

# The New Right is New

**The New Right has abandoned the florid moralism of the old right as espoused by Santamaria in favour of the harsh logic of market economics. Assisted by an increasingly sophisticated public relations machine, the New Right poses an increasing threat to the left by dominating political debate in this country.**

**T**he new right is real. Expensive, glossy publications, research centres, think tanks and the gathering together of more and more opinion makers signify a departure from the Catholic moralist model of B.A. Santamaria into a new pragmatism best represented by Hugh Morgan and his economic rationalist colleagues.

There are many indicators of how this economic rationalisation has superseded the Catholic moralism of the old right. The florid imagery and philosophy of Santamaria still lingers, but its pre-modern tone and its lack of realistic economic directions has tailed the right for some time. Santamaria's vision of the good society remains utopian; based on the purification of a diseased society.

**"The florid imagery and philosophy of Santamaria still lingers, but its pre-modern tone and its lack of realistic economic directions has failed the right for some time."**

In 1983, *The Age* published a series of articles by Santamaria outlining his ideas on the details of this diseased society and his cures for it. His view of the world "is the triumph of a particular philosophy and that is nihilism, a fundamental disbelief in any finalities at all, a continuing cultural revolution" against authority. (*The Age*, 14 November, 1983) In this catechism, he compares the 1980s with pre-Nazi Berlin. For him, this is the age of the breakdown of much that he values of Christianity, middle class values and the capitalist economic order with domination by inflation, unemployment, sexual perversion and delinquency. For him, the 1980s have been further complicated by law reforms like the Family Law Act. He views the legal recognition of *de facto* relationships with horror; making what "Roman law recognised as concubines as the legal equal of marriage". He views the 50 percent of married women in the workforce as victims, "helpless before militant feminist and homosexual cultures".

**H**is specific targets for reconstruction are the family, the schools, religion; a reorientation to a belief in authority and order. For the family to be reformed there must be, first, an acceptance of the biological differences between men and women. Secondly, there must be recognition of monogamous marriage as the

"indispensable purveyor of all primary, social and educational services for the young, sick, disabled, old", so providing the proper substitute for the ruinous welfare state.

Thirdly, married women (while being supposedly equal) are to find fulfilment in care and caring rather than paid work and the labour force. Fourthly, it may be necessary to provide for women with children out of marriage but "concubinage will be called concubinage".

For the schools to be reformed, Santamaria looks to the reconstitution of authority, excellence, the traditional disciplines, and the abolition of liberal studies, especially sex education. His themes are very clear. Women and the political sophisticates of the Viet Nam generation are substantially to blame for what he understands to be society's problems and a return to tradition is his solution. These visions leave Santamaria a hopeless romantic, elitist and sexist ideologue no longer adequate for the right's more economic prime movers. In their terms, he fails to face up to the problems of the international economic order, Australia's place in it and the fact that his mediaeval moral stance has little chance of popular success.

**"These visions leave Santamaria a hopeless romantic, elitist and sexist ideologue no longer adequate ...."**

## The Reconstructed Right

**T**he New Right seeks to modernise and reconstruct the goals and style reflected by Santamaria and others of his era. Their imagery, their policies and their targets for reform, however, appear more realistic, less moralistic and are centred on the economic and industrial rather than the social and cultural. Their self-professed objectives are to change public opinion, to counter the left, and to shift the focus of debate from what they believe to be a Labor orientation. Specifically, they determine to change the schools, the public sector, trade unions and the arbitration system, regulation of the market, especially the finance sector and defence policy. For all of these, they propose some form of privatisation (more recently called marketisation) and further deregulation. In the case of unions and arbitration, their proclaimed position is deregulation of the labour market, demolition of the commission.

