biased, smacks of propaganda, never admits any faults in the system.” However, most teachers tended to have high regard for the capitalist, free enterprise system and social studies teachers were particularly open to receiving and using the corporate material.<sup>xx</sup>

By the end of the 1950s the business point of view had become the accepted truth in many schools and students were, in the words of economics professor Daniel Fusfeld, “captives of the ideology of the right, ... indoctrinated” with the idea that an economy which was “free, competitive and individualistic” had to be maintained.<sup>xxi</sup>

## **EMPLOYEE ECONOMICS EDUCATION**

Whilst many corporations attempted to influence school education, many more directed ‘educational’ efforts at their employees, who were captive audiences. Ninety five percent of large companies surveyed in 1947 approved of the idea of employee education and in the following years many large corporations including Johnson & Johnson, IBM, Westinghouse, US Steel and DuPont developed educational programs for workers or supervisors. Nine million employees were put through ‘evangelical’ anti-union, anti-government courses of ‘economic education’ within a three year period.<sup>xxii</sup>

As with the general public it was assumed that undesirable worker attitudes towards business were related to their poor grasp of economic ‘principles’, in particular the following six economic principles:

1. Government control over production destroys free enterprise;
2. A man's real job security depends on how good his company is in meeting competition;
3. Highest pay should go to those who produce most;
4. The consumer, rather than the company, sets the price;
5. Labor saving machinery makes jobs;
6. Stockholder and employee interests are allied.<sup>xxiii</sup>

It was concluded from surveys that those who are ignorant of these economic principles were more likely to be dissatisfied at work and more likely to embrace "collectivist" proposals. They were also more likely to favour price controls, limits on profits, limits on salaries, government ownership and stronger unions than those who were 'well-informed'. Company-based economic courses were therefore run to better inform workers and foremen so that they would have better attitudes towards business as well as more interest in company problems and working to solve them, "increased productivity; improved worker morale, and better citizenship". The subjects most frequently covered in employee economic education courses were justifications for profits; the ideology of competition and how it ensures "the consumer is boss"; and the 'proper' and therefore limited role of government.<sup>xxiv</sup>

A 1954 American Management Association (AMA) report found that employee education was carried out in almost all American industrial companies. It noted that some companies used the terms "propaganda" and "economic

education” interchangeably and many were open about their wanting “to influence our people to think ‘right’” and wanting “to change their thinking”. Others were more circumspect, saying only that they wanted to present the pertinent “facts” so that employees could draw their own conclusions.<sup>xxv</sup>

An example of these employee education programmes was that offered by Du Pont entitled “How Our Business System Operates” (HOBSO). It involved three 90 minute discussion sessions with groups of 20 employees on company time. The course taught ideology rather than economics or company operations and emphasised the achievements of free enterprise whilst emphasising the threat of socialism. It stressed the importance of profits and competition and economic freedom and attacked government controls. NAM adopted HOBSO and distributed it to other companies. It trained company personnel to use it and be discussion leaders. By the middle of the 1950s more than 500 firms had participated in training sessions on HOBSO and its successor HOBSO II.<sup>xxvi</sup>

It was estimated that economic education programs and Ad Council advertising “reached, to a greater or lesser extent, about 70 per cent of the American population”.<sup>xxvii</sup> This ‘economic education’ campaign largely succeeded in turning most Americans into free-market believers, suspicious that government interventions eroded individual freedom and invited socialism into their midst. By 1955 studies found that the community was much more supportive of industry. A majority of those surveyed agreed that the interest of employers and workers were the same and the vast majority of Americans said they approved of large corporations. They were now more concerned about Big Labour and Big Government than Big Business.

The earlier post-war business campaigns in the US were scaled down after President Eisenhower, a friend of business, was elected in 1952. However, this was not the last of the campaigns to assert business values and in the 1970s corporations again renewed their campaign to promote business values and policy goals.

## **RESPONDING TO THE COUNTER-CULTURE MOVEMENT**

During the 1970s when confidence in free enterprise declined again corporations became politically active, getting together to support a conservative anti-regulatory agenda and financing a vast public relations effort aimed at regaining public trust in corporate responsibility and freedom from government regulation. The Ad Council launched another major campaign to promote free enterprise in 1976. It was supported by so many major corporations that the Council boasted the list of supporters read like a “who’s who in American business”. It was also supported by the US Department of Commerce.<sup>xxviii</sup>

The continuous campaign in favour of free enterprise has been described as “the most elaborate and costly public-relations project in American history.”<sup>xxix</sup> The multimillion dollar campaign included media advertisements, dedicated newsletters, films, teaching materials and training kits, booklets, point of sale displays, messages on envelopes, and flyers included with bank statements, utility bills and insurance premium notices. The media contributed \$40 million of free time and space to the campaign in the first two years.<sup>xxx</sup>

The unstated premise of the campaign, as before, was that if people were educated to view the free enterprise system as business people saw it they would

appreciate and defend it rather than criticise it. In the lead up to the campaign, Compton Advertising undertook surveys of public attitudes to the economic system. The table below shows some of the questions that were asked with the 'correct' answers indicated by a tick.

