Political Troglodytes and Economic Lunatics?

Advocacy Groups of the Australian Right

Dominic Kelly

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Department of Politics and Philosophy
School of Humanities and Social Sciences
College of Arts, Social Sciences and Commerce

La Trobe University
Victoria, Australia

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Contents

Abstract

In 1986, Australian Prime Minister Bob Hawke famously described members of the H.R. Nicholls Society, a recently formed New Right advocacy group, as "political troglodytes and economic lunatics." This thesis is an examination of that organisation and three associated single-issue advocacy groups of the Australian right: the Samuel Griffith Society, the Bennelong Society and the Lavoisier Group. Respectively, these groups have played significant roles in Australian political debates about industrial relations, the Constitution, Indigenous affairs and climate change.

The thesis begins by outlining the political and institutional environment from which the groups stemmed, stretching back to the emergence of think tanks in the early twentieth century. It traces the evolution of think tanks in the United States, United Kingdom and Australia from their origins as independent public policy research institutes to the highly partisan organisations that came to prominence from the 1970s onwards. Having provided the context, the thesis then discusses each of the four single-issue advocacy groups in great detail, looking at their formation and personnel, aims, methods, policy interventions and current status, before providing a brief summary of each group's political significance.

Following this detailed history, the thesis proceeds to a series of analytical discussions. The first looks at single-issue advocacy groups of the right as a distinctive organisational form. The second examines the pivotal partnership between Western Mining Corporation's Hugh Morgan and Ray Evans. The third and fourth look respectively at the groups' relationships with government and the media. The final section analyses each of the four advocacy groups' position within traditions of Australian conservatism. The thesis concludes by arguing that the marked rightward shift in Australian politics in recent decades cannot be appreciated without an understanding of the world of right-wing activism that these groups inhabited.

Statement of authorship

Except where reference is made in the text of the thesis, this thesis contains no material published elsewhere or extracted in whole or in part from a thesis submitted for the award of any other degree or diploma. No other person's work has been used without due acknowledgement in the main text of the thesis. The thesis has not been submitted for the award of any degree or diploma in any other tertiary institution. Interviews were conducted in accordance with the La Trobe University Human Ethics Committee's guidelines and requirements (project number 12-004).

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Abbreviations

ABC	Australian Broadcasting Corporation
ACF	Australian Conservation Foundation
ACM	Australians for Constitutional Monarchy
ACTU	Australian Council of Trade Unions
AEF	Australian Environment Foundation
AEI	American Enterprise Institute for Public Policy Research
AIGN	Australian Industry Greenhouse Network
AIPP	Australian Institute for Public Policy
ALP	Australian Labor Party
AMIC	Australian Mining Industry Council
ATSIC	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission
BCA	Business Council of Australia
CAI	Confederation of Australian Industry
CEI	Competitive Enterprise Institute
CIS	Centre for Independent Studies
CNI	Council for the National Interest
CPRS	Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme
CSIRO	Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation
ETS	Emissions Trading Scheme
IPA	Institute of Public Affairs
IPCC	Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change
MUA	Maritime Union of Australia
NFF	National Farmers' Federation
SEC	State Electricity Commission of Victoria
UAP	United Australia Party
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNFCCC	United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change
WMC	Western Mining Corporation
WWF	Waterside Workers' Federation

INTRODUCTION

Beginning in the mid 1980s, a new organisational form was born in Australian politics: the single-issue advocacy group of the right. Emerging out of the phenomenon of the 'New Right', the H.R. Nicholls Society (which was formed in 1986 and concerned with industrial relations), the Samuel Griffith Society (formed in 1992, concerned with constitutional issues), the Bennelong Society (formed in 2000, concerned with Indigenous affairs), and the Lavoisier Group (formed in 2000, concerned with climate change), were each established by Western Mining Corporation executives Hugh Morgan and Ray Evans, and various other figures associated with the political right. These organisations did much more than argue for specific policy reforms; they set out to change the way Australians thought.

Unlike the New Right milieu that they emerged from, these advocacy groups have not been subject to deep and sustained analysis, either in scholarly or general literature. When they have been referred to, it is usually in passing or as part of the background of a wider study. Think tanks such as the Institute of Public Affairs and Centre for Independent Studies have been at the forefront of countless studies, especially from the left, and yet the single-issue advocacy groups of the right, with which they shared many ideas and personnel, have been largely ignored. This thesis is the first research-based investigation of these four groups.

When mentioned in previous studies, the advocacy groups formed by Hugh Morgan and Ray Evans have often been treated in conspiratorial terms. Their shared post office boxes and overlapping memberships seemed to indicate that they formed a secret cabal, pulling the strings of government and industry from smoky

board rooms.[1] This exaggerated characterisation is a result of the lack of sustained examination of the groups, and is rejected in this thesis. Right-wing activists made no secret of their vision for Australia, and most of their political advocacy was done out in the open. Their vast archives of conference papers, government submissions and articles are freely available on their respective websites for anyone to peruse.

The groups specialise in four significant domestic policy areas, providing both micro and macro insights into the politics of the past three decades. The H.R. Nicholls Society engages in the ever-present battles between capital and labour, and the broader economic debates in which industrial relations is a central component; the Samuel Griffith Society concerns itself with legal and constitutional issues, and raises questions about the status and nature of Australian political institutions; the Bennelong Society focuses on cultural and racial issues, and the legacy of what some refer to as Australia's original sin: the dispossession of Indigenous peoples; the Lavoisier Group engages in environmental politics and disputes the view of the majority of scientists that climate change is a serious and alarming threat to humanity. Taken altogether, an in-depth study of this quartet of advocacy groups can tell us much about the nature of the Australian right, as well as Australian political culture more broadly.

Despite their limited size and public profile, the four groups have in many ways been remarkably successful in achieving their goals. The H.R. Nicholls Society set out to change the culture of industrial relations in Australia, especially its trade union-friendly system of conciliation and arbitration. Though they have had setbacks and disappointments along the way, its members believe that the pendulum has swung back towards employers in a significant way since the 1980s. "A review of the early HRN papers reads of an Australia that is almost unrecognizable today," said Hugh Morgan in 2010.[2] The Samuel Griffith Society has less to be pleased about, given that its founding purpose was to promote federalism, and centralisation of power in Canberra has continued apace since

[1] See for example Clive Hamilton, *Scorcher: The Dirty Politics of Climate Change*, Melbourne: Black Inc, 2007, pp. 132–44.
[2] Hugh Morgan, 'Remarks at the dinner marking Ray Evans's retirement from the H.R. Nicholls Society,' Melbourne, 7 October 2010, http://archive.hrnicholls.com.au/copeman/copeman2010/morgan-speech.php

1992. It can point to the failed republic referendum in 1999 as a major victory, however.

The Bennelong Society can also point to significant achievements. It rejected the doctrine of self-determination which had become dominant since the 1970s, and argued for a return to the assimilation policies of the mid twentieth century (sometimes rebadged as 'integration'). In John Howard, it could not have asked for a more receptive prime minister, and many of his policies were closely aligned with the views of the Bennelong Society. Likewise, the Lavoisier Group found willing allies in the halls of power. The group set out to prevent—or failing that, delay—any significant action on climate change, and it has been successful in this mission.

The research questions of this thesis are as follows. What sort of organisations are these four single-issue advocacy groups of the right? How should we characterise their political and ideological positions? Have they influenced specific government policies within their particular areas of interest? Have they contributed to a rightward shift in Australian politics over the past few decades?

In detailing their histories, the thesis differentiates the four groups from other institutions of the Australian right, and argues that they represent a distinct organisational form. It explores the similarities and differences among the four groups themselves, and argues that although they draw on elements of the Australian conservative tradition, their ideological position is more accurately described as reactionary conservatism. It demonstrates that the groups have been able to influence the direction of government policies, and argues that they have played a role in a general shift to the right since the 1980s. Through these discussions, the overall significance of single-issue advocacy groups of the right in Australian politics will be demonstrated.

Sources

The main primary sources used in researching this thesis were the conference proceedings and occasional articles and papers of each of the four organisations.

These publications are abundant in number, and provide an accurate picture of the issues and themes that preoccupied the groups over the years, and the views and opinions expressed about these issues. They can be found both in print and online. Where available, printed versions were preferred over online ones, on the assumption that it was in this format that members of the organisations themselves would usually have received and consumed the material upon publication.

The Samuel Griffith Society is the only one of the four groups that continues to publish its proceedings in hard copy, though its publishing schedule has been rather slow in recent years (the most recent proceedings available in either print or online format date back to 2014). The H.R. Nicholls Society printed hard copies of its proceedings up until 1997, after which they were only made available online. However, since switching to a new website in 2013, the online publication of H.R. Nicholls Society conference proceedings has been intermittent and unreliable. Formed at the turn of the century when the internet had taken hold, the Bennelong Society and Lavoisier Group used their websites as the most important outlets for their material. Neither group published their conference proceedings as hard copies, but did print occasional papers for general circulation.

Regular opinion pieces in newspapers and magazines by participants in the groups were also used as primary sources. Of the former, the *Australian*, the *Australian Financial Review*, the *Age* and the *Sydney Morning Herald* were the most common publishers of such articles. These and other newspapers were also useful for contemporary accounts of events relating to the four groups. When right-wing activists sought to expand on their ideas in longer form, space in magazines such as *Quadrant*, the *Bulletin*, the *IPA Review* and *Policy* was often made available. The role of such media is discussed in detail in chapter 7.

This primary material was complemented by interviews with some of the key players involved in the groups, as well as some other figures whose connection was more indirect. Naturally, the two people I was most eager to interview were the two most important figures in the establishment of all four groups: Ray Evans and Hugh Morgan. Evans was sceptical upon receiving my initial interview request, and wanted to know more about my ambitions before agreeing to an interview. “I find it difficult to believe that you can get a PhD thesis from research into the four

groups you have cited," he wrote to me in an email. "Surely there is another agenda here which lies behind your request." After explaining my interest in the groups as an organisational form distinct from the think tanks that had preceded them, and supplying him with a preliminary literature review, he was happy to talk to me.

Unfortunately, my requests for an interview with Hugh Morgan were ignored. After a genial conversation with Evans at his home in which we discussed all four advocacy groups at length, I enquired about my prospects of doing the same with Morgan, his close friend. Evans predicted that Morgan would be very reluctant due to his having been bitten badly in the past. He said that he would speak to him and explain that our interview had been fine, but this seemingly did nothing to change Morgan's mind. Attempts to contact him through other avenues proved fruitless.

John Stone, prominent in the early years of the H.R. Nicholls Society and by far the most important figure in the Samuel Griffith Society, was next on my list. After a short conversation over the phone, Stone was similarly reluctant to meet for a face-to-face interview. However, some time later he was happy to answer questions via email. His answers proved to be very valuable, as he retains vivid memories of his activities in the groups, and was able to fill in a number of gaps in my research. Further detail about the Samuel Griffith Society was provided by Greg Craven in a phone interview. I also met with and interviewed Stone's long-time friend and colleague Des Moore, a veteran right-wing activist who runs his own think tank, the Institute for Private Enterprise, and has been involved in all four single-issue advocacy groups.

The most important figure in the Bennelong Society was Peter Howson, but he died in February 2009. In its later years former Labor politician Gary Johns became central, and after speaking over the phone he agreed to meet me for an interview at his home in Brisbane. I travelled there with financial assistance from La Trobe University, and Johns put me in contact with two other Bennelong Society associates residing in Brisbane: former Liberal Indigenous affairs minister John Herron and conservative Indigenous activist Wesley Aird. All three were open about their roles within the Bennelong Society and its political impact.

I also sought interviews with prominent conservatives who were not closely connected with the four groups, but whose experience and knowledge of the world

of right-wing institutions is extensive. Unfortunately, John Roskam of the IPA, Greg Lindsay of the CIS and Gerard Henderson of the Sydney Institute, all declined to speak to me. However, Andrew Norton, presently at the Grattan Institute but formerly with the CIS, did agree to an interview. Though in the past he has been a member of the H.R. Nicholls Society and attended Samuel Griffith Society conferences, Norton was able to offer a more detached and critical perspective on the groups.

Structure

The thesis begins by surveying the historical and theoretical literature on think tanks in the United States, United Kingdom and Australia. The broad consensus of this literature is that there has been a significant shift in the way that think tanks operate since they first emerged early in the twentieth century. From that period through until the 1960s think tanks were likely to be seen as independent public policy research institutes with few if any agendas to push. They were primarily interested in finding solutions to policy problems, and went about this in an objective, non-ideological manner. The 1970s then saw a shift. More partisan (and, more often than not, conservative) organisations came to the fore, and zealously set about persuading governments and policy-makers to follow their preferred ideological courses of action.

Chapter 2 discusses the ideological and institutional background of the New Right in Australia, with emphasis on the IPA, *Quadrant* magazine, the CIS and the Centre of Policy Studies/Tasman Institute. A number of smaller, less influential New Right organisations are also briefly discussed. Many of the activists who would go on to be involved in the H.R. Nicholls Society, Samuel Griffith Society, Bennelong Society and Lavoisier Group began their activism in these organisations and were published in *Quadrant*. For this reason, it is vital to understand them before moving onto the single-issue groups.

The next four chapters look at each of the single-issue advocacy groups in detail. All of these chapters follow the same structure. They begin by outlining the

historical context of the respective debates. In the cases of the H.R. Nicholls Society (chapter 3) and Samuel Griffith Society (chapter 4), this involves looking back to the period leading up to and following Federation in 1901. Chapter 5 on the Bennelong Society briefly outlines the history of first contact between Indigenous people and British colonisers, before focusing on post-Second World War developments in Indigenous policy. Chapter 6 on the Lavoisier Group has a narrower historical focus, beginning with the birth of the international environmental movement in the 1960s, before moving onto subsequent developments in Australia.

Having outlined the historical context, each chapter then discusses the more immediate origins of the groups, introducing key personnel, and detailing how each group came to be formed. These sections are followed by a discussion of the main aims of the groups, and then a section on the methods they have employed to try to achieve these aims. A section on interventions follows, in which two examples are detailed for each group: for the H.R. Nicholls Society, the 1998 waterfront industrial dispute and the Work Choices debate in the latter years of the Howard government; for the Samuel Griffith Society, the republic and Mabo/native title debates; for the Bennelong Society, the demise of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission and debates about the future of remote Indigenous communities; for the Lavoisier Group, the Kyoto Protocol and carbon pricing debates. Each chapter concludes with a discussion of the groups' position today and a short summation of their impact on Australian political culture.

Chapter 7 brings the four organisations together to consider a number of the themes raised in the preceding chapters in more detail. It does so in five sections. The first concerns the single-issue advocacy group as an organisational form, including a discussion of some of the distinctive characteristics of the four being examined. The second section takes a detailed look at the remarkable partnership between Hugh Morgan and Ray Evans at Western Mining. This is followed by an analysis of the groups' relationships with and influence upon governments, especially the Howard government (1996–2007). The next section, on the role of sympathetic publications, covers newspapers, magazines, think tank publications and the conservative book publisher Connor Court. Finally, the political

philosophies of the organisations are analysed in some detail, as a way of placing them within the Australian conservative tradition, and demonstrating how they have contributed to a distortion of that tradition.

The thesis concludes by discussing some of the broader questions raised by the research about the overall significance of the four single-issue advocacy groups. It argues that although the influence of the groups can at times be overstated by commentators on both the left and right, they are nevertheless a fundamental element of the Australian political story of the past three decades.

1

LITERATURE REVIEW: THINK TANKS IN THE ANGLOSPHERE

Before beginning a review of the scholarly literature on think tanks in the United States, the United Kingdom and Australia, it is necessary to specify what it is we mean by the term 'think tank'. The following definition comes from the Think Tanks and Civil Societies Program at the University of Pennsylvania:

> Think tanks or public policy research, analysis, and engagement institutions are organizations that generate policy-oriented research, analysis, and advice on domestic and international issues in an effort to enable policymakers and the public to make informed decisions about public policy issues. Think tanks may be affiliated with political parties, governments, interest groups, or private corporations or constituted as independent nongovernmental organizations (NGOs). These institutions often act as a bridge between the academic and policymaking communities, serving the public interest as an independent voice that translates applied and basic research into a language and form that is understandable, reliable, and accessible for policymakers and the public.[1]

Although the term was not used at the time, think tanks conforming to the model described above first emerged in the US early in the twentieth century, with the creation of such institutions as the Russell Sage Foundation (1907) and the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace (1910). Following the tumult of the First World War, a number of foreign policy-focused organisations came into

[1] James G. McGann, *The Global "Go-To Think Tanks"* (rev. edn), Think Tanks and Civil Societies Program, University of Pennsylvania, 2010, p. 69.

being, such as the Hoover Institution on War, Revolution and Peace (1919), the Twentieth Century Fund (1919) and the Council on Foreign Relations (1921), which is the publisher of the influential journal *Foreign Affairs* and is to this day still widely recognised as the pinnacle of the American foreign policy establishment.

Two important organisations with more of a domestic focus were also founded in this period: the National Bureau of Economic Research (1920) and the Brookings Institution (1927). Brookings was the result of the merging of three previously established bodies—the Institute for Government Research, the Institute of Economics and the Robert Brookings Graduate School of Economics and Government—and has played a prominent role in American public policy ever since. It was voted the number one think tank in the world in a 2009 survey of more than 750 experts, scholars and journalists.[2] The emergence of such institutions demonstrates how the principles of science and social science were beginning to be applied to the practice of government in this period.