Academic and research organisations have been established or revamped, policies and manifestos



Tricia Caswell

produced. Considerable corporate monies have been invested in the Institute of Public Affairs, with branches in all states, the Sydney Centre for Independent Studies, Monash University Centre for Policy Studies, the Flinders Institute of Labor Studies and the Institute of Public Policy in Perth. In government, they still dominate the Industry Assistance Council, the federal Department of Finance, the Bureau of Agricultural Economics and many others. In the universities and institutes of technology, corporate capital investment in the development of new economic, public and management policy units provides for the rare instances of expansion in education. There has been serious discussion, too, about the establishment of private universities.

New Right journals and publications are beginning to flood the market. *The Institute of Public Affairs Review*, subtitled "Australia's journal of free enterprise opinion", *Reference 2000*, *The Optimist*, *Quadrant* and *The Australian/Israel Review* are but a few of the New Right's ideological papers. Business and management conferences and seminars are also increasing in number and variety. The chief ideologues remain tied to the mining and rich rural interests, the Liberal and National Country parties. Apart from Hugh Morgan of Western Mining, there is John Howard advised by Dr. Gerard Henderson (ex-Santamaria aide), John Stone, Katharine West, Greg Lindsay, Lauchlan Chipman, Claudio Veliz, Leonie Kramer, Frank Knopfelmacher and the like attune themselves to these newer forces in virulent and generalised anti-communism, while others are specialists, like Geoffrey Blainey on immigration and Chipman on education.

Numerous so-called community organisations represent aspects of these New Right forces, especially sexism, racism and chauvinism. Many such groups are long-established and also retain strong links with the old Catholic right, like the anti-feminist, anti-abortion Women's Action Alliance. Other long-standing groups such as National Action, the fanatical

neo-Nazi organisation dedicated to anti-communism and racism, have more oblique links with them. While the corporate captains are happy to encourage racism in regard to Aborigines, for the most part their spokespeople on such matters represent apparently more legitimate views on multiculturalism. In a recent article in the *Institute of Public Affairs Review*, Geoffrey Blainey writes for them on matters of multiculturalism, denigrating the contribution of post World War II immigrants to

**"The self-professed objectives are to change public opinion, to counter the left, and to shift the focus of debate from what they believe to be a Labor orientation."**

Australia, referring to them as "an industry", "the creation of Mr. Grassby in the Whitlam government and of Mr. Fraser in the late 1970s", both of whom he claims used the ethnic lobby for electoral gain.

Still, their racism is overt. In Mr. Hugh Morgan's infamous land rights speech he proclaimed "land rights are paganism and spiritualism", Aboriginal culture a "world of pagans, superstition, fear and darkness". And on South Africa, they are keen for no sanctions, participation by our sportspeople in South Africa, and they point to the violence and horror of other Black African nations as far greater evils than apartheid which, in the end, they would have as a model for the rest of the African continent.

### Redirecting Political Debate

In their bid to change Australia, the New Right has declared its interest in a renaissance of private enterprise economics and thinking based on pre-Keynesian market models. This means the circumnavigation of the state machinery and the longer term rebuilding of their version of the Western, liberal-democratic tradition. The targets mentioned earlier: education, the public sector, trade unions, regulation of the market, especially the finance sector and defence policy, are their immediate concerns; all viewed from the perspective of wealth creation as opposed to wealth distribution. They see the latter as the chief obsession of labour and doomed to undermine both Australia's traditional economy and culture. The specifics of their plan require some explanation.

For the New Right, education must be freed from any trends that dilute its role as a reproducer of traditional capitalist values. This can happen most effectively if the system is competitive and elitist, with support for the development of greater privatisation. Constant attacks on education, especially state education, like *Education Shambles: why our schools are in a mess* (*The Bulletin*, 4 February, 1986), undermine any long-term attempts to make the schools more representative and egalitarian, and promote a return to tight managerial control of curriculum and administration in line with New Right thinking.