	Agree	Disagree	Don't Know
Business alone decides what will be produced	38.6%	59.8% ✓	1.6%
The primary role of business is to provide goods and services the country needs	77.9% ✓	21.5%	0.6%
In general, when business profits are up, times are good and life is better for more people	81.1% ✓	18.3%	0.6%
Overall, the American economic system offers more freedom and opportunity to better oneself than other economic systems	91.6% ✓	7.3%	1.1%

\* "signifies correct response"

Source: Compton Advertising, 'Study on Advertising Awareness and Understanding of the American System: Benchmark, Phase I.' Compton Advertising, June 1976.

Although the Compton survey found most people were in agreement with business values indicating that the earlier employee and school campaigns had been successful, the Ad Council believed that these positive attitudes needed to



be more widespread and harnessed to ensure that people understood that protection of the economic system meant leaving it unregulated and unchanged.

The campaign juxtaposed personal, political and economic freedom, arguing that constraints on economic freedom were tantamount to reducing personal and political freedom and that those who sought to “intervene excessively in the play of market forces,” however well intentioned they might be, posed a major threat to those freedoms. Criticism of the economic system amounted to subversion of the political system.<sup>xxxix</sup>

The campaign sought to get maximum distribution of a booklet on *America's Economic System... and your part in it*. The booklet was in colour and illustrated with *Peanuts* cartoons. It described the economic system in simple, idealised terms. It promoted the idea that everyone not only had a stake in the economic system but also had a say in it. It argued that everyone helps to make decisions in the system—governments, producers and especially consumers: “the key role that really makes everything work is played by you, in your role as consumer.” Ordinary people also play a role as producers—“Workers are producers”—and as investors—“if you have a savings account, own life insurance, or are in a pension fund, you are helping to generate funds for investment purposes.”<sup>xxxix</sup>

The booklet emphasised the importance of hard work and increasing productivity “if we are to maintain competitiveness in selling goods and services both at home and abroad”. It reinforced the need for consumers to spend their money buying goods to ensure the security of their jobs: “Remember when we buy less than our economy is producing, eventually production goes down and unemployment increases.” Naturally, it also defended the role of advertising:

“Those who supply the best goods and services at the best prices generally will be the most successful. And it is through advertising that producers inform buyers about their goods and services....”<sup>xxxiii</sup>

The booklet was careful to downplay the amount of profits made by corporations. It did this by using averages of all businesses and arguing that the profits made by corporations were small compared to the aggregate income of all individuals. It emphasised that the economic system was responsible for the high standard of living in the US and that personal freedom was intimately connected with economic freedom.

The Ad Council distributed millions of copies of these booklets to schools, workplaces and communities – some 13 million by 1979.<sup>xxxiv</sup> According to the Council, advertisements for the booklets were sent to every media outlet and every magazine in the country. It was advertised free:

- on over 400 television stations;
- on over 1000 radio stations;
- in over 3000 daily and weekly newspapers;
- in over 400 business and consumer magazines;
- on thousands of counter cards in libraries, banks and stores;
- on over 110,000 transit cards in subways and other transport venues (over \$25 million of measurable free time and space).<sup>xxxv</sup>

The booklet was reproduced in full in over 100 newspapers and magazines. Over 1,800 companies, 1,300 schools and 500 organisations ordered bulk copies for employees, students, members.<sup>xxxvi</sup>

A second stage of the campaign launched in 1977 involved a huge advertising campaign centred around the idea of an Economics Quotient (EQ) — an obvious reference to IQ. Advertisements asked “How high is your EQ?” or “Do your kids have a higher E.Q. than you?” and included quiz questions and answers so people could test themselves. The idea was to make people feel ignorant so that they would write away for the booklet, whilst at the same time making an ideological point. The “basic economic questions” in the advertisements included:

True or False.

In 1975, the investment in equipment and facilities averaged almost \$41,000 for each production worker in American industry.

[Answer: true]

True or False.