The next major surge of think tank growth occurred during and after the Second World War, with the foundation of business-minded organisations such as the Committee for Economic Development (1942) and the American Enterprise Institute for Public Policy Research (AEI) (1943), as well as the more military-focused RAND Corporation (1948). The AEI's emphasis on free markets and limited government set it apart from many of its contemporaries, but it was an early precursor of some of the more forthright conservative think tanks that were to emerge in the 1970s.[3] RAND has been called the "prototype think tank", in that it was probably the first organisation to be associated with the term, and therefore provided a model for others to follow.[4] As Harold Orlans describes in *The Nonprofit Research Institute: Its Origin, Operation, Problems, and Prospects* (1972), RAND was established in recognition of "a need to develop new and more permanent arrangements whereby civilian engineers and scientists could continue

[2] McGann, *The Global "Go-To Think Tanks"*, p. 29.
[3] Jason Stahl, *Right Moves: The Conservative Think Tank in American Political Culture Since 1945*, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2016, p. 13.
[4] James G. McGann with Richard Sabatini, *Global Think Tanks: Policy Networks and Governance*, London: Routledge, 2011, p. 49.

the critical technical work they had begun during the war."[5] RAND initially operated predominantly as a government and military research contractor, but has significantly expanded its operations throughout its history.

By the 1960s and 1970s, think tank numbers were exploding. Some of the more prominent organisations established in this period include the Hudson Institute (1961), the Center for Strategic and International Studies (1962), the Institute for Policy Studies (1963), the Urban Institute (1968), the Heritage Foundation (1973), the Cato Institute (1977) and the Manhattan Institute for Policy Research (1978). The most striking element of this explosion was the increasingly ideological tone of the organisations, especially those on the conservative side of political debates. Abandoning the non-partisan principles of their forebears, this new form of think tank "was more engaged in selling predetermined ideology to politicians and the public than undertaking scholarly research."[6] No longer would they simply attempt to influence policy by networking in Washington DC; they embraced the media and spread the word to the general public. What follows is a review of some of the major scholarly work that has been produced on think tanks since the 1970s.

Think tank scholarship

Although think tanks first developed around the turn of the century, they were subject to little scholarly discussion before the 1990s, despite the explosion in their numbers in the 1960s and 1970s. An important exception was Paul Dickson's book, *Think Tanks* (1971). Although obviously dated, the book provides a useful early discussion of the origins and initial structures and aims of think tanks in the United States. Dickson's focus is on those institutes that were mainly employed as contractors for the US government such as RAND Corporation. While acknowledging that they exist in other countries, Dickson points out that "think

[5] Harold Orlans, *The Nonprofit Research Institute: Its Origin, Operation, Problems, and Prospects*, New York: McGraw-Hill, 1972, p. 19.
[6] Jane Mayer, *Dark Money: How a Secretive Group of Billionaires is Trying to Buy Political Control in the US*, Melbourne: Scribe, 2016. p. 79.

tanks are an overwhelmingly American phenomenon."[7]

A more recent—and hence, more useful—history of American think tanks is James Smith's *The Idea Brokers: Think Tanks and the Rise of the New Policy Elite* (1991). Taking a more critical perspective, Smith charts the evolution of the role of experts and intellectuals in American politics from the late nineteenth century until the 1980s, culminating in the Reagan revolution. Speaking firmly from what he sees as the consensual centre, Smith is critical of the role of ideological think tanks of both the left and right, and the rhetoric that surrounds them. "At times the proliferation of Washington-based research organizations," he writes, "especially those that link research with advocacy, has seemed only to sharpen policy debate and to undermine the likelihood of reaching practical agreements."[8]

Paul Dickson's contention that think tanks have thrived in the US is discussed in more detail by Carol Weiss in the introduction to her edited collection *Organizations for Policy Analysis: Helping Government Think* (1992).[9] Weiss suggests some key factors in explaining the phenomenon. First, the fragmentation of the American political system—especially the separation of the executive and the legislature, but also of government departments, states, political parties and individual congressmen and women—increases the possibility of independent research and analysis. Secondly, neither the political parties nor stakeholders such as industry or labour have structures that can effectively aggregate interests. Party discipline like that seen in Australia, Britain or Canada is rare in the US, leading non-government actors to pursue policy research independent of the parties. Meanwhile, peak bodies designed to lobby on behalf of industry or labour either have not been established or have no broad political influence. Thirdly, she points to the considerable complexity of American politics in the second half of the twentieth century, leading to new specialisations in the concerted search for answers to difficult policy problems. Finally, Weiss notes the politicisation of the civil service since the Nixon presidency, which has led to a narrowing of focus on

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[7] Paul Dickson, *Think Tanks*, New York: Atheneum, 1971, p. 5.
[8] James A. Smith, *The Idea Brokers: Think Tanks and the Rise of the New Policy Elite*, New York: The Free Press, 1991, p. 212.
[9] Carol H. Weiss, 'Helping Government Think: Functions and Consequences of Policy Analysis Organizations,' in Carol H. Weiss (ed.), *Organizations for Policy Analysis: Helping Government Think*, Newbury Park: Sage Publications, 1992, pp. 1–18.

what is politically expedient rather than the broader, long-term perspective.

Most literature on the subject of think tanks at some point grapples with the dilemma of definition, recognising that there is not one agreed upon way of defining what is and is not a think tank. One of the most useful ways of categorising think tanks is provided by Kent Weaver and James McGann in their introduction to *Think Tanks and Civil Societies: Catalysts for Ideas and Action* (2000).[10] They identify four distinct types (albeit with some overlap): academic think tanks (or "universities without students"); contract research think tanks; advocacy tanks; and party think tanks. The authors point out the strengths and weaknesses of each, while also describing their differing areas of specialisation. Another valuable discussion of the differing ways of categorising think tanks is found in Diane Stone and Andrew Denham's *Think Tank Traditions: Policy Research and the Politics of Ideas* (2004).[11] While again stressing the degree of overlap, Stone cites numerous examples of considerably diverse types of institutions being grouped under the umbrella term 'think tank'. The book also compares the different ways in which think tanks have developed across the globe.

James McGann's 1992 paper, 'Academics to Ideologues,' divides the history of the public policy research industry into four eras: 1900–29, 1930–59, 1960–75 and 1976–90, noting major upheavals such as the two world wars and the Great Depression as key factors influencing the organisational form of significant institutions. Focusing on the remarkable transformation in the final period, McGann identifies six interrelated trends influencing the development of the think tank industry. First, there was a dramatic proliferation of the number of think tanks. Second, Washington became the unchallenged centre of influence in the world of politics and ideas. Third, think tanks became increasingly specialised, often focusing on single issues rather than the broader social, economic and foreign policy debates. Fourth, think tanks became more politicised, eschewing the ideologically neutral positions of their forebears. Fifth, Congress and the White

[10] R. Kent Weaver and James G. McGann, 'Think Tanks and Civil Societies in a Time of Change,' in James G. McGann and R. Kent Weaver (eds), *Think Tanks and Civil Societies: Catalysts for Ideas and Action*, New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 2000, pp. 1–35.
[11] Diane Stone, 'Introduction: Think Tanks, Policy Advice and Governance,' in Diane Stone and Andrew Denham (eds), *Think Tank Traditions: Policy Research and the Politics of Ideas*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004, pp. 1–16.

House saw a huge increase in the number of professional staffers. Combined with the creation of government think tanks, this led to an increased reliance on independent research, data and analysis. Finally, the media became a more significant player in the public policy process. McGann concludes that these extraordinary transformations show that "if the press is the fourth arm of government, think tanks are certainly the fifth."[12]

In *Capturing the Political Imagination: Think Tanks and the Policy Process* (1996), Diane Stone discusses some of the different ways in which scholars have approached the study of think tanks. The first is the pluralist perspective, which argues that think tanks are simply competitors alongside other government, private and non-profit organisations in the marketplace of ideas. In contrast, scholars adopting the elitist perspective emphasise the strong links between think tanks and corporate power, even those whose political persuasion might be seen as left-wing or progressive. Stone also discusses two approaches from the political fringes. She quickly dismisses the far-right theories of socialist conspiracy as lacking scholarly credibility. The New Left/neo-Marxist perspective is taken more seriously, however. Taking elitist theories a step further, Marxists have argued that think tanks such as the Brookings Institution, the AEI and the Heritage Foundation "mobilise elites to redefine the terms of debate and in order to translate class interests into state action."[13]

Donald Abelson takes a slightly different approach to Stone in *Do Think Tanks Matter? Assessing the Impact of Public Policy Institutes* (2009).[14] While also discussing the pluralist and elitist perspectives, he replaces the far-right and Marxist approaches with two others, reflecting the developments within the field since the publication of Stone's book. The first is the statist approach, which stresses that despite the varying influence of non-state actors such as think tanks, the state retains the ultimate power to make important decisions affecting the nation. Although this may appear to relegate think tanks to a position of

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[12] James G. McGann, 'Academics to Ideologues: A Brief History of the Public Policy Research Industry,' *PS: Political Science & Politics*, vol. 25, no. 4 (December 1992), p. 739.
[13] Diane Stone, *Capturing the Political Imagination: Think Tanks and the Policy Process*, London: Frank Cass, 1996, p. 32.
[14] Donald E. Abelson, *Do Think Tanks Matter? Assessing the Impact of Public Policy Institutes* (2nd edn), Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2009.

irrelevance, proponents of this approach note that they still maintain influence through their personnel moving from jobs in think tanks to government positions and vice versa, thereby spreading their ideas across sectors. Abelson also discusses the institutional approach to the study of think tanks. He identifies three ways in which this has been done. First, there are studies of the history and evolution of think tanks in particular countries. Second, there are those that look at the broader policy communities and the role of think tanks within them. Finally, a third approach recognises the diversity of the mandates, resources and priorities of different think tanks and looks at how this can determine the stage of the policy cycle they choose to be involved in.

Movement conservatism

The post-war period in American politics saw the rise of a conservative intellectual movement, which disseminated ideas that gradually took over the Republican Party and spread throughout the western world. An important milestone was the 1953 publication of Russell Kirk's *The Conservative Mind*, which traced the lineage of modern American conservatism back to the eighteenth century Irish political philosopher Edmund Burke.[15] According to historian George Nash, Kirk's book "dramatically catalyzed the emergence of the conservative intellectual movement."[16] One of those inspired was 30-year-old William F. Buckley Jr, who founded the magazine *National Review* in 1955. This and other anti-communist, 'neoconservative' publications such as *Commentary* magazine (under the editorship of Norman Podhoretz) and Irving Kristol's journal the *Public Interest* became essential reading for American conservatives in the following decades.[17] In 1964, hardline conservative Barry Goldwater won the Republican presidential nomination against the establishment candidate, Nelson Rockefeller. Though he

[15] Russell Kirk, *The Conservative Mind: From Burke to Eliot* (5th edn), Chicago: Henry Regnery Company, 1972.
[16] George H. Nash, *The Conservative Intellectual Movement in America Since 1945*, New York: Basic Books, 1976, p. 69.
[17] Rick Perlstein, *The Invisible Bridge: The Fall of Nixon and the Rise of Reagan*, New York: Simon & Schuster, 2014, pp. 453–54.

went on to lose the election to Lyndon Johnson in a landslide, Goldwater's nomination signalled the arrival of movement conservatism in mainstream politics, an arrival that was confirmed by Ronald Reagan's election as governor of California two years later.

As Jean-François Drolet writes in his 2011 study of the movement, American neoconservatism grew out of a small group of predominantly Jewish New York intellectuals who had abandoned the leftist radicalism of their youth.[18] Instead they became virulently anti-communist, and relentlessly critical of the failings of American liberalism. (In a famous line, Kristol said that a neoconservative is "a liberal who has been mugged by reality."[19]) An early comprehensive study of the neoconservative phenomenon is Peter Steinfels's *The Neoconservatives: The Men Who Are Changing America's Politics* (1979), which identifies the key American players and their intellectual origins.[20] Another useful analysis, from a liberal perspective, is Sidney Blumenthal's *The Rise of the Counter-Establishment: From Conservative Ideology to Political Power* (1986). Implicitly accepting that a liberal establishment does indeed exist, Blumenthal argues that in response the conservative "factories of ideology" institutionalized a particular form of ideological politics that became the norm by the 1980s. Rejecting the orthodox view that the American electorate moved to the right in that decade, he suggests that there was simply a realignment of elites: "The Counter-Establishment was a political elite aspiring to become a governing elite."[21]

Naturally, the rise of a new conservative movement had an enormous impact on the think tank world. There was an explosion in think tank numbers in the 1970s, many of which came to be described as of the New Right. David Ricci argues in *The Transformation of American Politics: The New Washington and the Rise of Think Tanks* (1993), that this phenomenon was largely a conservative backlash against the liberal-dominated post-war era, which culminated in the mass

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[18] Jean-François Drolet, *American Neoconservatism: The Politics and Culture of a Reactionary Idealism*, London: Hurst & Company, 2011, p. 19.
[19] Irving Kristol, quoted in Andrew Hartman, *A War for the Soul of America: A History of the Culture Wars*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015, p. 64.
[20] Peter Steinfels, *The Neoconservatives: The Men Who Are Changing America's Politics*, New York: Simon & Schuster, 1979.
[21] Sidney Blumenthal, *The Rise of the Counter-Establishment: From Conservative Ideology to Political Power*, New York: Times Books, 1986, p. 5.

social movements of the 1960s.[22] This point is echoed by Andrew Hartman in *A War for the Soul of America: A History of the Culture Wars* (2015).[23] Ricci also identifies a new focus on marketing from the think tanks themselves, who were looking to find new ways to have their ideas heard. While the more established think tanks were concentrating their efforts on maintaining their relationships with the political elite in Washington, the new guard attempted to communicate directly with ordinary people via newspapers, radio and television, while of course continuing to cultivate contacts in Washington. In a 1989 book chapter titled 'Think Tanks and the Politics of Ideas,' James Smith discussed the frustration with which these methods were viewed by older institutes, who were more interested in focusing on their research than promoting their ideas in the public domain. He cites a Brookings Institution staff member lamenting that, "We now need to appear to be a player even though we have been a player along."[24]

Joseph Peschek's *Policy-Planning Organizations: Elite Agendas and America's Rightward Turn* (1987) looks at the role played by conservative think tanks "in a period of broad political and economic change."[25] He focuses specifically on five think tanks: the Brookings Institution, the Trilateral Commission, the AEI, the Heritage Foundation and the Institute for Contemporary Studies. He argues that the major economic upheavals of the 1970s led these organisations to recognise inherent contradictions between liberal democracy and capitalism and hence to propose alternative ways of thinking about social and economic challenges.

As suggested by the literature discussed above, the orthodox view within recent think tank scholarship is that the 1970s saw a transformation in the way think tanks operated. Andrew Rich's *Think Tanks, Public Policy, and the Politics of Expertise* (2004), seeks to interrogate this assumption by posing as its central questions:

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[22] David M. Ricci, *The Transformation of American Politics: The New Washington and the Rise of Think Tanks*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993.
[23] Hartman, *A War for the Soul of America*, p. 38.
[24] James A. Smith, 'Think Tanks and the Politics of Ideas,' in David C. Colander and A.W. Coats (eds), *The Spread of Economic Ideas*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989, p. 189.
[25] Joseph G. Peschek, *Policy-Planning Organizations: Elite Agendas and America's Rightward Turn*, Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1987, p. vii.

> Have think tanks generally evolved from producing painstaking research and objective writing to pursuing ideological agendas with far-reaching impact in the war of ideas? If so, what accounts for these transformations, and what are their consequences for the role and influence of their products – expertise and ideas – in American policy making?[26]

Rich is in no doubt that there has been a transformation, citing the increasing ideological division of the 1960s as a turning point where the value of objective expertise lost out to aggressive, partisan advocacy, supported by modern marketing methods. Noting this transformation in his 1989 article, 'The Changing World of Think Tanks,' Kent Weaver showed concern for its effect on American political culture: "It remains to be seen whether the image of think tank research in the US as objective can survive the growth of openly partisan and ideological advocacy tanks."[27] In 2004, Rich argued that the aggressive partisanship of many think tanks had indeed undermined their public esteem.