For the New Right, the public sector is, at best, a direct servant of corporate interests. It is best, for the 1980s and onward if government is small; if the state turns over its Keynesian welfare role to the market and the family; and if the power of increasingly militant white collar unions is

diminished. A model like this means a decreased tax burden and a market more manipulated by capital.

### Deregulating the Labour Market

**D**eregulation, with aggressive, competitive approaches to industry and finance sectors are favoured as magical answers to Australia's industrial development and balance of payments difficulties. This classical market economics has led, so far, to a belief in further internationalisation of the economy and complete deregulation of the labour market. Unions, the Accord, the Arbitration Commission, are attacked as intolerable constraints on our competitiveness and economic growth. The New Right ideologues would destroy centralised wage-fixing, reduce youth wages, abolish awards, annihilate the unions and further promote corporate management. John Howard says "ultimately, you have to create a situation where there is a decline in union membership" (*Sydney Morning Herald*, 1 March, 1985). John Stone places priority on central wage-fixing: "The most important single requirement for putting Australia to rights today is the abandonment of the centralised wage determination system" (September 1985). The key is the destruction of the unions. Australia has a relatively highly unionised labour force (58 percent). This provides a challenge for deregulation strategists.

The New Right is very forthright about attitudes to organised labour, and their agreement with anti-union legislation (introduced by Bjelke-Petersen in Queensland, Fraser in the federal sphere and, more recently, by the Victorian and federal Labor governments for the deregistration of the BLF). They go much further in their hopes for the abolition of the Arbitration Commission. What must be recognised by the left is that a great deal of deregulation of employment practices has already occurred. In *The Anti-Union Strategies — an attack on living standards*, the ACTU's background paper, a series of anti-union employment practices are listed. These include self-employment, sub-contracting, increased outwork in the clothing and word-processing sectors, promotion of small business, individualised contracts of employment, below award rates and conditions, cash-in-hand payments, promotion of workers to supposedly

**"John Howard says 'ultimately, you have to create a situation where there is a decline in union membership'."**

"managerial" positions to avoid unionisation, greater use of casual and part-time employment and discrimination against active unionists.

The New Right's dreams are closer to reality than many unionists realise. These practices reflect well-established patterns in Thatcher's Britain and Reagan's United States; they are directed at unions and any collective organisation of workers so that living standards and technological change can be controlled solely by capital (*Trade Union Information Kit*, TURC, VTHC, 1985).

### New Right Society

**I**n emphasising these specific objectives, the New Right spends much less of its public voice drawing pictures of



**...RANT defends a free-market economy, a traditionalist morality, and culturally integrated society rich in autonomous institutions."**

its "good society" than does the old right. Nevertheless, they do have a complete view of society. That view is a mixture of the fundamentalism of Santamaria, with the family as essential and the consequent restriction of women to cheap and unpaid labour, and with more modern corporate capitalism pressing for aggressive open marketeering as the basis for economic growth.

In *The Bulletin* of 10 December 1985, Tim Duncan maps out a taxonomy of "Concerns that Divide Us", the orthodoxies of the present and of the "left" as opposed to those being promoted by the New Right. He lists them under (1) The rescue of Australian history, (2) Reasserting traditional social values, (3) The future of mankind (sic). He appears to agree with the New Right that Australian

culture is dominated by a progressive/radical interpretation of Australia as a capitalist nation. Duncan's list asserts that the "Orthodoxy now taught in Australian schools" about the ideal society is of "a sustainable society, living within its means, conserving for future generations and living simply". The facts are very different. Most Australian education institutions teach traditional economics; there is no developed critique of capitalism. Much of the education system has remained untouched by progressive schooling techniques and traditional disciplines have always remained overwhelmingly dominant. The New Right knows full well that some diversification and modernisation of views have occurred in schools and elsewhere, but they do not sincerely believe that the culture has been overtaken by any left hegemony.