If you have a savings account, own stock, bonds or life insurance, or are in a pension fund, you are an investor in the U.S. economy. [Answer: true]

The Ad Council produced two more booklets that year, one on employment and one on inflation and these were also subject to mass distribution. Also a picture book version of the original booklet was prepared for “low-level readers” and children.<sup>xxxvii</sup>

The Council’s ‘economic education’ campaign was supplemented by the efforts of many individual corporations, trade associations and chambers of

commerce. Some companies again offered their own employees economic 'education'. Teacher education was also targeted by individual corporations because of the influence of teachers on millions of children.

Corporate sponsored classroom materials were also produced for the purpose of selling the free enterprise system to school children. Four million packages of *Industry and the American Economy* (an 11 booklet package), were distributed to students and teachers all over the nation. Corporate money also financed a television show on economics featuring a leading neoliberal economist, Milton Friedman, and another "In Search of the Real America" featuring a fellow from the conservative think tank, the American Enterprise Institute.<sup>xxxviii</sup>

Various oil companies got involved. Phillips Petroleum Company supported the production of a series of five films entitled "American enterprise" with an accompanying teachers guide. It cost \$800,000 and reached over 8 million students. Amoco Oil Company also produced a 26 minute film and teachers guide to explain how the free enterprise system works. The Exxon Company got together with Walt Disney Educational Media Company to produce a 22 minute film for high school students about two children that go into business.<sup>xxxix</sup>

The US Chamber of Commerce produced films, teaching materials and booklets on the economic system and a package entitled "Economics for Young Americans" that included film strips, audio cassettes, lesson plans and text on productivity, profits and the environment. Local chambers of commerce also participated in the campaign. The National Education Program produced "full color animated cartoons"; flannel board presentations; a monthly newsletter; a weekly column for newspapers and trade publications; audio-taped and printed

speeches; a Do-It-Yourself Materials Kit for organising a one-day forum; and a number of films on topics such as “A Look at Capitalism” and “The Spirit of Enterprise”.<sup>xl</sup>

In the late 1970s US business was spending a billion dollars each year on propaganda of various sorts “aimed at persuading the American public that their interests were the same as business’s interests.” The result of all this expenditure showed in the polls when the percentage of people who thought that there was too much regulation soared to 60% in 1980 (up from 22 per cent in 1975).<sup>xli</sup>

By 1978 US business had “clearly regained the political initiative” and defeated many of the regulatory measures hard won by public interest activists. By 1986 27 states required some form of economics education in primary and/or secondary schools on the assumption that “popular misconceptions lead to bad policies”.<sup>xlii</sup>

## **AUSTRALIA**

Economic education spread from the US to other English speaking countries during the 1970s and 1980s. In Australia, after the election of the Labor government in 1972, the Australian Chamber of Commerce (ACC) reacted with a nationwide ‘economic education campaign’ to promote free enterprise.

ACC’s Economic Education programme was the “centre piece of our activities in public opinion forming about the role of business in the community, especially amongst the young” and, like the US campaigns, was in response to concern “at the widespread lack of understanding of economic facts of life by the

general public”. ACC ran a series of essay competitions for students; surveyed and evaluated existing economics and commerce courses in Australian schools; and recommended changes to the Departments of Education in each state to ensure that students would learn the ‘correct’ view of how private enterprise works.<sup>xliii</sup>

ACC produced some 15 videos and films “for instructional use in schools” in cooperation with the Productivity Promotion Council of Australia, the Institute of Public Affairs (a conservative think tank), the Sydney Stock Exchange and “two of Australia’s major companies”. Its first series of videos, entitled “Business in the Community”, was on the contribution of companies and specific industries to the wellbeing of Australian society with an emphasis on the role of adequate profit in maintaining employment and economic growth. The ACC wanted to “counter the view that the only concern of business is profits”.<sup>xliv</sup>

The Departments of Education in each state agreed to use ACC materials and to include them in Department Resource Centres. The ACC also claimed “good relations with Teachers’ Associations throughout Australia”. It encouraged and facilitated city-based chambers of commerce to undertake their own educational programs. The ACC also produced a “Guide to Employee Economic Information Programmes” for employers to undertake economic education with their employees and distributed it to some 450 companies.<sup>xlv</sup>

Enterprise Australia (EA) was set up in 1976, as an offshoot of the Australian Free Enterprise Association (AFEA), which was established in response to perceived threats to free enterprise. AFEA’s initial funding came from CIG, Esso, Kodak, Ford Motors, and IBM. Keavney, CEO of EA, saw two

main threats to free enterprise in Australia. One was the encroachment of government into “areas best left to the productive private sector” and the other “the widespread public misconceptions” about business such as the size of profits and who benefits from them.<sup>xlvi</sup>