Neoliberalism

The guiding ideology of the New Right think tanks in the 1970s was what came to be known as neoliberalism. Neoliberalism has been defined by David Harvey as "a theory of political economic practices that proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade."[28] 'Austrian School' economists such as Friedrich Hayek and Ludwig von Mises had been developing these ideas for decades. In 1947, they founded the Mont Pelerin Society, which Hayek envisioned as "something halfway between a scholarly association and a political society."[29] It formalised their

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[26] Andrew Rich, *Think Tanks, Public Policy, and the Politics of Expertise*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004, p. 2.
[27] R. Kent Weaver, 'The Changing World of Think Tanks,' *PS: Political Science & Politics*, vol. 22, no. 3 (September 1989), p. 570.
[28] David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005, p. 2.
[29] Friedrich Hayek, quoted in Philip Mirowski, *Never Let a Serious Crisis Go to Waste: How Neoliberalism Survived the Financial Meltdown*, London: Verso, 2013, p. 43.

position as the most prominent intellectual critics of the economic theories of John Maynard Keynes. In the US, the leading intellectual proponent of neoliberalism was the University of Chicago economist Milton Friedman. Comprehensive studies of the neoliberal movement's global impact have been provided by Philip Mirowski and Dieter Plehwe's *The Road from Mont Pèlerin: The Making of the Neoliberal Thought Collective* (2009),[30] and Daniel Stedman Jones's *Masters of the Universe: Hayek, Friedman, and the Birth of Neoliberal Politics* (2012).[31]

As recounted by Jason Stahl in *Right Moves: The Conservative Think Tank in American Political Culture Since 1945* (2016), a significant landmark in this period was the Heritage Foundation's 20-volume, 3000-page *Mandate for Leadership: Policy Management in a Conservative Administration*. Produced for the incoming Reagan administration in 1980, this unprecedented publication was the work of more than 300 people across twenty project teams.[32] President-elect Reagan was appreciative, and fourteen Heritage staff were appointed to his transition team. An eleven hundred-page abridged version of *Mandate for Leadership* was published for general sale in 1981, and made the *Washington Post* bestseller list.[33] A second edition, *Mandate for Leadership II: Continuing the Conservative Revolution*, was produced upon Reagan's re-election in 1984, and the series continues to this day, albeit in a less comprehensive form. The Heritage Foundation's president, Edwin Feulner, visited Australia in 1985 and gave a lecture in which he explained the importance of think tanks in the Anglosphere:

> Ideas like Supply Side economics, privatisation, enterprise zones, and the flat tax are produced by individuals first – the academic scribblers, as Keynes would call them. Milton Friedman and Stuart Butler in the United States and Madsen Pirie in the United Kingdom, for example, explain, and expand the ideas. They are the first-hand dealers in ideas. But, it takes an institution to help popularise and propagandise an idea – to market an idea. Think-tanks are

[30] Philip Mirowski and Dieter Plehwe (eds), *The Road from Mont Pèlerin: The Making of the Neoliberal Thought Collective*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009.
[31] Daniel Stedman Jones, *Masters of the Universe: Hayek, Friedman, and the Birth of Neoliberal Politics*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012.
[32] Charles L. Heatherly (ed.), *Mandate for Leadership: Policy Management in a Conservative Administration*, Washington DC: Heritage Foundation, 1981, p. ix.
[33] Stahl, *Right Moves*, pp. 109–10.

> the second-hand dealers of ideas. Organisations like the Institute of Economic Affairs or the Adam Smith Institute in London, my own Heritage Foundation in the United States and the Centre of Policy Studies and the Centre for Independent Studies here in Australia host conferences, lectures and seminars and publish policy reports, books and monographs to popularise an idea. Through "outreach" programmes an institution can promote an idea on a continuing basis and cause change. But this takes time.[34]

Neoliberalism was also having a huge impact in the UK. Inspired by Maurice Cowling's 1989 essay, 'The Sources of the New Right,'[35] Richard Cockett's *Thinking the Unthinkable: Think-Tanks and the Economic Counter-Revolution* (1995) tells the story of the neoliberal movement's influence on British politics. Cockett charts the movement from its 1930s origins through until its eventual triumph with Margaret Thatcher's 1979 election victory and subsequent dominance of British politics in the 1980s. The most important think tanks in this movement were the Institute of Economic Affairs (founded in 1955), the Centre for Policy Studies (1974), which Thatcher helped to found while in opposition, and the Adam Smith Institute (1977).

The founder of the Institute of Economic Affairs, Sir Antony Fisher, is an especially important figure in the worldwide neoliberal movement. Fisher was a successful farmer who, after reading Hayek's *The Road to Serfdom* (1944), sought the author's advice about how he could help influence the political process. Hayek told him that becoming a politician was a waste of time; he would be better off "forming a scholarly research organisation to supply intellectuals in universities, schools, journalism and broadcasting with authoritative studies of the economic theory of markets and its application to practical affairs."[36] Fisher went on to help found a number of think tanks in the UK, US and Canada, as well as the Atlas Economic Research Foundation (1981). The Atlas Network (as it is now called) was designed as a way of institutionalising the process of helping to create and support free market organisations. Its most recent institute directory lists 459

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[34] Edwin J. Feulner, 'Ideas, Think-Tanks and Governments,' *Quadrant*, November 1985, p. 22.
[35] Maurice Cowling, 'The Sources of the New Right,' *Encounter*, November 1989, pp. 3–13.
[36] Antony Fisher, quoted in Richard Cockett, *Thinking the Unthinkable: Think-Tanks and the Economic Counter-Revolution, 1931–1983*, London: Fontana Press, 1995, p. 124.

partners in 95 countries.[37]

The Adam Smith Institute's Madsen Pirie once said of his organisation: "We propose things which people regard as being on the edge of lunacy. The next thing you know, they're on the edge of policy."[38] Cockett's book largely supports this assertion, arguing that free market think tanks "did as much intellectually to convert a generation of 'opinion-formers' and politicians to a new set of ideas as the Fabians had done with a former generation at the turn of the century."[39] Andrew Denham's *Think-Tanks of the New Right* (1996) complements Cockett's work by focusing specifically on the characteristics and prospects of four conservative British think tanks in the post-Thatcher era: the Institute of Economic Affairs, the Adam Smith Institute, the Centre for Policy Studies, and the Social Affairs Unit.[40]

The focus here has been on the US and UK, because it is those countries that Australia tends to emulate the most. But the intellectual and institutional transformations described above were of course not confined to the Anglosphere. As David Harvey argues, "there has everywhere been an emphatic turn towards neoliberalism in political-economic practices and thinking since the 1970s."[41] American and British think tanks played a pivotal role in neoliberalism's eventual triumph as the dominant economic orthodoxy of the late twentieth century.

The Australian experience

The broad history of political ideas in Australia has been covered well by James Walter in his *What Were They Thinking? The Politics of Ideas in Australia* (2010).[42] For a greater focus on the Australian right, David Kemp's 1988 essay, 'Liberalism and Conservatism in Australia Since 1944,' shows the shifts in ideology and tactics

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[37] Atlas Network, 'Global Directory,' https://www.atlasnetwork.org/partners/global-directory
[38] Madsen Pirie, quoted in Alan Rusbridger, 'Adam Smith Institute's sense and nonsense,' *Guardian*, 22 December 1987, https://www.theguardian.com/politics/1987/dec/22/uk.past
[39] Cockett, *Thinking the Unthinkable*, p. 5.
[40] Andrew Denham, *Think-Tanks of the New Right*, Aldershot: Dartmouth Publishing, 1996.
[41] Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, p. 2.
[42] James Walter, *What Were They Thinking? The Politics of Ideas in Australia*, Sydney: UNSW Press, 2010.

on the right from an insider's perspective.[43] For a detailed look at the period in which the H.R. Nicholls Society and other right-wing political advocacy groups emerged, Paul Kelly's *The End of Certainty: The Story of the 1980s* (1992) is indispensable.[44] From this base one can move on to some of the more narrowly-focused scholarly work on Australian think tanks.

In her 1991 article, 'Old Guard versus New Partisans,' Diane Stone focused on the transformation of independent policy planning institutes in the US, UK and Australia and found that changes in Australia had largely echoed what had been happening abroad.[45] While relatively ideologically neutral organisations such as the Australian Institute for International Affairs (founded in 1924) and the Committee for Economic Development Australia (1960) fell by the wayside in the 1980s, more strident ones such as the Centre for Independent Studies and the Australian Institute for Public Policy gained considerable ground. Meanwhile, the Institute for Public Affairs, founded in 1943, experienced a resurgence in the early 1980s after transforming into a more ideological organisation, courtesy of the involvement of such New Right figures as Rod Kemp, Hugh Morgan and John Stone. Peter Saunders and James Walter also note the emergence of advocacy think tanks that are "explicitly ideological and aggressive in promulgating partisan approaches to public issues" in *Ideas and Influence: Social Science and Public Policy in Australia* (2005).[46] As social scientists concerned with effective policy development and outcomes, the authors fear that partisan think tanks are "more attuned to winning the war of ideas than considering how their proposals might play out in practice."[47]

In a 2004 paper on Australian think tanks, Ian Marsh and Diane Stone argue that Australia provides difficult conditions for think tank survival and those that have prospered have done so against the odds. These difficult conditions include

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[43] David Kemp, 'Liberalism and Conservatism in Australia Since 1944,' in Brian Head and James Walter (eds), *Intellectual Movements and Australian Society*, Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1988, pp. 322–62.
[44] Paul Kelly, *The End of Certainty: The Story of the 1980s*, Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1992.
[45] Diane Stone, 'Old Guard versus New Partisans: Think Tanks in Transition,' *Australian Journal of Political Science*, vol. 26, no. 2 (1991), pp. 197–215.
[46] Peter Saunders and James Walter, 'Introduction: Reconsidering the Policy Sciences,' in Peter Saunders and James Walter (eds), *Ideas and Influence: Social Science and Public Policy in Australia*, Sydney: University of New South Wales Press, 2005, p. 7.
[47] Saunders and Walter, 'Introduction,' p. 8.

Australia's "poorly developed culture of philanthropy" and the relative strength and discipline of the major political parties.[48] This argument is countered by James McGann and Erik Johnson in *Comparative Think Tanks, Politics and Public Policy* (2005), which uses thirteen indicators to compare think tank development across countries all over the world. They find that, comparatively, Australia is "one of the most hospitable locations for think tanks in the world," largely due to its economic prosperity, freedom of expression and extensive volunteerism.[49]

Diane Stone's provocative 2007 article, 'Recycling Bins, Garbage Cans or Think Tanks?' challenges what she perceives as being some prominent myths about think tanks and the roles they actually perform.[50] Citing the relative lack of interaction between think tanks and the general public, Stone disagrees with the widely asserted claim that think tanks serve as bridges between state, society and science, as well as the notion that they serve the public interest. She argues that they are primarily self-interested and often staffed by former government officials who form an informal network of political elites detached from the general public.

Despite the widespread impression that conservative organisations dominate the contemporary think tank scene in Australia, Paul 't Hart and Ariadne Vromen argue in 'A New Era for Think Tanks in Public Policy?' (2008), that they can be found across the political spectrum.[51] They provide examples of recently established left-wing or centrist think tanks such as the Australia Institute (1994), the Chifley Research Centre (2000), the Climate Institute (2005), the Centre for Policy Development (2007) and Per Capita (2007). They then go on to discuss some of the challenges that think tanks face in the present Australian political environment, such as: competition from the increasing number of think tanks; funding difficulties; a decline in their perceived authority; increased internationalisation of policy analysis; difficulties gaining access to politicians and policy-makers. These challenges echo many of the points raised in the international

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[48] Ian Marsh and Diane Stone, 'Australian Think Tanks,' in Stone and Denham, *Think Tank Traditions*, pp. 252–53.
[49] James G. McGann with Erik C. Johnson, *Comparative Think Tanks, Politics and Public Policy*, Cheltenham: Edward Elgar, 2005, pp. 171–72.
[50] Diane Stone, 'Recycling Bins, Garbage Cans or Think Tanks? Three Myths Regarding Policy Analysis Institutes,' *Public Administration*, vol. 85, no. 2 (June 2007), pp. 259–78.
[51] Paul 't Hart and Ariadne Vromen, 'A New Era for Think Tanks in Public Policy? International Trends, Australian Realities,' *Australian Journal of Public Administration*, vol. 67, no. 2 (June 2008), pp. 135–48.

literature.

In addition to these more neutral studies of Australian think tanks, there have been a number of left-wing critiques of the New Right and its associated think tanks. In the introduction to her edited collection *Australia and the New Right* (1982), Marian Sawer openly states that "the book is a response to an ideological offensive from the right."[52] She goes on to discuss the philosophical underpinnings and political manifestations of Australian libertarianism. Although Australian libertarianism has its own distinctive history and traditions, Sawer finds that in the 1970s, in response to economic stagnation and troubling aspects of the Whitlam government's program, Australians increasingly looked to American libertarians and associated tax revolt movements for ideas and inspiration.

Another edited collection, Ken Coghill's *The New Right's Australian Fantasy* (1987), covers similar ground. In it, Dennis Altman argues that the apparent success of the New Right is not so much due to the popularity of its program, but more to do with the clever ways in which its members have campaigned and marketed their ideas.[53] Breen Creighton stresses the New Right's lack of formal organisational structure or a single, cohesive philosophical position.[54] This is an important point given that labels are often applied to groups and individuals inappropriately, purely because of an association with other similar or overlapping entities. Ken Coghill details some of the key industrial battles of the 1980s that were having enormous implications for the development of New Right organisations.[55] Finally, Bette Moore and Gary Carpenter provide a useful summary of the organisations and individuals that made up the Australian New Right at the time, and the connections they have to each other.[56]

The networks of influence and fund-raising that exist on the conservative side of politics have often been the focus of critiques from the left. Damien Cahill's 2004 doctoral thesis argues that the radical neoliberal movement acted as a

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[52] Marian Sawer (ed.), *Australia and the New Right*, Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1982, p. xi.
[53] Dennis Altman, 'Tilting the Political Globe,' in Ken Coghill (ed.), *The New Right's Australian Fantasy*, Melbourne: McPhee Gribble, 1987, pp. 20–26.
[54] Breen Creighton, 'Trade Unions, the Law and the New Right,' in Coghill, *The New Right's Australian Fantasy*, pp. 74–92.
[55] Ken Coghill, 'Regrouping to Win Hearts and Minds,' in Coghill, *The New Right's Australian Fantasy*, pp. 116–44.
[56] Bette Moore and Gary Carpenter, 'Main Players,' in Coghill, *The New Right's Australian Fantasy*, pp. 145–60.

hegemonic force in Australia from the 1970s to the 1990s, with think tanks playing a central role. "The radical neo-liberal movement is not reducible to its think tanks, he wrote. "Movement activists sometimes operate independently of the movement's mobilising structures. The importance of think tanks, however, is they provide the movement with its organisational backbone."[57] Philip Mendes's 'Australian Neoliberal Think Tanks and the Backlash Against the Welfare State' (2003) effectively outlines elements of the agendas of the IPA and CIS but fails to demonstrate that they have had a strong influence on government policy.[58] While these organisations may share the views of many Liberal *and* Labor politicians, they have often been unsuccessful in transforming their opinions into specific policy reform. Marcus Smith and Peter Marden traverse similar territory in 'Conservative Think Tanks and Public Politics' (2008).[59] While maintaining that conservative think tanks exert considerable influence on politicians, and hence, on public opinion, they are also unable to provide evidence of direct policy influence. Many of the left-wing critiques of Australia's think tank environment situate people and organisations within political and intellectual networks, but their partisan nature must always be taken into account when evaluating their conclusions.

Conclusion

The history of Australian think tanks and political advocacy organisations largely mirrors that of the US and UK, though usually with a time lag. What began as a small selection of predominantly apolitical think tanks in the first half of the twentieth century later expanded into a much larger group of partisan advocacy organisations. Rather than aiming to produce objective policy analysis, the new partisan groups were devoted to changing political directions from their specific ideological standpoints. The next chapter will go into more detail about the

[57] Damien Cahill, *The Radical Neo-Liberal Movement as a Hegemonic Force in Australia, 1976–1996*, PhD Thesis, University of Wollongong, 2004, p. 109.
[58] Philip Mendes, 'Australian Neoliberal Think Tanks and the Backlash Against the Welfare State,' *Journal of Australian Political Economy*, no. 51 (June 2003), pp. 29–56.
[59] Marcus Smith and Peter Marden, 'Conservative Think Tanks and Public Politics,' *Australian Journal of Political Science*, vol. 43, no. 4 (December 2008), pp. 699–717.

Australian experience, by focusing on the ideas and institutions most pivotal to the emergence of the Australian New Right.

2

IDEAS AND INSTITUTIONS OF THE AUSTRALIAN RIGHT

This chapter will outline the history of the Australian right since the 1940s through some of its most significant institutions. Firstly, it discusses the evolution of liberal and conservative political ideas in the Liberal Party, before moving onto a number of institutions that were prominent in the emergence of the New Right. The most important of these are the Institute of Public Affairs, *Quadrant* magazine, the Centre for Independent Studies and the Centre of Policy Studies (which later transformed into the Tasman Institute). A number of smaller groups that emerged in the 1980s are also briefly discussed, namely the Crossroads Group, the Society of Modest Members, the Australian Lecture Foundation, the Australian Adam Smith Club, Centre 2000 and the Council for the National Interest. What follows is not intended to be an exhaustive history of the Australian right. Rather, it is provided as a way to understand the ideological and institutional milieu from which the single-issue advocacy groups emerged.

Liberalism and conservatism

The complicated mix of liberal and conservative political philosophies on the non-Labor side of Australian politics stretches back to the merging of the Protectionist and Free Trade parties to create the Fusion Party in 1909. Various alliances were attempted in the following decades before non-Labor fell apart again during the Second World War. Robert Menzies had become prime minister in 1939 as leader of the United Australia Party (UAP), but over the course of the next two years there

was increasing dissension within the UAP-Country Party coalition, leading to Menzies' resignation in August 1941. Further attempts to hold a conservative government together foundered, and Labor leader John Curtin took over as prime minister a little more than a month later. The UAP-Country Party coalition was crushed at the next federal election in 1943, leading Menzies and others to set up a new Liberal Party in 1944–45. The Liberal Party won government in coalition with the Country Party in 1949, and has survived as the strongest national conservative party ever since.