**".... the hopelessly unimaginative debates between New Right and conservative Labor spell disaster for the left as a popular force ...."**

What they do believe is that they must continue to claim left, or at least Labor, dominance of Australia as necessary rhetoric to build support for their newly-presented reactionary ideals. Geoffrey Barker suggested somewhat cynically that this ideological component is "so powerful that they have been at least partly adopted by the Labor government" (*The Age*, 5 February 1986).

Nevertheless, the left must take the New Right seriously because it does represent a range of new reactionary forces. While their philosophies are in many ways traditional, neo-conservative ones emerging out of the old right, it is more aggressive, potentially better resourced and much more attuned to international economic demands. We must take them seriously because they are part of these very significant restructures in the international and social economic order. Technological change, the consolidation of transnational corporations, the increased mobility of investment capital, new production techniques and arrangements, changes in market relations between eastern and western blocs and third world countries mean the left in Australia cannot ignore the potential impact of the right's international and domestic policy options.

Not only do the New Rights policies suggest Australia should leave itself totally dependent on international capital and the American alliance, they have played a part in shifting the domestic debates away from any consideration of social and economic alternatives that should be the progressive centrepiece for Labor in government. The New Right's hard core approach to a 21st Century Australia allows the ongoing conservatism of Labor governments. Federally, Labor has embraced the deregulation of the finance sector and the continuing destabilisation of our manufacturing industry in the name of economic realism. It is still tagged radical and the dogbody of the trade union movement in the New Right's rhetoric.

## Redressing the Balance

If the left, the labour movement, together with the social movement of women, environmentalists, nuclear disarmers, gay activists, community groups and Aborigines do not develop realistic social and economic alternatives that address our key concerns of equality, democracy and environmental responsibility, the hopelessly unimaginative debates between the New Right and conservative Labor spell disaster for the left as a popular force for the rest of the century. Trade unions must reorganise themselves to ensure their influence is consolidated for the future, not eroded. As the most institutionalised part of the left, unions must provide the lead for left unity in committing resources to organise for the modernisation and democratisation of industry and the workforce. And they must work constructively with progressive social movements to resource research and organisation on issues outside unions.

While Labor governments are in power, unions must maximise whatever opportunities exist for intervention, education and organisational consolidation. For all its weaknesses, the Accord includes the promise of co-operation between government and unions over matters of social and economic justice. If unions can do more to make those promises real, to support and incorporate less established progressive networks, and maintain independent resources and organisations of workers, the tide of reaction may be turned and a progressive offensive can become a significant part of popular debate about issues presently dominated by the slick forces of the New Right.

---

Tricia Caswell is an industrial officer for the Victorian Trades Hall Council, and a member of the Socialist Left of the ALP.

---

## FURTHER READING

*Australia and the New Right*, Allen and Unwin, Sydney 1982.  
*Conspiracy: The National Civic Council*, Union Printing Co-op, Abbotsford.  
 "New Right, Where it Stands and What it Means, by Duncan T. & McArden, A. in *The Bulletin*, 10 December 1985.  
*Nazis Out of Uniform, The Dangers of the Neo-Nazi Terrorism in Australia*, by D. Freney, D. Freney, Sydney.  
*Institute of Public Affairs Review*, Vol. 39, No. 3, Summer 1985/86.  
*Factions, Friends and Fancies, the Liberals*, P. O'Brien, P. Penguin,

Articles by B.A. Santamaria in *The Age* are:  
 "Santamaria still in the fight", 20 July 1985, Saturday Extra p. 5.  
 "Decline and Fall", 12 November 1983, Saturday Extra, p. 5.  
 "The Cult of Nothingness", 14 November 1983, p. 11.  
 "A Fight Against Anarchy", 15 November 1983, p. 11.  
 Sheehan, P., "The Right Strikes Back", *Weekend Herald*, 16-17 March 1985.  
*The New Right: Who, What, Why*, TNC Workers Research Brief 13, November 1985.  
*Anti-Union Employment Practices*, Transnational Brief 12.