EA sought to show that private enterprise contributed to “Australia’s way of life” and standard of living and to “emphasise the dangers to our society of unnecessary regulations”. This was the message it spread to educational institutions, the media, small business and employees. EA’s schools and colleges programmes were “developed within schools systems in official association with Departments of Education” in each state. These included:<sup>xlvii</sup>

- a core text book *The World of Business in Australia* (an adaptation of a Canadian text) with teachers guide, student’s workbook and audio-visual material;
- topic books for primary schools;
- a 22 module audio-visual course on economic concepts for secondary schools (“produced in cooperation with NSW Department of Education”);
- work experience programmes for teachers and for students; conferences for secondary school students; workshops for teachers;
- a magazine for teachers;
- a clearinghouse of industry-provided ‘educational’ materials for schools;
- and a programme in which business executives spent one or two weeks in schools.

EA also produced fifteen videos and films with titles such as *Profits, Advertising* and *The Market Economy*.<sup>xlvi</sup>

Various teachers unions attacked EA materials as propaganda. Nevertheless the educational authorities seemed to welcome this material into schools, and EA was careful to get the endorsement of selected teachers, public servants, academics and politicians of both major parties.<sup>xlix</sup> After the Labour government was elected in 1983 Enterprise Australia continued to have government support, and prime minister Bob Hawke's public endorsement.

Other organizations that actively sponsored economic education in Australia included the Australian Bankers Association, the Australian Mining Industry Council, the Australian Industries Development Association (later merged with the Business Roundtable to form the Business Council of Australia), the American Chamber of Commerce in Australia, and conservative think tanks such as the Centre for Economic Development in Australia (CEDA). They ran conferences and made presentations to teachers, business people and school students.<sup>1</sup>

By 1979 the proportion of people who thought the government should cut taxes rather than spend more on social services had increased to 59 percent compared to 26 percent in 1967. Similarly the percentage of people who thought unions had too much power had increased from 47 to 78.<sup>li</sup> Such a reversal of opinion was unusual and could be accredited to the onslaught of business propaganda.



## CONCLUSION

The campaigns of the 1940s and 1970s prepared the populace for the neoliberal onslaught that was to follow. Economic education has now become mainstream. It is no longer an obvious expression of the campaign to sell free enterprise but rather is disguised as a means to give children and young adults the necessary economic knowledge to live successful lives and understand the world around them. Who could fault such a noble motive?

Nonetheless the groups that are pushing for economic education to be mandatory in schools have an ideological agenda and the economic standards they are promoting have an ideological bias. As J.K. Galbraith points out:

mainstream economics has for some centuries given grace and acceptability to convenient belief—to what the socially and economically favoured most wish or need to have believed. This economics, to repeat, is wholly reputable; it permeates and even dominates professional discussion and writing, the textbooks and classroom instruction.<sup>lii</sup>

To serve this function Galbraith notes that it must have three aspects. Firstly it needs to provide a rationale for minimising government intervention. Secondly it needs to justify “untrammelled, uninhibited pursuit and possession of wealth” in terms of the common good. Thirdly it needs to explain poverty and unemployment in terms of the individual faults of those who find themselves in that situation.<sup>liii</sup> Economic education sought to provide all three.

Clearly 'economic education', in schools, workplaces and in broader public fora, plays a crucial role in achieving capitalist hegemony.

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- <sup>i</sup> This article draws on a forthcoming book, Sharon Beder, *Free Market Missionaries: The Corporate Manipulation of Community Values* (London: Earthscan, 2006).
- <sup>ii</sup> John Gray, *False Dawn: The Delusions of Global Capitalism* (London: Granta Books, 2002), 3.
- <sup>iii</sup> Robert Lynd quoted in Elizabeth A. Fones-Wolf, 'Beneath Consensus: Business, Labor, and the Post-War Order' (Doctor of Philosophy, University of Massachusetts, 1990)., 39.
- <sup>iv</sup> *Ibid.*, 422.
- <sup>v</sup> Alex Carey, *Taking the Risk out of Democracy*, ed. Andrew Lohrey (Sydney: UNSW Press, 1995), 27.
- <sup>vi</sup> Quoted in Stuart Ewen, *PR! A Social History of Spin* (New York: Basic Books, 1996), 360.
- <sup>vii</sup> Quoted in Carey, *Taking the Risk out of Democracy*, 30.
- <sup>viii</sup> Robert Griffith, 'The Selling of America: The Advertising Council and American Politics, 1942-1960', *Business History Review*, Autumn 1983, 401.
- <sup>ix</sup> Advertising Council quoted in C. C. Carr, 'Translating the American Economic System', *PR Journal* 5, no. 6 (1949), 4.
- <sup>x</sup> Griffith, 'The Selling of America', , 402.
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