For a long time, as Judith Brett observed, "to be called a conservative has more often been an accusation than a self-description."[1] Australians who would be natural supporters of the Conservative Party if they were British were reluctant to adopt the term in Australia. Menzies explicitly rejected the term when he created the Liberal Party. "We took the name 'Liberal' because we were determined to be a progressive party," he wrote in his memoirs, "willing to make experiments, in no sense reactionary but believing in the individual, his rights, and his enterprise, and rejecting the Socialist panacea."[2] Menzies embraced the post-war Keynesian economic consensus, including the expansion of the welfare state, having accepted that "Liberal ideology had to be reworked to accommodate the greater expectations of the role of government which were taking shape during the war."[3]

Although Menzies disagreed with Labor on the desirable balance between private enterprise and government intervention in the economy, he accepted the fundamental assumptions of what Paul Kelly has described as the post-Federation "Australian Settlement": white Australia, industry protection through tariffs, a pervasive system of industrial conciliation and arbitration, state paternalism, and a foreign policy dependent on imperial benevolence.[4] Menzies presided over a period of unprecedented prosperity and Australian voters rewarded the Liberal-Country Party coalition with nine successive election victories. By the end of the 1970s, however, the long post-war boom had ended and novel ideas were being proposed

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[1] Judith Brett, *Australian Liberals and the Moral Middle Class: From Alfred Deakin to John Howard*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003, p. 2.
[2] Robert Menzies, *Afternoon Light: Some Memories of Men and Events*, Melbourne: Cassell Australia, 1967, p. 286.
[3] Brett, *Australian Liberals and the Moral Middle Class*, p. 117.
[4] Paul Kelly, *The End of Certainty: The Story of the 1980s*, Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1992, pp. 1–16.

about how to manage economies like Australia's. Following the turmoil of Gough Whitlam's Labor government (1972–75), and as Malcolm Fraser proved a disappointment to his own colleagues, the political and economic ideas of what became known as the New Right began to take hold of the Liberal Party.

A new political lexicon developed in this period, and one New Right think tank later produced a phrasebook that aimed to provide a more modern reference guide than the traditional political and economic dictionaries and textbooks.[5] The abundance of terms used to describe the New Right can seem confusing and contradictory, but at its core the movement was about free market economics, whether it was described as liberalism, libertarianism, dry economics, radical conservatism, economic rationalism or neoliberalism. As Andrew Norton has argued, the New Right was the most common term used to describe the movement in Australia in the 1980s. Gradually, as the New Right no longer seemed new, economic rationalism took over as the preferred Australian term, and was used extensively in the 1990s. That term also died out, and in the 2000s neoliberalism became, and remains, the dominant term.[6]

Discussions of terminology are further complicated by John Howard's central role in the Liberal Party since the 1980s. Howard was both an economic liberal and a social conservative, and saw no contradiction in this hybrid political philosophy, maintaining that the Liberal Party "has always been the custodian of both the conservative and classical liberal traditions in the Australian polity."[7] Howard was able to call on both approaches in response to what Robert Manne called the "two peaceful social revolutions" that reshaped Australian life from the 1970s onwards. The first was cultural, and involved the abandonment of chauvinistic and racist policies in favour of ethnic diversity. The second was economic, and involved the embrace of neoliberalism in response to the end of the long post-war boom.[8] "Taken together," wrote Manne, "these revolutions threatened to wash away a great

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[5] John Nurick, *Wet, Dry & Privatise: A New Political Phrasebook*, Perth: Australian Institute for Public Policy, 1989.
[6] Andrew Norton, 'Naming the Right: From the New Right to Economic Rationalism to Neoliberalism,' *Quadrant*, December 2001, pp. 62–65.
[7] John Howard, *Lazarus Rising: A Personal and Political Autobiography*, Sydney: HarperCollins, 2010, p. 654.
[8] Robert Manne, 'The Howard Years: A Political Interpretation,' in Robert Manne (ed.), *The Howard Years*, Melbourne: Black Inc, 2004, pp. 3–4.

deal of what many Australians had, unselfconsciously, come to regard as an almost natural and even permanent way of life."[9]

Howard sympathised with those who were unsettled by cultural and economic change. But he was an enthusiastic supporter of neoliberal economics, and therefore chose to emphasise his social conservatism as a way of appealing to voters. As prime minister from 1996 to 2007 his approach came to make political sense as his support for traditional social values provided reassurance to people suffering from the disruptions of neoliberal economic policies. Critics saw this fusion of economic liberalism and social conservatism as inherently contradictory, but it was undoubtedly successful for Howard and has come to define modern Australian conservatism. But Howard, of course, did not act alone; the transformation of non-Labor politics in Australia was helped along by many other organisations and individuals.

Institute of Public Affairs

The Institute of Public Affairs is Australia's oldest conservative think tank. Founded in Melbourne by a group of prominent businessmen in the wake of the UAP-Country Party coalition's 1943 election defeat, it was concerned that Australia was heading down a path towards central planning and socialism once the Second World War was won. The following is how the IPA describes itself on its website:

> The IPA is an independent, non-profit public policy think tank, dedicated to preserving and strengthening the foundations of economic and political freedom. Since 1943, the IPA has been at the forefront of the political and policy debate, defining the contemporary political landscape. The IPA is funded by individual memberships and subscriptions, as well as philanthropic and corporate donors. The IPA supports the free market of ideas, the free flow of capital, a limited and efficient government, evidence-based public policy, the rule of law, and representative democracy. Throughout human history,

[9] Manne, 'The Howard Years,' pp. 4–5.

> these ideas have proven themselves to be the most dynamic, liberating and exciting. Our researchers apply these ideas to the public policy questions which matter today.[10]

The founder and main driving force of the IPA was Charles Kemp, who was its director from 1943 to 1976. According to Paul Kelly, Kemp was "a major influence at the inception of the Liberal Party and probably the principal intellectual architect of the original Menzies platform."[11] Menzies himself described the IPA's 1944 policy statement *Looking Forward* as "the finest statement of basic political and economic problems made in Australia for many years."[12] The first council of the IPA included representatives from Coles, BHP and National Australia Bank as well as Keith Murdoch, then the recently appointed chairman of the Herald and Weekly Times. Despite these associations with prominent businessmen and politicians, the IPA has always adamantly maintained that its research is independent and subject to no outside influence. Inaugural chairman George Coles defined its mission at the first Annual Meeting in 1944, stating that "the IPA did not wish to be directly involved in politics, but it wanted to help create a modern political faith, which would be constructive and progressive and which would receive a large measure of public support."[13]

The IPA's early emphasis was on free trade, promoting private enterprise and minimising industrial disputes. It accepted the basic Keynesian consensus on the federal government's necessary role in economic planning, but was suspicious of Labor's real or perceived socialist sympathies. James Walter has argued that the founders were all "concerned to mobilize opinion through the IPA to counter the threat to business autonomy that ALP reconstruction plans were seen to represent."[14] So although the IPA was not yet a vehicle for free market ideology, it was concerned that the ALP was heading down a path of increasing government control and centralisation, a concern shown to have some foundation when Prime Minister Ben Chifley attempted to nationalise the banks in 1947.

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[10] IPA, 'About Us,' http://ipa.org.au/about
[11] Kelly, *The End of Certainty*, p. 47.
[12] Robert Menzies, quoted in IPA, 'About the IPA,' *IPA Review*, April–June 1968, p. 36.
[13] George Coles, quoted in IPA, 'About the IPA,' p. 35.
[14] James Walter, 'Intellectuals and the Political Culture,' in Brian Head and James Walter (eds), *Intellectual Movements and Australian Society*, Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1988, p. 248.

After the initial enthusiasm of the early decades, the IPA entered a period of decline in the 1960s, coinciding with Menzies' retirement and the eventual election of a Labor government in 1972. But the intellectual currents were changing. The end of the post-war boom and the subsequent political and economic crises of the 1970s demanded fresh policy thinking, and many on the right were disenchanted with conservative politics as usual. They rejected the Keynesian consensus and found new answers in the laissez-faire ideas of Friedrich Hayek and Milton Friedman, economists who were gaining in academic respectability after being awarded Nobel Prizes in 1974 and 1976 respectively.[15] Friedman came to Australia on a lecture tour in 1975, a visit described by the IPA as "like a breath of fresh air."[16] Hayek followed in 1976, and was invited by the IPA to address its annual meeting. The IPA's report of his address could not have been more gushing:

> No one among the 200 people who attended the IPA Annual Meeting on October 20th will readily forget the standing ovation which greeted Professor Hayek at the conclusion of his Address. This was the spontaneous response of an audience, the members of which sensed themselves to be in the presence of a truly great mind.[17]

A new generation of radical neoliberals was inspired by these visits, and Charles Kemp's retirement in 1976 provided an opportunity for the IPA to take a new direction. In 1978 Hugh Morgan was appointed to the IPA Council, and was crucial in encouraging corporate donations as well as providing funding himself. The following year director Roger Neave, a moderate successor to Kemp, was pushed out.[18] Finally, in 1982, the takeover was complete when Kemp's son Rod—significantly more radical than his father—was appointed director.

Throughout the 1980s members of the IPA became increasingly disillusioned with the timidity of the Liberal Party. One journalist described the IPA as having "thrown up its hands in disgust at the inability of the Liberals to cope with ideas."[19]

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[15] David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005, p. 22.
[16] IPA, 'Milton Friedman's Visit,' *IPA Review*, April–June 1975, p. 29.
[17] IPA, 'Professor F.A. Hayek's Australian Visit,' *IPA Review*, October–December 1976, p. 79.
[18] Mike Seccombe, 'Former IPA head: radicals "hijacked" think tank,' *Saturday Paper*, 27 August 2016.
[19] Tim Duncan, 'New Right crusaders challenge the Labor line,' *Bulletin*, 2 October 1984, p. 31.

With a few notable exceptions among what were known as the 'dries' (such as Bert Kelly, John Hyde, Jim Carlton and John Howard), Liberals were unwilling to argue publicly for neoliberal ideas. Hence, the IPA and other New Right organisations became critics of the party while the ALP under Bob Hawke and Paul Keating went about opening up the Australian economy, something that the Liberals had failed to do while in power from 1975 to 1983.

An important way in which the IPA was rejuvenated was through its quarterly publication, the *IPA Review*. Charles Kemp had edited the magazine in a rather staid fashion from 1947 until his retirement, and though his son David described the *IPA Review* as "the single most influential private source of liberal economic analysis over the years, both within the Liberal Party and beyond,"[20] it was ripe for an overhaul. In a 1982 message to readers Rod Kemp outlined his plan to build circulation by providing "articles which are succinct enough to meet the needs of the busy reader and which are comprehensible to the non-specialist."[21] This transition has continued through recent decades, and the magazine is now a glossy, full-colour publication designed to catch the eye of casual readers.

Having left his position as chief of staff to Liberal leader John Howard in 1986, Gerard Henderson took over the moribund NSW branch of the IPA the following year. However, before long he was clashing with other members of the IPA due to their support for Queensland Premier Joh Bjelke-Petersen's campaign to enter federal politics. Henderson left the IPA in 1989 and founded his own organisation, the Sydney Institute, which is less a think tank than a current affairs forum. It hosts weekly events in which guests are invited to speak on a chosen subject. The speeches are then published in its quarterly journal, the *Sydney Papers*. The Sydney Institute is best described as a 'talk tank,' a forum for ideas to be shared and discussed rather than an institutional vehicle for swaying politicians to a particular point of view. "People say it is like a conversation," Henderson told the *Sydney Morning Herald* in 2003.[22]

When Rod Kemp resigned as director of the IPA in 1989 after winning

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[20] David Kemp, 'Liberalism and Conservatism in Australia Since 1944,' in Head and Walter, *Intellectual Movements and Australian Society*, p. 329.
[21] Rod Kemp, 'To our readers,' *IPA Review*, Summer 1982–83, p. 88.
[22] Brad Norington, 'The idea factories,' *Sydney Morning Herald*, 11 August 2003.

Liberal preselection for the Senate, Des Moore was appointed acting director. An important figure within the New Right, Moore has been involved in just about every organisation that could be associated with the term. In 1958, while studying at the London School of Economics, he introduced himself to John Stone, who was serving as a Treasury representative in Australia House. Stone recommended Moore for a job in Treasury, where he remained for the next 28 years.[23] He became a deputy secretary in 1981, but in 1984 he lost a close ally when Stone resigned as secretary. In 1986, disenchanted with the economic policy direction of the Labor government and looking for new ways to get his ideas into the public arena, he spent four months in Washington DC working for the AEI and the Heritage Foundation. Upon his return to Australia in 1987, Moore resigned from the Treasury and took up a position with the IPA.[24] He remained there until 1996, when disagreement with the recently appointed director Mike Nahan led to his resignation.[25] He then established his own think tank, the Institute for Private Enterprise, which he operates from his home to this day. Moore has been involved in all four single-issue advocacy groups that are the focus of the following chapters.

In March 1991 the IPA amalgamated with the Perth-based Australian Institute for Public Policy (AIPP), and John Hyde became executive director. Hyde, a former Liberal MP, had founded the AIPP after he lost his Western Australian seat at the 1983 federal election, and was "widely credited in Canberra with being the driest of all dries."[26] Another organisation that benefited from the largesse of Hugh Morgan, the AIPP's most significant contribution to public debate was *Mandate to Govern: A Handbook for the Next Australian Government*, published in the lead up to the 1987 federal election. Inspired by the Heritage Foundation's *Mandate for Leadership* (referred to in chapter 1), the publication contained contributions from key New Right figures, including Ray Evans, John

[23] John Stone, 'Some Words of Thanks,' in *Upholding the Australian Constitution*, vol. 22, Proceedings of the Twenty-Second Conference of the Samuel Griffith Society, Perth, August 2010, p. 270.
[24] Des Moore, interview with author, Melbourne, 10 August 2012.
[25] David Walker, 'Last of the old guard quits think tank,' *Age*, 17 February 1996.
[26] Tom Duggan, 'Dry launch,' *Age*, 19 December 1985.

Stone, David and Rod Kemp, Greg Lindsay and Michael Porter.[27] Though it was claimed that *Mandate to Govern* was "not directed at either major party but at an unknown Government,"[28] its authors could hardly have been surprised when the re-elected Labor government paid it little attention.

Undeterred, the IPA later followed the same formula at the state level. In 1991, with Victoria in recession and the Labor government edging towards defeat, it partnered with the Tasman Institute and thirteen business organisations to form Project Victoria. The group then published *Victoria: An Agenda for Change* by Des Moore and Michael Porter, which aimed to set the policy direction of the next Coalition government in Victoria.[29] In Premier Jeff Kennett and Treasurer Alan Stockdale they found a most receptive audience. Financial journalist Alan Kohler later described Porter and Moore as "the unsung Marx and Engels of the Victorian revolution (with Kennett and Stockdale playing Lenin and Trotsky)," and Project Victoria as "the most successful right-wing policy manifesto ever seen in Australia."[30] When another scandal-plagued state Labor government was ousted in Western Australia in 1993 by Richard Court's Liberals, the IPA published *Reform and Recovery: An Agenda for the New Western Australian Government*.[31] One of its authors was Mike Nahan, who was director of the IPA from 1995 to 2005, before entering the WA parliament in 2008. He was the state's treasurer from 2014 to 2017.

The IPA has often been criticised for not disclosing its sources of funding. In 2003, Nahan promised to do so in the following year's annual report. This promise came in the wake of the organisation winning a Howard government contract to research the political activities of non-government organisations such as charities, aid and welfare groups. But when John Roskam took over as executive director in 2005 he reneged on Nahan's promise, blaming the immature Australian electorate. "It's not for us to reveal our supporters," he said. "Whether we like it or not, the

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[27] John Nurick (ed.), *Mandate to Govern: A Handbook for the Next Australian Government*, Perth: Australian Institute for Public Policy, 1987, p. xvi.
[28] Nurick, *Mandate to Govern*, p. xv.
[29] Des Moore and Michael Porter (eds), *Victoria: An Agenda for Change*, Melbourne: Tasman Institute/IPA, 1991.
[30] Alan Kohler, 'The radical right wing speeds the Kennett revolution,' *Age*, 14 February 1997.
[31] Mike Nahan and Tony Rutherford (eds), *Reform and Recovery: An Agenda for the New Western Australian Government*, Perth: Institute of Public Affairs, 1993.

Australian democracy is not so sophisticated that companies can reveal they support free market think tanks, because as soon as they do they will be attacked."[32] The issue stirred again when the Gillard government introduced plain packaging of all cigarettes sold in Australia. The IPA has been a notable opponent of the plan, but is unwilling to declare whether it has received financial backing from tobacco companies.

Roskam's leadership of the IPA has been characterised by a shift away from traditional conservatism towards more libertarian approaches to issues such as illicit drugs, gambling and same-sex marriage, and an absolutist position on freedom of speech. In a 1991 study, Ian Marsh stated that organisations such as the IPA are "deliberately elite focussed,"[33] unlike populist issue movements and mass parties. However, this is no longer true of the IPA under Roskam, given that in recent years its staff have become increasingly visible to the general public, with regular appearances on ABC current affairs programs on television and radio, as well as regular columns in major daily newspapers and websites. The IPA's 2016 annual report boasted of 1378 mentions of its research in print and online media and more than 600 staff appearances on television and radio.[34] Its increasingly youthful staff have also used social media very effectively to reach new audiences. This is not the work of an organisation that wants to fly under the public radar.

The relationship between the IPA and the Liberal Party has been close, if informal. "There's always been this kind of strange relationship to it," said Mike Nahan in 1996.[35] A number of important figures in conservative politics have been prominent in both organisations, including the Kemp brothers, Hyde and Nahan. John Roskam has had multiple failed attempts at winning Liberal preselection, while younger IPA staff James Paterson and Tim Wilson entered parliament as Liberals in 2016. However, when members of the IPA believe that the Liberal Party is betraying free market, liberal principles, they have no reticence in saying

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[32] John Roskam, quoted in Ewin Hannan and Shaun Carney, 'Thinkers of influence,' *Age*, 10 December 2005.
[33] Ian Marsh, *Globalisation and Australian Think Tanks: An Evaluation of Their Role and Contribution to Governance*, Sydney: Committee for Economic Development of Australia, 1991, p. 29.
[34] IPA, *IPA Annual Report 2016*, http://ipa.org.au/images/IPA_Annual_Report_2016.pdf
[35] Mike Nahan, quoted in Wilson da Silva, 'The new social focus,' *Australian Financial Review Magazine*, June 1996, p. 24.

so. For this reason it would not be fair to describe the contemporary IPA as a party think tank, a description which was more accurate in its early years.

Quadrant magazine

The next institution to be discussed, *Quadrant*, is not a think tank at all, but one cannot talk about the Australian right without mentioning this enormously influential publication. Founded in 1956, *Quadrant* is, like the IPA, an 'old guard' conservative institution that has been transformed in recent decades by the rise of the New Right and the end of the Cold War. *Quadrant* was an initiative of the Australian Committee for Cultural Freedom (later renamed the Australian Association for Cultural Freedom), which was the Australian arm of the Congress for Cultural Freedom, an international anti-communist advocacy group founded in 1950. *Quadrant*'s main goal was to counteract the intellectual appeal of communism. It has maintained a small but devoted following, with its circulation never rising above five to six thousand copies.[36]

Quadrant made its opposition to the left explicit from the beginning. Inaugural editor James McAuley wrote in his first editorial that the magazine would "try to be liberal and progressive, without falling into the delusion that to be liberal and progressive means to rehearse with childish obstinacy the rituals of a sentimental and neurotic leftism."[37] In particular the magazine was seen as a counter to the left-leaning *Meanjin*, which *Quadrant* founder Richard Krygier believed was pro-communist.[38] *Quadrant's* current self-description (written in 2008) emphasises its editorial stance as being staunchly opposed to the left:

> While fashionable thought in much of the Australian media, universities and the arts remains influenced by left-wing moral authoritarianism, *Quadrant* has persistently questioned this orthodoxy. For the past decade, it has been at the

[36] Peter Ellingsen, 'Rapture in the right,' *Age*, 22 July 1992; Keith Windschuttle, 'The Australia Council's revenge,' *Quadrant*, 15 May 2016, https://quadrant.org.au/opinion/qed/2016/05/australia-councils-revenge/
[37] James McAuley, 'By Way of Prologue,' *Quadrant*, Summer 1956–57, p. 4.
[38] Cassandra Pybus, *The Devil and James McAuley* (rev. edn), Brisbane: University of Queensland Press, 2001, p. 149.

forefront of the so-called Culture Wars. It has:

- exposed the shoddiness and political bias of much academic historical and anthropological writing
- deplored the politicisation of the arts
- analysed the decay of our public universities from political correctness and managerialism
- debated the place of religion in our society, especially the importance of the Judeo-Christian heritage of Western civilization
- turned a sceptical eye on a range of intellectual fads and fashions including postmodernism, cultural relativism, multiculturalism and radical environmentalism.[39]

During the Cold War *Quadrant* was home to the writings of some of the most prominent Australian intellectuals, many of them émigrés from the communist regimes of Eastern Europe. Although it has always been seen as a conservative publication, David Kemp has argued that during the 1950s and 1960s it was "more interested in the conflict between Communism, Catholicism and liberalism in the Labor Party than with the domestic policy issues concerning the dominant coalition parties."[40]

In 1966 a *New York Times* investigation confirmed long-held suspicions that the Congress for Cultural Freedom had been secretly funded by the Central Intelligence Agency since its inception.[41] More details gradually came out over the course of the next year. While the revelations caused considerable controversy and the left was damning in its criticism, reaction within *Quadrant* was mixed. Frank Knopfelmacher saw no problem with it and wanted to publicly congratulate the CIA, while Donald Horne was embarrassed and wanted to distance the magazine from the controversy.[42] Whatever one's view of the appropriateness of the funding, it appears that few, if any, *Quadrant* staff knew about it, and even if they had, it would hardly have altered the editorial direction of the magazine.

With the emergence of the New Right in the 1970s and 1980s, *Quadrant* was

[39] *Quadrant*, 'About Us,' https://quadrant.org.au/about-us/
[40] Kemp, 'Liberalism and Conservatism in Australia,' p. 333.
[41] Pybus, *The Devil and James McAuley*, p. 220.
[42] Pybus, *The Devil and James McAuley*, p. 223.

beginning to be seen by some as too focused on the Cold War and out of step with the new intellectual fashion of neoliberal economics. A 1984 *Bulletin* article described the *Quadrant* circle as not fitting in with a "younger and more libertarian network."[43] But *Quadrant* did begin to open its pages to neoliberal arguments at this time, becoming a frequent publisher of key representatives of the think tanks discussed elsewhere in this chapter. Probably the most famous piece was Gerard Henderson's 'The Industrial Relations Club' in September 1983, which was an important opening salvo in the coming industrial relations battle.[44]

After a period of upheaval in the late 1980s, Robert Manne became editor of *Quadrant* on the day that the Berlin Wall came down in November 1989. This was the beginning of what might be called a battle for *Quadrant*'s soul. As neoliberal economics continued to take hold on the right, Manne encouraged an economic debate within *Quadrant*'s pages. On one side were conservative protectionists, such as himself, his La Trobe University colleague John Carroll and IPA founder Charles Kemp; on the other were radical proponents of free trade, such as Hugh Morgan, Ray Evans and John Stone. Things came to a head in June 1992 when continued tension between Manne and his opponents led him to offer his resignation. "If I had been a passionate supporter of economic rationalism, there would have been no problem," he explained.[45] Evans claimed that the final straw was Manne's decision to co-edit with Carroll a book on the failure of neoliberal economics called *Shutdown*.[46] "I've never denied that this is an important debate and that *Quadrant* should be involved," Evans said. "My problem was always that the editor of *Quadrant* should not become identified with the protectionists. *Shutdown* was part of a pattern of behaviour with which I had a great many difficulties."[47] But Manne's resignation was never formally accepted, and he was soon back at the editor's desk with the support of the chair of the editorial board, Dame Leonie Kramer. The failure to oust Manne saw Evans resign from the board.

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[43] Duncan, 'New Right crusaders challenge the Labor line,' p. 29.
[44] Gerard Henderson, 'The Industrial Relations Club,' *Quadrant*, September 1983, pp. 21–29.
[45] Robert Manne, quoted in Ellingsen, 'Rapture in the right'.
[46] John Carroll and Robert Manne (eds), *Shutdown: The Failure of Economic Rationalism and How to Rescue Australia*, Melbourne: Text Publishing, 1992.
[47] Ray Evans, quoted in Gideon Haigh, 'Manne Overboard,' *Independent Monthly*, April 1993, p. 7.

"By all measurements, Manne is of the Left," he lamented to the *Bulletin*.[48]

Manne also caused controversy within *Quadrant* with his approach to Indigenous issues. Beginning with the publication in 1993 of his friend Raimond Gaita's two-part essay on the Mabo judgment, Manne challenged his fellow conservatives to grapple with the dispossession of Australia's original inhabitants, and the continued disadvantage and prejudice they faced. By 1997, with the publication of the *Bringing Them Home* report on Aboriginal child removal, the question of genocide was being openly debated in the magazine. This alarmed many in the *Quadrant* circle, who saw it as little more than left-wing political correctness, and eventually relations became so strained that Manne resigned as editor in November 1997. "Because of my attitude to the dispossession I am certain that the old guard were relieved when I resigned," he later recalled.[49] Manne's replacement, P.P. 'Paddy' McGuinness, promised to "throw off the mawkish sentimentality which has become prevalent on a number of policy issues, most importantly on Aboriginal issues."[50]

Looking back on fifty years of *Quadrant* in 2006, Martin Krygier—son of the magazine's founder Richard Krygier—was struck by the eclecticism, the distinction, the cosmopolitanism, and the moral-political commitments of its contributors and their writings.[51] He saw *Quadrant* as essential in exposing what was in the 1950s and 1960s a very parochial country to a wider world of ideas. But Krygier was disheartened by the trajectory of the magazine since the elevation of McGuinness to the editorship in 1998. He bemoaned *Quadrant*'s obsessions with those it despises, chiefly journalists (especially from the ABC and the Canberra Press Gallery), university humanities departments, and lawyers (especially those with a focus on human rights). Krygier's characterisation of an editorial on the pernicious role of lawyers could just as easily sum up his view of much of the magazine under McGuinness's editorship: "a mix of obvious ignorance and

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[48] Ray Evans, quoted in Damien Murphy, 'Loose cannon of the Right,' *Bulletin*, 2 November 1993, p. 43.
[49] Robert Manne, *Left, Right, Left: Political Essays 1977–2005*, Melbourne, Black Inc, 2005, p. 10.
[50] P.P. McGuinness, 'The Future for *Quadrant*,' *Quadrant*, January–February 1998, p. 12.
[51] Martin Krygier, 'The Usual Suspects: *Quadrant* at 50,' *Monthly*, December 2006–January 2007, p. 24.

purported omniscience, pummelling simplifications and omnipresent derision."[52]

Naturally, Krygier's view is not shared by those still involved with the magazine. Speaking as a special guest at the fiftieth anniversary dinner in 2006, John Howard claimed that "*Quadrant* has been Australia's home to all that is worth preserving in the Western cultural tradition."[53] Conservative journalist Greg Sheridan has described it as "the most cosmopolitan and sophisticated small magazine in Australian history."[54] Neither makes any suggestion that it has declined in recent years, and McGuinness's death in 2008 saw an outpouring of tributes from conservative politicians and commentators.

Quadrant was an old guard anti-communist magazine whose *raison d'être* disappeared in 1989. Unlike its British (*Encounter*), French (*Preuves*) and German (*Der Monat*) equivalents, *Quadrant* continued to publish despite the end of the Cold War and the collapse of the Soviet Union. While there was a considerable battle for control of the magazine in the 1990s, its direction now appears set as a partisan publication focused on the ongoing culture war with the left. As we will see in the following chapters, *Quadrant* was a pivotal outlet for the activists of the H.R. Nicholls Society, Samuel Griffith Society, Bennelong Society and Lavoisier Group to promote their ideas to a broader conservative audience.

Centre for Independent Studies

The Centre for Independent Studies has often been referred to as Australia's leading think tank, though its fortunes have waxed and waned over the course of four decades. It was founded in 1976 in the backyard shed of 26-year-old high school mathematics teacher Greg Lindsay, who remains its executive director to this day. In 1975 Lindsay was active in advertising guru John Singleton's libertarian Workers' Party, before deciding that his future lay in the world of think tanks. In April 1976 he wrote to Lauchlan Chipman, professor of philosophy at the University of Wollongong, outlining his plans and seeking his advice. Chipman

[52] Krygier, 'The Usual Suspects,' p. 28.
[53] John Howard, 'A Tribute to *Quadrant*,' *Quadrant*, November 2006, p. 22.
[54] Greg Sheridan, 'Era of the unhinged,' *Weekend Australian*, 19 January 2008.

agreed to become the chairman of the fledgling organisation's Research Committee, and delivered a lecture at the first CIS seminar in October 1976.[55] But it wasn't until April 1978 that the CIS first came to public attention, following a conference it had held on government intervention in the economy at Macquarie University. Paddy McGuinness wrote a column about the conference in the *Australian Financial Review* titled 'Where Friedman is a pinko,' and provided the organisation's address and telephone number.[56] Lindsay was then inundated with messages of support.[57]

In 1979 Hugh Morgan managed to convince nine companies to each pledge $25,000 to the cause ($5000 per year over five years).[58] Thereafter the CIS rose quickly to claim a prominent place within Australian economic debates. Lindsay successfully sought the patronage of Friedrich Hayek, the globally renowned intellectual father of neoliberalism, and was accepted as a member of the exclusive Mont Pelerin Society in 1982. Lindsay hosted the Mont Pelerin Society's Pacific Regional Meeting in Sydney in 1985,[59] and in what was undoubtedly a career highlight, was elected to a two-year term as the Society's president in 2006. A 2004 *Bulletin* article referred to Lindsay as "perhaps the most influential man in Australia,"[60] which may appear somewhat hyperbolic, but in 2010 the CIS was the only Australian organisation to make James McGann's list of the Top 50 Worldwide Think Tanks.[61]

In its own words, the CIS "seeks to create a better Australian society through ideas, research and advocacy that support individual liberty and responsibility, free enterprise, the rule of law and limited, democratic government."[62] Elaborating on some of the organisation's key principles, Lindsay has argued that "the CIS receives support simply because enough Australians agree with us that a prosperous economy must be market-based within a sensible regulatory

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[55] Published as Lauchlan Chipman, 'Liberty, Justice and the Market,' *CIS Occasional Papers*, no. 6, 1981.
[56] P.P. McGuinness, 'Where Friedman is a pinko,' *Australian Financial Review*, 4 April 1978.
[57] Greg Lindsay and Andrew Norton, 'The CIS at Twenty,' *Policy*, Winter 1996, p. 18.
[58] Diana Bagnall, 'How this man controls your future,' *Bulletin*, 28 September 2004, p. 24.
[59] Christopher Jay, 'Economics think tank is growing up,' *Australian Financial Review*, 13 February 1986.
[60] Bagnall, 'How this man controls your future,' p. 23.
[61] James G. McGann, *The Global "Go-To Think Tanks"* (rev. edn), Think Tanks and Civil Societies Program, University of Pennsylvania, 2010, p. 31.
[62] CIS, 'Mission & History,' https://www.cis.org.au/about/mission

environment; that individual liberty is a critical component of a forward-looking open society; that a strong and stable society needs strong and stable families and a wide range of autonomous voluntary institutions; that civil society is the nursery of moral integrity; and that good government recognises and respects such things."[63] Since 1985 the CIS has published the quarterly magazine *Policy*.

In the 1990s, as neoliberal economics came to dominate thinking on both sides of politics, the CIS branched out into social issues. "The war is over in other areas," said Ian Marsh. "They've done their job on privatisation, deregulation and competition policy and now they're moving to the other major fronts of public policy: social issues."[64] These issues included the environment, family and divorce, education, welfare and poverty. But unlike the IPA, which began to take a more libertarian approach around this time, the CIS remained socially conservative. It remains a defender of traditional heterosexual marriage and has produced reports claiming to prove that sole parent families are damaging to children. Despite this, Lindsay maintains that the CIS has "always been about the support of a free society, not just free markets."[65]

The CIS's combination of economic liberalism and social conservatism found particular favour during the Howard years. As Wilson da Silva observed in 2002: "Its arguments for restoring marriage and family traditions, for parental choice in schooling, private health care, baby bonuses, and for limiting multiculturalism; and against sole parent families and welfare dependency – all find echoes in Howard government policies."[66] It became the pre-eminent right-wing think tank at this time, as the IPA slid from public view under Mike Nahan's leadership. This was reflected in the budgets of the two organisations: in 1990 the CIS had a budget of less than $1 million, compared with $1.5 million for the IPA. By 2006 the CIS's had increased to $2.5 million, while the IPA's had dropped to $1.1 million.[67] However, the IPA has since regained ground, due in large part to its younger, more media-savvy staff. By 2012 the IPA's budget had rocketed to $4

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[63] Greg Lindsay, 'Why think tanks are here to stay,' *Age*, 20 October 2000.
[64] Ian Marsh, quoted in da Silva, 'The new social focus,' p. 21.
[65] Lindsay and Norton, 'The CIS at Twenty,' p. 21.
[66] Wilson da Silva, 'Signal drivers,' *Australian Financial Review Magazine*, July 2002, p. 26.
[67] Ben Potter, 'Think tank a real agent of change,' *Weekend Australian Financial Review*, 29 April 2006.

million, while the CIS's remained stagnant at $2.7 million.[68]

While more than willing to discuss ideas with politicians, Lindsay has always been insistent that the CIS remain politically independent. And despite the organisation's natural affinity with the conservative side of politics, it has also cultivated relationships with Labor figures. Former NSW premier Bob Carr hailed the CIS as "a jewel in Sydney's crown."[69] Mark Latham, who led the Labor Party to the 2004 federal election, was a regular attendee at CIS functions and contributor to its publications before falling out with Lindsay in 2002.[70] Andrew Norton, who was employed at the CIS for much of the 1990s and 2000s, thought that "Labor might even be ahead in terms of the people who have spoken at CIS functions."[71] This willingness to engage with ostensible ideological opponents allowed the CIS to broaden its influence. "No think tank is as quoted by so many, so often and in so wide a range of forums as the CIS," wrote da Silva. "None is so well funded, nor as capable of bringing together such a powerful coterie of men and women from both sides of politics."[72]

Like the IPA, the CIS has often been criticised for its lack of financial transparency. Marcus Smith and Peter Marden had the CIS firmly in mind when they argued: "Despite claims to being champions of cherished liberal institutions and the free market of ideas, conservative think tanks continue to flout basic principles of accountability and transparency upon which the health of a vibrant democratic politics must inevitably rest."[73] Lindsay has responded to such criticisms by arguing that its funding is "a matter between the individuals or the organisations that give to us, and us, and it's a private thing, it's nobody else's business."[74] He also argues that because no single corporation or individual makes up more than a small percentage of their funding they would be unable to influence the organisation even if they tried.

Arriving just as the New Right was emerging as a significant political

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[68] Andrew Clark, 'Reframing the big picture,' *Australian Financial Review Magazine*, December 2012, pp. 29–30.
[69] Bob Carr, quoted in da Silva, 'Signal drivers,' p. 28.
[70] Bagnall, 'How this man controls your future,' p. 25.
[71] Andrew Norton, interview with author, Melbourne, 14 August 2012.
[72] da Silva, 'Signal drivers,' p. 26.
[73] Marcus Smith and Peter Marden, 'Conservative Think Tanks and Public Politics,' *Australian Journal of Political Science*, vol. 43, no. 4 (December 2008), p. 713.
[74] Greg Lindsay, quoted in Hannan and Carney, 'Thinkers of influence'.

movement in Australia, the CIS has always been unashamed in its outspoken advocacy of what it believes in, based mainly around the ideas of Friedrich Hayek and other neoliberal economic thinkers. It reached the peak of its powers during the Howard years, as its values neatly coincided with those of the government. Since then, however, the CIS has struggled to maintain its influence, as its rather dry approach of hosting seminars and preparing policy papers was eclipsed by the IPA's media-driven style.

Centre of Policy Studies/Tasman Institute

The Centre of Policy Studies (not to be confused with the UK-based Centre for Policy Studies mentioned in the previous chapter) was established by Michael Porter at Monash University in 1979. Unlike the IPA and CIS (and somewhat ironically given its focus on free market economics), the Centre of Policy Studies was reliant on a combination of government funding and private grants. The Fraser government awarded it one of ten Research Centre of Excellence grants in 1982, which brought in $2.6 million over the next six years.[75]

The Centre's most prominent work was the National Priorities Project, a major commissioned study of potential government expenditure cuts, which was funded to the tune of $500,000 by an alliance of business groups.[76] Combining scholarly research with policy advocacy, it was this sort of work that led many Labor figures to treat the organisation with suspicion. While there was very little the ALP could do about the private think tanks that routinely attacked them, the Centre of Policy Studies was attached to a university and was receiving significant government funding, allowing it to become a political target.

In October 1986, just as the New Right was at the centre of political controversy, Ken Coghill, parliamentary secretary to the Cabinet in John Cain's Victorian Labor government, launched a number of freedom of information requests so that he could make a "scientifically based assessment" of the Centre's

[75] Damien Cahill, *The Radical Neo-Liberal Movement as a Hegemonic Force in Australia, 1976–1996*, PhD Thesis, University of Wollongong, 2004, p. 118.
[76] Tim Duncan, 'Mark of Cain in attack on New Right academics,' *Bulletin*, 14 October 1986, p. 26.

activities and documents.[77] Coghill believed that the National Priorities Project was a conspiracy of the New Right and was determined to put an end to it. However, the requests were viewed widely as an outrageous attack on academic freedom, and Porter threatened to resign or even face prison rather than hand over some of the requested information. Most egregiously for Porter, requests were made for records of correspondence with other organisations and individuals, including Hugh Morgan, John Stone, Greg Lindsay and John Hyde.[78] "It is absolutely intolerable, an outrage," Porter said. "It is the most authoritarian, totalitarian act ever perpetrated on an academic institution in Australia."[79] The controversy drew the intervention of the premier, and Coghill was forced to withdraw his request.

The Centre of Policy Studies was defunded by the Hawke government in February 1987, much to the chagrin of its supporters, who claimed that the decision was blatantly political. As the Centre floundered without this financial support, Porter devoted himself to setting up a private university, to be called Tasman University. He was backed by a number of prominent businessmen, including Hugh Morgan.[80] Porter hoped to open the university in 1990, but in late 1989 was still struggling to raise the capital, and turned to Monash University for help. The project was finally shelved in January 1990 having failed to reach agreement with Monash about the terms of a partnership, and unable to fund itself independently.[81]

Porter's response to this failure was to found the Tasman Institute in 1990. His goal was "to go forward from being a 'think tank' to becoming a 'do tank'."[82] The Tasman Institute would not merely produce papers and publications, but try to make neoliberal change a reality. This attitude was embodied in Project Victoria, the Tasman Institute's joint undertaking with the IPA in 1991 discussed earlier in this chapter. But it wasn't long before tensions emerged within the New Right. When the IPA's Des Moore called for 25,000 Victorian public service jobs to be cut, Porter attempted to distance himself and the Tasman Institute from the

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[77] Duncan, 'Mark of Cain in attack on New Right academics,' p. 28.
[78] Duncan, 'Mark of Cain in attack on New Right academics,' p. 27.
[79] Michael Porter, quoted in David Elias and Simon Clarke, 'Academic outcry forces Coghill to withdraw FoI requests,' *Age*, 9 October 1986.
[80] Mark Davis, 'Private sector supports trans-Tasman uni project,' *Australian Financial Review*, 27 November 1987.
[81] Steve Lewis, 'Lack of funds puts paid to private Tasman University,' *Australian Financial Review*, 17 January 1990.
[82] Michael Porter, quoted in Cahill, *The Radical Neo-Liberal Movement*, p. 121.

controversial remarks. Porter was also displeased with Moore's statement that the Tasman Institute "do consultancies which are under instructions from clients to produce a certain result," insisting that his organisation retained editorial control. "It is disappointing that misunderstanding on the independence of think tanks should be propagated from a person within the IPA," Porter wrote, "with its excellent recent record for resisting privileged interests."[83]

The early 1990s saw the Tasman Institute branching out beyond economics, advancing right-wing positions on the environment and Aboriginal land rights almost identical to those of the IPA. But as the decade progressed, it became more focused on consultancy work, which became a major source of revenue. As Damien Cahill has observed, "Tasman has conducted consultancy work for numerous government, non-government and private organisations and corporations in the Asia-Pacific region and Eastern Europe, providing advice on ways of implementing neoliberal strategies such as privatisation and deregulation."[84] The think tank division disappeared altogether in 2002 when the Tasman Institute merged with ACIL Consulting to form ACIL Tasman, and became solely devoted to consulting.[85] (ACIL Consulting was founded by David Trebeck, and had advised the Howard government during the 1998 waterfront dispute, which will be discussed in chapter 3.)

Beginning as an academic think tank with a clear and defined policy agenda, the Centre of Policy Studies was an unusual organisation in the Australian institutional context. Its difficult relationship with government demonstrated the dangers of trying to advocate for certain policy positions while receiving public funding. Once Porter switched to the privately funded, openly partisan advocacy Tasman Institute he was much more free to pursue his policy goals. Tasman's greatest impact came when it combined with the IPA to provide a neoliberal blueprint for the Kennett government in Victoria, before eventually transforming into a lucrative consulting business.

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[83] Michael Porter, 'Project's aim is to create jobs' (letter to the editor), *Age*, 1 October 1992.
[84] Cahill, *The Radical Neo-Liberal Movement*, p. 208.
[85] Brett Foley, 'Consultants ACIL and Tasman join forces,' *Australian Financial Review*, 18 November 2002.

Other New Right organisations

The 1980s also saw the formation of a number of smaller New Right organisations, each with unique characteristics. There is considerable overlap between these organisations and those already discussed in this chapter. As Greg Sheridan observed in 1986, many New Right activists were more than willing to be active in multiple organisations. But Sheridan, a journalist with views quite consistent with the New Right, was dismissive of the idea that this indicated some kind of conspiracy was afoot:

> When activist organisations begin they like to have a few distinguished people to act as patrons or to serve on their boards in order to give the new organisation credibility, especially with potential financial contributors. Very often the only involvement these persons have with the organisations in question is their willingness to allow their names to be used.[86]

While Sheridan makes a fair point, it is still important to be aware of the people associated with the political and intellectual milieu of the New Right, in order to better understand it as a whole. Briefly outlined below are six groups that might be seen as having minor roles in the broader picture, but which remain relevant to the story this thesis tells.

Crossroads Group

The Crossroads Group was founded in response to the publication in 1980 of *Australia at the Crossroads*.[87] Commissioned by oil giant Shell, John Hyde described the book as the "inspiration of the dry movement in federal parliament after the 1980 election" and a blueprint for the radical liberal ideas that came to dominate the right as the 1980s progressed.[88] In December 1980 Hyde and Jim Carlton invited around forty like-minded conservatives to the inaugural Crossroads Conference, which was held in Sydney in February 1981. Attendees included Hugh

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[86] Greg Sheridan, 'Just who are the New Right?' *Weekend Australian*, 6 September 1986.
[87] Wolfgang Kasper et al., *Australia at the Crossroads: Our Choices to the Year 2000*, Sydney: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1980.
[88] John Hyde, quoted in Kelly, *The End of Certainty*, p. 41.

Morgan, Bert Kelly, Greg Lindsay, David and Rod Kemp, Michael Porter, Gerard Henderson, Andrew Hay, David Trebeck and Maurice Newman. John Stone did not attend but joined the group later on. The Crossroads Group met twice yearly until its disbanding in 1986.[89] As Paul Kelly observed, this group would become "the nucleus of the 'free market' counter-establishment of the 1980s" which took control of the Australian right over the course of the decade.[90]

Society of Modest Members

Hyde and Carlton were also instrumental in the formation of the parliamentary Society of Modest Members in 1981. The group's patron was Bert Kelly, the federal Liberal member for the rural South Australian seat of Wakefield from 1958 to 1977. Kelly was an adamant opponent of industry protection, especially in the form of tariffs on imports, an unpopular position across the political spectrum at the time. (According to historian W.K. Hancock, "protection in Australia has been more than a policy: it has been a faith and dogma."[91]) Following his demotion from John Gorton's ministry in November 1969, Kelly began writing a weekly 'Modest Member' column in the *Financial Review* (later renamed the 'Modest Farmer.') He would go on to write almost 900 of these columns between 1969 and 1987, including periods at the *Bulletin* and the *Australian*.[92] Kelly's columns were considered essential reading for the political class, even for many on the opposite side of the chamber, and gradually other politicians came to agree with his position that tariffs were harmful to the Australian economy. Following Kelly's death, Gough Whitlam told a CIS function that "no private member has had as much influence in changing a major policy of the major parties."[93]

Though a dry economic outlook was undoubtedly the dominant theme of the Society of Modest Members, its initial membership accounted for a wide range of views, even including Malcolm Fraser and Andrew Peacock. But this ideological diversity did not last, as members "became increasingly discontented with the

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[89] Cahill, *The Radical Neo-Liberal Movement,* p. 117.
[90] Kelly, *The End of Certainty*, pp. 41–42.
[91] W.K. Hancock, *Australia*, Brisbane: Jacaranda Press, [1930] 1961, p. 71.
[92] Hal G.P. Colebatch, *The Modest Member: The Life and Times of Bert Kelly*, Ballan: Connor Court, 2012, p. 2.
[93] Gough Whitlam, in CIS, 'A Tribute to the Modest Member: Bert Kelly,' *CIS Occasional Papers*, no. 60, 1997, p. 8.

slowness of movement towards liberalization" during Fraser's prime ministership.[94] In what appears to be a hyperbolic rewriting of history, one member claimed in 1986 that the group was the initiative of Coalition MPs "suffering under the yoke of the Fraser socialist government."[95] The Society gradually dissipated throughout the 1990s and 2000s, but was revived in 2011 by a new generation of Liberal MPs, with former Howard government ministers Peter Costello and Nick Minchin as its patrons.[96]

Australian Lecture Foundation

Established by Hugh Morgan in 1981, the sole purpose of the Australian Lecture Foundation was to bring prominent intellectuals to Australia on lecture tours. Under the stewardship of Ray Evans, the Foundation provided financial and logistical support for like-minded thinkers to travel to Australia and spread their ideas and network with eager audiences of Australian conservatives. Speakers included American neoconservative and editor of *Commentary* magazine Norman Podhoretz, British socialist turned conservative historian Paul Johnson, London-based Australian political theorist Kenneth Minogue and British philosopher Roger Scruton.[97] Journalist Christopher Jay described the Foundation's work as "a remarkably inexpensive method of securing exposure for particular ideas, press coverage and entree to Government and the public service."[98]

Australian Adam Smith Club

The Australian Adam Smith Club was founded in Sydney in 1981, a fusion of the Libertarian Dinner Club and the newsletter *Optimism*, with Greg Lindsay as its inaugural chairman.[99] A Melbourne branch was founded by David Sharp in 1983. Aiming "to promote and explore the further understanding of the principles and works of Adam Smith and like minded thinkers," the club welcomed new members

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[94] Kemp, 'Liberalism and Conservatism in Australia,' p. 346.
[95] Peter McGauran, quoted in Marion Maddox, *God Under Howard: The Rise of the Religious Right in Australian Politics*, Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 2005, p. 215.
[96] Michelle Grattan, 'Libs move to keep Abbott on track,' *Age*, 6 July 2011.
[97] Christopher Jay, 'New Right policy moves out of the politicians' hands,' *Australian Financial Review*, 11 February 1986.
[98] Jay, 'New Right policy moves out of the politicians' hands'.
[99] Cahill, *The Radical Neo-Liberal Movement*, p. 119.

who were on board with its hardline economic stance:

> Members of the club take an uncompromising stand in the support of:
> - private property
> - freedom of contract
> - freedom from coercion by others
> - freedom of trade and enterprise in the market, both domestically and internationally
> - freedom of the individual within the framework of minimal government activity
> - freedom of movement of capital and labour throughout the world.[100]

The Sydney branch of the Adam Smith Club folded in the mid 1980s, leaving the Melbourne branch to carry on the name.[101] It remains in existence to this day, producing a rudimentary newsletter called *Laissez Faire* and holding quarterly dinners. Past speakers at these dinners have included Ray Evans, Bert Kelly, Geoffrey Blainey, B.A. Santamaria, Lauchlan Chipman, Bob Day, Keith Windschuttle and Gary Johns. In 1989 Hugh Morgan received the Adam Smith Club's award for outstanding services to liberty.

Centre 2000

Centre 2000 was founded in Sydney in 1983, and was closely linked with the Australian Adam Smith Club. While the Adam Smith Club remained little more than an intimate dinner club that hosted guest speakers, Centre 2000 was determined to spread the neoliberal message through literature and public campaigns. It sold books via mail order and published a bi-monthly magazine called the *Optimist* from 1985 to 1989. A program called 'Sponsor an Intellect' was established, which aimed to supply schools and universities with books on free market themes. The academic advisory council for this program included Leonie Kramer, Lauchlan Chipman, Wolfgang Kasper and David Kemp.[102] One of Centre

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[100] Australian Adam Smith Club, '20th anniversary dinner programme,' 18 November 2003, http://adamsmithclub.org/Menu.pdf
[101] David Sharp, in Australian Adam Smith Club, '20th anniversary dinner programme'.
[102] Jay, 'Economics think tank is growing up'.

2000's public campaigns was 'Tax Freedom Day,' a 1985 attempt to stir a tax revolt by handing out 120,000 notes with a face value of just 55.5 cents, representing the value of each dollar earned by individuals after the government takes its share.[103]

Council for the National Interest

The Council for the National Interest (CNI) was founded by Catholic intellectual and political activist B.A. Santamaria in 1985. According to Gerard Henderson, it was a front organisation that was "part of BAS's plan to construct a new political party."[104] The group was initially focused on defence and foreign policy issues, but in the 1990s "broadened its focus to encompass the whole range of economic, social and political issues vital to the national interest."[105] CNI board members included John Stone, Lauchlan Chipman, Leonie Kramer, former Western Australian Liberal premier Charles Court and WMC chairman Sir Arvi Parbo.[106] From 1989 it published the quarterly journal *Australia and World Affairs*, which became *National Observer* in 1999 before finally ceasing publication in 2012. It aimed to "provide high-quality commentary which is not affected by contemporary political correctness or prejudices."[107] Contributors have included Hugh Morgan, Ray Evans, Charles Copeman, Harry Gibbs, Peter Howson, Geoffrey Partington, Keith Windschuttle, William Kininmonth and David Flint.

Conclusion

The institutions discussed in this chapter were important pillars in what came to be known as the New Right. Inspired by their ideological counterparts overseas—especially in the US and UK—a new generation of Australian conservatives rejuvenated their side of politics and redefined what it meant to be a conservative.

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[103] Alan Tate, 'Conservatives grab tax issue and run,' *Sydney Morning Herald*, 2 July 1985.
[104] Gerard Henderson, *Santamaria: A Most Unusual Man*, Melbourne: Miegunyah Press, 2015, p. 299.
[105] Council for the National Interest, 'About Us,' http://www.cniwa.com.au/
[106] Henderson, *Santamaria*, p. 411.
[107] *National Observer*, 'Our Mission,' http://www.nationalobserver.net/mission.htm

They rejected the moderate conservatism of Robert Menzies' Liberal Party, in favour of a radical neoliberalism which placed its faith above all else in markets as the main guarantor of freedom and prosperity.

David Kemp was a political scientist at Monash University from 1975 to 1990, advised Malcolm Fraser both as opposition leader and prime minister in 1975–76, and was director of the Prime Minister's Office in 1981. During the 1980s he was an occasional contributor to the *IPA Review* (while his brother was its editor), before he went to Canberra as a Liberal MP in 1990. As both an observer and participant, he is as well placed as anyone to comment on the transformation of conservative politics in the 1970s and 1980s. He put it like this in 1988:

> Over the decade to 1985 something akin to a broad, though not unified, liberal movement came into existence with political and intellectual leaders, publicists and pamphleteers, journalists and commentators, policy support in the public bureaucracy and in private 'think-tanks', interest group mobilization and an apparently expanding base of mass support. Comparatively isolated intellectuals became linked in a nationwide network challenging traditional conservative centres of power in both industry and the labour movement, and creating significant problems of adjustment and accommodation for each of the major parties.[108]

The neoliberals reinvigorated the IPA, fought and eventually replaced the protectionists at *Quadrant*, and created new institutions such as the CIS, Centre of Policy Studies and AIPP, among others. In doing this they laid the groundwork for the transformation of the Liberal Party's economic approach, and to a lesser extent the Labor Party's as well. As their ideas came to dominate economic debates, they looked to areas of social policy that they considered ripe for reform. The institutions discussed in this chapter have been widely acknowledged in the academic and general literature as influential actors. Less acknowledged, however, is the role of single-issue advocacy groups as part of this movement.

[108] Kemp, 'Liberalism and Conservatism in Australia,' p. 340.

3

THE H.R. NICHOLLS SOCIETY AND INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS

In his comprehensive account of Australian politics in the 1980s, *The End of Certainty*, Paul Kelly posited Australia's distinctive system of industrial relations as one of the five pillars of the post-Federation political consensus. "Arbitration was the greatest institutional monument to Australian egalitarianism and its quest for social order," he wrote. "Its longevity is a tribute to its ability to incorporate its opponents."[1] The system was accepted by capital and labour and became entrenched over decades, but in the 1980s this industrial consensus collapsed, and the H.R. Nicholls Society was a key actor in a process of creative destruction.

Australia's industrial relations system came about as a result of the depression and bitter strikes of the 1890s, and the subsequent rise to political prominence of the Australian Labor Party. When the unions' attempts to achieve wage justice through strikes were defeated, "they turned to the state as a countervailing force to the employers' industrial supremacy, seeking state power so that employers could be made to yield what they would not offer."[2] Arbitration courts and wage boards were established in the pre-Federation colonies by alliances of trade unionists and liberal lawyers. The latter were especially concerned with restoring peace to the community, because "the new class turmoil threatened their vision of a prosperous, orderly society."[3] They sought to end the hostilities between capital and labour by creating an independent umpire within the apparatus of the state.

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[1] Paul Kelly, *The End of Certainty: The Story of the 1980s*, Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1992, p. 9.
[2] Stuart Macintyre, *Winners and Losers: The Pursuit of Social Justice in Australian History*, Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1985, p. 51.
[3] Macintyre, *Winners and Losers*, p. 52.

When the six colonies came together to form the Commonwealth of Australia in 1901, the Constitution gave the federal parliament specific powers to make laws with respect to "conciliation and arbitration for the prevention and settlement of industrial disputes extending beyond the limits of any one State."[4] Prime Minister Alfred Deakin set about making full use of these powers in supporting the passage of the Conciliation and Arbitration Bill, which was first introduced to parliament in July 1903. Eventually passed in December 1904 following extensive debate and the fall of Deakin's government, the *Commonwealth Conciliation and Arbitration Act* created the Court of Conciliation and Arbitration, which was charged with settling disputes between employers and employees, or their trade union representatives. Kelly's description of the legislation accurately captures both its benevolent intentions and its negative consequences, at least in the eyes of its critics:

> The philosophy of the Arbitration Act was that industrial relations required an umpire and could not be left to employers and employees. The aim was to remove the need for industrial action by paying workers a fair wage and guaranteeing equity across industries. The Australian system was unique because "it provided regulation not only of the process for settling disputes but also direct regulation of the outcome … based on specific views about wage equity." This led to a system of national wage regulation and institutionalised comparative wage justice, an idea that defied the contrasting economic performance of different industries in varying regions. The Act enshrined trade union power and encouraged the growth of unions on a craft rather than an industry basis.[5]

For critics of the new arbitration system, worse was yet to come. The legislation required that the president of the Court of Conciliation and Arbitration would come from among the Justices of the High Court. In 1907, Henry Bourne Higgins, who had served as attorney-general in John Watson's Labor government despite not being a member of the ALP, was appointed as the court's second president. In his first case, Higgins brought down what became known as the

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[4] Commonwealth of Australia, *Australia's Constitution*, Canberra: Australian Government Publishing Service, [1901] 1995, p. 19.
[5] Kelly, *The End of Certainty*, pp. 8–9

Harvester judgment, a decision which would go on to shape Australian wage regulation for much of the twentieth century. Indeed, Higgins's biographer John Rickard described it as having "won its place in Australian history books as a symbolic part of the making of the Australian nation."[6]

Higgins had been asked by the parliament to determine what was a "fair and reasonable" wage and chose the Sunshine Harvester Works in outer Melbourne as his test case. In making his judgment, Higgins declared: "I cannot think of any other standard appropriate than the normal needs of the average employee, regarded as a human being living in a civilized community."[7] Thus, in addition to standard expenses such as rent, groceries and fuel, he included in his calculations all of those things that a family of five in such a community might require:

> light, clothes, boots, furniture, utensils, rates, life insurance, savings, accident or benefit societies, loss of employment, union pay, books and newspapers, tram and train fares, sewing machine, mangle, school requisites, amusements and holidays, intoxicating liquors, tobacco, sickness and death, domestic help, or any expenditure for unusual contingencies, religion or charity.[8]

Taking all of these expenses into account, Higgins determined that the basic wage for an unskilled worker should be seven shillings per day, or two pounds and two shillings per week. Australia's system of centralised wage fixation was born.

In the words of Rickard, Higgins had "placed the onus on employers and critics to either accept this standard or justify a lesser one."[9] When they weren't able to do the latter his formulation became entrenched. The combination of a minimum wage and arbitration was, as Higgins wrote in the *Harvard Law Review*, "a new province for law and order."[10] Needless to say, employers were not impressed with Higgins's judgment. Not only did they see it as conflicting with the laws of the market, leading to unemployment where reductions in wages might otherwise keep workers employed, but they also felt that the state was taking the

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[6] John Rickard, *H.B. Higgins: The Rebel as Judge*, Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1984, p. 171.
[7] H.B. Higgins, quoted in Rickard, *H.B. Higgins*, p. 172.
[8] H.B. Higgins, quoted in Rickard, *H.B. Higgins*, pp. 172–73.
[9] Rickard, *H.B. Higgins*, p. 174.
[10] H.B. Higgins, 'A New Province for Law and Order: Industrial Peace Through Minimum Wage and Arbitration,' *Harvard Law Review*, vol. 29, no. 1 (November 1915), pp. 13–39.

side of trade unions in a class war. Eventually, however, they came to accept the system, and were incorporated into its structures and institutions. "The duties of the state towards the community," wrote Stuart Macintyre, "the need to mitigate the effects of the market, the entitlement of all to earn a living wage, these ideas became embedded in political discourse."[11]

The arbitration system endured for the next eight decades. Indeed, by the 1980s, wrote Kelly, "the conciliation and arbitration framework had become the strongest pillar of the old Deakin Settlement."[12] But a combination of New Right activists and Liberal Party politicians were now determined to "turn Mr Justice Higgins on his head."[13] This chapter will detail the H.R. Nicholls Society's pivotal role in that campaign, beginning with some biographical background of some of the key players: Hugh Morgan and Ray Evans, both of whom worked for Western Mining Corporation (WMC) for much of their professional careers, and John Stone, the former treasury official and later politician.

Formation and personnel

Hugh Morgan (1940–)

Hugh Morgan is very much an archetypal business establishment figure. In the words of Gerard Henderson, he "looks like the modern-day embodiment of the Melbourne Club at work."[14] The son of Bill Morgan, himself a former managing director of WMC, he attended the exclusive Geelong Grammar School before studying law and commerce at the University of Melbourne. He worked as a judge's associate in the Commonwealth Industrial Court and as a solicitor before moving into the mining industry in 1965. By 1976, aged just 35, he became an executive director of WMC. He was appointed managing director in 1986 and chief executive officer in 1990, before finally stepping down in 2003. He has had two stints on the board of the Reserve Bank of Australia (1981–84 and 1996–2007) and has held countless directorships, chairs and honorary positions for a range of

[11] Macintyre, *Winners and Losers*, p. 56.
[12] Kelly, *The End of Certainty*, p. 111.
[13] John Howard, quoted in Kelly, *The End of Certainty*, p. 111.
[14] Gerard Henderson, *Australian Answers*, Sydney: Random House, 1990, p. 240.

business and voluntary organisations. He is a director of the Cormack Foundation, which was established in 1988 to raise funds for the Liberal Party through its large investment portfolio of blue-chip shares. It has also made donations to the CIS, IPA and Des Moore's Institute for Private Enterprise.[15]

In the mid 1970s, following the election of the Whitlam government, Morgan's interests began to take on a more political edge. As Sarah Burnside has shown, this period saw the "broad agreement that Australia's interests were furthered by resource development" increasingly brought into question.[16] In 1973, amidst a resources boom, the minister for minerals and energy, Rex Connor, commissioned the economist Thomas Fitzgerald to answer the broad question: "What is Australia getting from its mineral industry?"[17] The resultant report, *The Contribution of the Mineral Industry to Australian Welfare*, was released in 1974 and was summarised by the author as having three main elements:

> The first was the scale of the taxation concessions granted by the federal government to the mining industry … The taxation concessions greatly advantaged expanding mineral companies … The second part was the extent of the overseas ownership of these advantaged mineral exploiters. And the third … was the power and disposition of state governments, without any reference to the federal government, to grant great mineral rights to companies, foreign or local, which would automatically mean granting extraordinary federal taxation concessions to the expansion of those deposits.[18]

Essentially, Fitzgerald argued that the wealth created from mining was concentrated in the hands of a small number of companies, many of which were foreign-owned, to the detriment of the ultimate owners of the resources, the Australian people.

To put it mildly, the mining industry—led by its peak body the Australian

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[15] Anne Davies, 'High-fliers fund Libs with blue-chip shares,' *Sydney Morning Herald*, 23 December 1997.
[16] Sarah Burnside, 'Mineral Booms, Taxation and the National Interest: The Impact of the 1974 Fitzgerald Report on *The Contribution of the Mineral Industry to Australian Welfare*,' *History Australia*, vol. 10, no. 3 (December 2013), p. 172.
[17] Thomas Fitzgerald, quoted in Burnside, 'Mineral Booms,' p. 178.
[18] Thomas Fitzgerald, quoted in Burnside, 'Mineral Booms,' p. 180.

Mining Industry Council (AMIC)—was not impressed. AMIC produced its own report, *Mining Taxation and Australian Welfare*, which argued that Fitzgerald's report was "too narrowly conceived, distorted by the particular statistics selected and written without any consultation with the mining industry."[19] Hugh Morgan later described the report as "the Tom Fitzgerald ambush," and identified it as a turning point for him personally and the industry more broadly:

> Its effect on the Australian Mining Industry Council led to a realisation at the time that success in mining was not just a question of bog boring and firing. Success in mining was a question of political survival in a community with rapidly changing values.[20]

Morgan had come to realise that industry could not simply sit back and hope that its good work would be appreciated. Business people had to actively persuade the community in the same way their adversaries did, and he adopted this approach as president of AMIC from 1981 to 1983. As Ronald Libby relates, this period proved "a learning exercise for AMIC in preparation for mounting full-blown public advocacy campaigns such as the anti-land-rights campaign in Western Australia in 1984,"[21] which will be discussed further in chapter 5. In a 1984 *Bulletin* article Morgan was still lamenting the reluctance of business to defend itself. "The private sector has yet to discover the same political *savoir-faire* and confidence which the trade union movement or the conservation movement, for example, have in such abundance," he wrote.[22] Morgan now recognised that public opinion could not be ignored. "Politicians can only accept what is accepted in the public opinion polls," he told the *Sydney Morning Herald*, "so you have to change public opinion!"[23]

One way to influence public opinion was by supporting think tanks that promoted free enterprise. After some involvement with the Institute of Economic

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[19] Australian Mining Industry Council, quoted in Burnside, 'Mineral Booms,' p. 184.
[20] Hugh Morgan, quoted in Henderson, *Australian Answers*, p. 241.
[21] Ronald T. Libby, *Hawke's Law: The Politics of Mining and Aboriginal Land Rights in Australia*, Perth: University of Western Australia Press, 1989, p. 57.
[22] Hugh Morgan, 'The threat to Australia's private enterprise sector,' *Bulletin*, 10 July 1984, p. 148.
[23] Hugh Morgan, quoted in Paul Sheehan, 'The Right strikes back,' *Sydney Morning Herald*, 2 March 1985.

Affairs in Britain, Morgan joined the IPA Council in 1978, a position he held for more than twenty years. As noted in chapter 2, Morgan also raised more than $200,000 for the CIS in 1979. In 1986 he was awarded honorary life membership of the CIS in recognition of his support. Morgan also established himself as a prominent public figure. In a 1985 feature, Paul Sheehan waxed lyrical about Morgan's growing stature and influence:

> Hugh Morgan's eyes gleam even brighter than his hair. He is charming and unafraid. He has become, in some ways, the most important conservative figure in Australia. He is not merely a captain of industry, he is at the centre of a large and growing network of activists who are seeking to reshape the political agenda in this country. They have decided to change public opinion. They are bypassing the universities. They are even hoping to begin Australia's first private university. They are not short of money. And they have decided the issues are too important to be left to politicians.[24]

Other observers echoed these sentiments. David Kemp wrote that "in any history of the period, his will be seen as a most important role, both for his own contributions to debate and for his outstanding organizing capacity."[25] Paul Kelly described Morgan as one of the two "most influential businessmen within non-Labor politics" in the 1980s.[26] By the mid 1990s, the *Financial Review* saw him as a contender for the title of ideological godfather of the Australian right.[27]

Backed by the influential chairman of WMC, Arvi Parbo, Morgan sought publicity through a number of provocative speeches on industrial relations, foreign debt, small government, Aboriginal land rights, immigration and the environment. A 1985 article in the *Bulletin* featured a full-page cartoon of Morgan standing at a lectern, brandishing a bible, atop a pile of dirt sign-posted "WMC sacred site. Keep Off."[28] In his 1990 book of interviews, *Australian Answers*, Gerard Henderson

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[24] Sheehan, 'The Right strikes back'.
[25] David Kemp, 'Liberalism and Conservatism in Australia Since 1944,' in Brian Head and James Walter (eds), *Intellectual Movements and Australian Society*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988, p. 351.
[26] Kelly, *The End of Certainty*, p. 42.
[27] Wilson da Silva, 'The new social focus,' *Australian Financial Review Magazine*, June 1996, p. 24.
[28] Tim Duncan, 'Western Mining's messiahs of the New Right,' *Bulletin*, 2 July 1985, p. 66.

noted a dissonance between the scripted and unscripted Morgan:

> I was half-way through my hour-long discussion with Hugh Morgan when it suddenly dawned on me that he had not as yet quoted from the Old Testament, William Shakespeare or Samuel Johnson. There appear to be two sides to WMC's managing director. The written Morgan is tough-minded, sometimes strident. He has an obvious message and the nature of its presentation makes it memorable and, at times, unforgettable. Then there is the spoken Morgan—also tough-minded but ostensibly moderate and discreet. The written Morgan is heavily into the works of prophets, playwrights and pamphleteers. The spoken Morgan exudes a preference for action over theory, seems more interested in art than literature and even shows some signs of agnosticism.[29]

Henderson had unwittingly stumbled upon an important fact: the scripted Morgan was not Morgan at all, but rather his fellow WMC executive Ray Evans.

Ray Evans (1939–2014)

Ray Evans was named Neville Raymond Evans at birth. According to Peter Costello, he was named in honour of the British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain, but as Chamberlain's reputation quickly went south due to his disastrous appeasement policies towards Nazi Germany, the family switched to calling him Ray.[30] After graduating from the University of Melbourne he worked for the State Electricity Commission of Victoria (SEC) from 1961 to 1968, before becoming a lecturer in electrical engineering at the Gordon Institute of Technology in Geelong. In 1976 that institution's higher education courses were taken over by the newly established Deakin University, where Evans became a senior lecturer in the School of Engineering. In 1980 he was promoted to the position of deputy dean, but the following year Malcolm Fraser's Review of Commonwealth Functions—otherwise known as the "razor gang"—saw funding cuts that led to the school being abolished, and Evans was left unemployed.

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[29] Henderson, *Australian Answers*, p. 242.
[30] Peter Costello, 'The Importance of Ideas,' Address to the H.R. Nicholls Society, Melbourne, 8 February 2017, http://hrnicholls.com.au/peter-costellos-address-to-hr-nicholls-society/

In November 1981 Evans wrote to Arvi Parbo offering his services as a speechwriter. A week later he ran into Hugh Morgan at a CIS event in Sydney, and mentioned the letter he had written to Parbo, which Morgan happened to have in his pocket.[31] Evans recalled that they "established an instant rapport."[32] He was offered a job and began work at WMC in April 1982. Morgan elaborated on the reason for hiring Evans in 2005: "He was hired basically because the material I had read sounded apposite to the sorts of challenges and issues that we felt needed to be addressed."[33] According to one report, Evans was affectionately known as WMC's "corporate theologian," which was reflected in his penchant for quoting the bible.[34] But his main role was to defend WMC against its enemies, and provide the material for Morgan to mount robust counter-attacks. "My role was to engage in the culture wars and provide him with feedback," Evans recalled.[35] His friend Patrick Morgan went into more detail:

> Ray devised the strategy of getting Hugh Morgan … to make a series of provocative statements (that came easily to Ray) on mining, the economy, Aboriginal matters and Australia's place in the larger scheme of things. These talks were designed to elicit howls of outraged protest from the various anti-progress lobbies, which they did. Hugh Morgan gained as a result a high media profile and had to be included, as the authorised "voice from the Right", so to speak, in all subsequent controversies in these areas.[36]

Evans was responsible for most, if not all, of Morgan's controversial addresses, and eventually wrote over 200 speeches for him throughout the 1980s and 1990s, before retiring from WMC in 2001.[37]

But where had Evans's brand of forthright political activism come from? Like many of his generation, Evans became politically active as a university

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[31] Hugh Morgan, 'Ray's Career as an Advocate,' Eulogy at the funeral of Ray Evans, Melbourne, 27 June 2014, http://hrnicholls.com.au/rays-career-as-an-advocate-2/
[32] Ray Evans, quoted in Andrew Cornell, 'Why Ray Evans is always right,' *Weekend Australian Financial Review*, 8 January 2005.
[33] Hugh Morgan, quoted in Cornell, 'Why Ray Evans is always right'.
[34] Greg Sheridan, 'Just who are the New Right?' *Weekend Australian*, 6 September 1986.
[35] Ray Evans, quoted in Michael Bachelard, 'Exit, stage Right,' *Weekend Australian*, 10 August 2002.
[36] Patrick Morgan, 'The Life and Career of Ray Evans,' *Quadrant*, September 2014, p. 78.
[37] Hugh Morgan, 'Ray's Career as an Advocate'.

student. He joined the Melbourne University ALP Club, and later served as its president for one year. This "intellectual forum" had been founded in 1959 by lecturer Frank Knopfelmacher, with the assistance of *Quadrant*'s Richard Krygier.[38] Knopfelmacher, a Jewish émigré from communist Czechoslovakia, was a psychologist, philosopher and sociologist whose social democratic anti-communism had a profound influence on the political and intellectual development of many of his students.[39] At a time when "a generation of Melbourne University students split into pro- and anti-Knopfelmacher camps,"[40] Evans was most definitely a member of the former, as Knopfelmacher's son Andrew recalled in 2002. "Although the ALP Club was ostensibly a social democratic operation," said Knopfelmacher, "it was a tribute to his intellectual impact that current New Right operatives such as Ray Evans actually received their initial political formation and inspiration from Dad's lectures."[41] Questioned about this by journalist Andrew Cornell, Evans agreed that Knopfelmacher had been an important influence on him.[42]

Another significant influence in this period was B.A. Santamaria. Recalling this association, Evans described himself as "Santamaria's tame Protestant."[43] According to Patrick Morgan, Santamaria provided a vital insight about individuals and organisations: "Santamaria got across to Ray that in public life the individual is very ineffective. You need to form an organisation to carry out your aim, because this gives you public credibility."[44] As Gerard Henderson details in his biography, Santamaria founded or was involved in an extraordinary number of political and religious organisations throughout his career.[45] There can be little doubt that these served as models for Evans's later political activities.

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[38] Andrew Knopfelmacher, 'The Nine Lives of Frank Knopfelmacher,' Address at the Retreat Hotel, Melbourne, 21 March 2002, http://www.pwhce.org/textknop.html
[39] Robert Manne, 'Homage to Knopfelmacher,' *Quadrant*, March 1989, p. 13.
[40] James Franklin, *Corrupting the Youth: A History of Philosophy in Australia*, Sydney: Macleay Press, 2003, p. 283.
[41] Knopfelmacher, 'The Nine Lives of Frank Knopfelmacher'.
[42] Cornell, 'Why Ray Evans is always right'.
[43] Ray Evans, quoted in Cassandra Pybus, *The Devil and James McAuley* (rev. edn), Brisbane: University of Queensland Press, 2001, p. 241.
[44] Patrick Morgan, 'A Remembrance of Ray Evans,' H.R. Nicholls Society Annual Conference, Melbourne, 28 November 2015, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vgQetPxULGM
[45] Gerard Henderson, *Santamaria: A Most Unusual Man*, Melbourne: Miegunyah Press, 2015, pp. 409–11.

The 1960s also saw Evans attending Labor Party conferences as a delegate for the Federated Fodder & Fuel Trades Union, but his shift to the right began when Sam Benson, the federal member for Batman in Melbourne, was expelled from the ALP due to his support for Australia's participation in the war in Vietnam. Evans followed Benson out of the ALP and went on to assist him in his successful campaign to retain his seat as an independent at the 1966 election.[46] Evans later stood as an independent in the special Senate election in 1969, and was a candidate for the anti-communist Democratic Labor Party in the seat of Bellarine in the 1973 Victorian state election, but these were to be his only forays into electoral politics. By the 1970s Evans was transforming into an economic dry, largely in response to the industrial landscape he witnessed while working at the SEC and later in higher education. Patrick Morgan recalled Evans's view of the SEC:

> a workplace in which bosses and workers had set up a cosy, closed-shop arrangement where overmanning practices and inflated salaries were endemic, all at the expense of the public. He had then moved to the Gordon Institute at Geelong which morphed into Deakin University; here he witnessed feather-bedding and rent-seeking activities (his terms) and other forms of self-protection from measurable, real-world criteria.[47]

The most important influence on Evans in this period was his "mentor and hero" Bert Kelly.[48] The extent of Evans's admiration for Kelly was illustrated in the considerable efforts he made to honour him in retirement and death. Following Kelly's disappointment at being dropped as a columnist in 1988 after a run of almost twenty years, Evans organised a function to honour him at the National Gallery of Victoria, attended by over 400 people.[49] As early as 1990 he sought Kelly's blessing to write his biography, but circumstances intervened and the task was eventually handed to Hal G.P. Colebatch.[50] When Kelly died in 1997, Evans

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[46] Ray Evans, interview with author, Melbourne, 5 June 2012.
[47] Patrick Morgan, 'The Life and Career of Ray Evans,' p. 78.
[48] Morgan, 'The Life and Career of Ray Evans,' p. 79.
[49] Ray Evans, in CIS, 'A Tribute to the Modest Member: Bert Kelly,' *CIS Occasional Papers*, no. 60, 1997, pp. 25–26.
[50] Ray Evans, 'Reflections on the Modest Member,' *Quadrant*, December 2012, p. 16.

delivered the eulogy at his funeral. In 2011, Evans helped his friend Bob Day establish the Bert Kelly Research Centre in Adelaide.[51] The Centre is host to the Ray Evans Library, to which he dedicated his considerable book collection.[52] In 2012, Colebatch's biography of Kelly was finally published, and Evans spoke at its official launch.

So, in 1982, armed with his informal political education and having been mentored by Frank Knopfelmacher, B.A. Santamaria and Bert Kelly, Evans found himself in a rather unique role: political advisor and speechwriter to a businessman in Hugh Morgan. When the ALP won government in March 1983 things were looking bleak for these radicals of the New Right. But before long the tide was turning back their way, and Morgan cited two events in particular.[53] The first was the publication of Gerard Henderson's 'The Industrial Relations Club' in *Quadrant* in September 1983, in which he criticised the "club-like atmosphere" of Australian industrial relations, with government institutions, employers and unions all complicit.[54] Tim Duncan said in 1989 that Henderson's article "set off the notion that industrial regulation was the basis for a new form of privilege which allowed the so-called representatives of the under-privileged, in this case the union bosses, to turn themselves into Orwellian pigs."[55] The second event was John Stone's Edward Shann Memorial Lecture at the University of Western Australia in August 1984, which Evans later described as "arguably the seminal document in the campaign for liberalising the labour market."[56]

John Stone (1929–)

Originally hailing from Perth, John Stone graduated with a Bachelor of Science (with first class honours in mathematical physics) from the University of Western Australia in 1950. He was then awarded a Rhodes Scholarship and travelled to

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[51] Bob Day, 'Ray's Career as an Advocate,' Eulogy at the funeral of Ray Evans, Melbourne, 27 June 2014, http://hrnicholls.com.au/rays-career-as-an-advocate/
[52] Hugh Morgan, 'Ray's Career as an Advocate'.
[53] Hugh Morgan, 'The Nature of Trade Union Power,' in *Arbitration in Contempt*, Proceedings of the Inaugural Seminar of the H.R. Nicholls Society, Melbourne, February 1986, p. 17.
[54] Gerard Henderson, 'The Industrial Relations Club,' *Quadrant*, September 1983, p. 21.
[55] Tim Duncan, quoted in John Lyons, 'Bunfight among knights of the Right,' *Sydney Morning Herald*, 11 February 1989.
[56] Ray Evans, quoted in John Stone, 'Dinner Address,' in *Fair is Foul and Foul is Fair*, Proceedings of the Twenty-Ninth Conference of the H.R. Nicholls Society, Melbourne, March 2009, http://archive.hrnicholls.com.au/archives/vol29/Stone2009.pdf

Oxford University to enrol in a Bachelor of Arts, where he graduated with first class honours in politics, philosophy and economics in 1954. Returning to Australia, he took up a position at the Commonwealth Treasury, where he remained for the next thirty years (except for the period 1967–70 when he was in Washington DC working at the International Monetary Fund and World Bank). In 1979 he became secretary to the Treasury, the department's most senior role, where he made his hardline position on industrial relations known when Malcolm Fraser asked him to prepare a memorandum of advice for an incoming Conservative government in Britain. "Union power has become a threat not merely to economic stability," wrote Stone, "but to civil liberties and the very concept of the rule of law upon which the British society has been founded and of which it has been for so long such a notable exemplar."[57]

Stone led Treasury until his resignation in 1984 due to increasing disagreement with the Labor government over the direction of economic policy.[58] His first post-Treasury role was as a visiting professor at Michael Porter's Centre of Policy Studies, before he became a senior fellow at the IPA in 1985. He also commenced writing regular articles for the *Sydney Morning Herald* and *Quadrant*, revelling in the intellectual freedom that his departure from the public service provided. In April 1987 he accepted an offer to help develop Joh Bjelke-Petersen's single-rate tax policy, which was to form a key part of his ill-fated 'Joh for Canberra' campaign.[59] Stone was then offered the number two spot on the Queensland National Party's Senate ticket (behind Sir Joh's wife, Florence Bjelke-Petersen), and subsequently elected to the Senate in July 1987. He immediately became the leader of the National Party in the Senate and shadow minister for finance. In March 1990 he resigned from the Senate in order to contest the lower house seat of Fairfax in Queensland, but was unsuccessful, thus bringing to an end his short career in electoral politics.

Following this setback Stone returned to his former role as a senior fellow at the IPA, and recommenced writing articles for *Quadrant*, as well as a weekly

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[57] John Stone, quoted in John Howard, *Lazarus Rising: A Personal and Political Autobiography*, Sydney: HarperCollins, 2010, p. 103.
[58] Kelly, *The End of Certainty*, p. 143.
[59] Paul Davey, *Joh for PM: The Inside Story of an Extraordinary Political Drama*, Sydney: NewSouth Publishing, 2015, p. 131.

column for the *Financial Review* that ran until 1998. Since then he has been an occasional contributor to both the *Financial Review* and the *Australian*, albeit with reduced frequency in recent years. Throughout the 2000s he also wrote increasingly strident articles for the CNI journal *National Observer*. Stone was also a key figure in the Samuel Griffith Society through much of the 1990s and 2000s, which will be covered in chapter 4. Like Evans, he was a great admirer of Bert Kelly, and in an obituary wrote of how he would often read Kelly's speeches on tariffs aloud to his wife late at night.[60]

But let us return to Stone's "seminal" Shann lecture in 1984, delivered shortly after announcing his intention to resign from the Treasury. Titled '1929 and All That,' the lecture drew parallels between the present state of the Australian economy and its condition on the eve of the Great Depression. In particular, he pointed to three problems: "financial mismanagement, protectionism and ossified labour markets."[61] He articulated his strong view that labour is a commodity just like any other, in plain opposition to the historically dominant Australian view that workers should be afforded protection from the vagaries of the market:

> The fact is that there has been in Australia an unwillingness to view the workings of labour markets like other markets—in terms of supply, demand and price. Yet employment, unemployment and wages—the things which do attract attention and concern—are nothing more than the labour market reflections of the operation of supply, demand and price.[62]

Thus, due to the influence of "that post-Federation regulator *par excellence* Henry Bourne Higgins," what should be recognised as simple economic truth was viewed as a sort of heresy.[63] This economically damaging tradition, Stone argued, persisted through the decades with the strong support of trade unions, the Labor Party and the industrial relations bureaucracy. He went on to describe the problem in the starkest of terms:

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[60] John Stone, 'A last trumpet for Bert – Mr Valiant-for-Truth,' *Australian Financial Review*, 30 January 1997.
[61] John Stone, '1929 and All That,' *Quadrant*, October 1984, p. 10.
[62] Stone, '1929 and All That,' p. 15.
[63] Stone, '1929 and All That,' p. 15.

> The truth is that our system of wage determination today constitutes a crime against society. It is, starkly, a system of wage determination under which trade union leaders and people preening themselves as "Justices" of various Arbitration benches combine to put young people in particular, but many others also, out of work.[64]

Given his own proclivity for dramatic language, it is not surprising that Ray Evans took particular notice of Stone's lecture. He was especially impressed with Stone's criticism of Higgins, calling it "the most significant attack on the founder of our arbitration system since Prime Minister Billy Hughes sought to undermine Higgins in 1917."[65]

The Hancock Report and the steering committee

In July 1983 Labor's industrial relations minister, Ralph Willis, announced the appointment of a Committee of Review into Australian Industrial Relations Law and Systems, "with the aim and for the purpose of developing a more effective and practical industrial relations system in accordance with social, economic and industrial changes which have occurred and are taking place in Australia."[66] The committee was to be chaired by economist Keith Hancock, then vice-chancellor of Flinders University, and assisted by George Polites of the Confederation of Australian Industry (CAI) and Charlie Fitzgibbon of the Waterside Workers' Federation. For critics, these appointments immediately exposed the review as a sham. In a paper written for the CIS, Paddy McGuinness questioned the make-up of the committee and pre-emptively criticised its findings:

> As paid-up life members of the industrial relations club, the mutual admiration society of practitioners and experts in industrial relations, the three members of the committee necessarily start from the common presumption that the centralised system of wage-fixing under the Commission has worked

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[64] Stone, '1929 and All That,' p. 19.
[65] Ray Evans, 'Justice Higgins: Architect and Builder of an Australian Folly,' in John Hyde and John Nurick (eds), *Wages Wasteland: A Radical Examination of the Australian Wage Fixing System*, Sydney: Hale & Iremonger, 1985, p. 30.
[66] Ralph Willis, quoted in Owen Covick, 'The Hancock Report on Australia's Industrial Relations System,' *Australian Economic Papers*, vol. 24, no. 45 (December 1985), p. 243.

pretty well and is in need of only minor reform.[67]

Released in May 1985, Hancock's three-volume report made 148 recommendations for change, but nevertheless confirmed the scepticism of its critics by concluding that "conciliation and arbitration should remain the mechanism for regulating industrial relations in Australia."[68] Many of Hancock's recommendations were in line with the submissions of the Australian Council of Trade Unions (ACTU) and CAI, who "were in broad agreement beforehand about the general reforms they wanted."[69] This collaboration was for the New Right further evidence of the cosy industrial relations club at work. John Howard described the report as "a product of the IR Club, by the IR Club, for the IR Club."[70] The influence of Gerard Henderson, who had joined Howard's staff in January 1984, was clear.

For the purposes of this chapter, however, the most important consequence of the Hancock Report was that it prompted Ray Evans to contact John Stone in order to discuss what could be done in response. Evans had already been in contact with Barrie Purvis and Peter Costello, and by September 1985 the four men were meeting regularly to discuss industrial relations. Although they barely knew each other, they agreed to form a "steering committee" with the ultimate goal of expanding into a larger organisation devoted to labour market reform.

Purvis, at the time director of the Australian Wool Selling Brokers Employers' Federation, had a long career in industrial relations and personnel management. He was a founding member of the Industrial Relations Society of Victoria, one of the organisations identified by Henderson as being part of the industrial relations club. However, he was also described as a "real hardhead" who was "renowned in employer circles for his bulldog-like approach."[71] He maintained the lowest public profile of the four founding members, and died in July 2014.

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[67] P.P. McGuinness, 'The Case Against the Arbitration Commission,' *CIS Occasional Papers*, no. 11, 1985, p. 1.
[68] Keith Hancock, quoted in Stuart Macintyre, 'Arbitration in Action,' in Joe Isaac and Stuart Macintyre (eds), *The New Province for Law and Order: 100 Years of Australian Industrial Conciliation and Arbitration*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004, p. 93.
[69] Shaun Carney, *Australia in Accord: Politics and Industrial Relations Under the Hawke Government*, Melbourne: Sun Books, 1998, p. 156.
[70] John Howard, quoted in Kelly, *The End of Certainty*, p. 278.
[71] Carney, *Australia in Accord*, p. 125.

Peter Costello was only 28 years old when he was contacted by Evans, but had already made a name for himself in industrial law, thanks largely to the Dollar Sweets case of 1985, in which he represented that company in its dispute with the striking members of the Federated Confectioners Association, and won. The case was especially significant because it was won in the Supreme Court of Victoria rather than the Conciliation and Arbitration Commission. As Costello recalled: "It showed that the common law had jurisdiction in industrial disputes and that civil courts could be effective where the Arbitration Commission failed."[72]

Costello entered federal parliament at the 1990 election, ironically representing the seat of Higgins. He went on to become Australia's longest serving treasurer in the Howard government from 1996 until 2007. In an interview in his first year in that role he suggested that the demonisation he faced as a result of his involvement in the H.R. Nicholls Society was a spur to go into politics. "Doing all these cases in a system which I considered fundamentally corrupt and in need of great change—and then becoming the bête noire of the ALP and ACTU—I thought, well if that's the way you feel about it I'm going to Canberra. I'm going to fix them," he told the *Australian*.[73] According to Evans, Costello let his membership lapse when the Coalition won the 1996 election, so as to avoid any conflict of interest.[74] However, Labor was still attacking Costello for his association with the Society as late as the 2007 election campaign. By this point he had seemingly burned his bridges with his old friends, with Stone in particular providing scathing assessments of Costello's record in industrial relations.[75]

Henry Richard Nicholls (1830–1912)

The name of the H.R. Nicholls Society stemmed from an arcane piece of trivia that Evans had discovered in John Rickard's biography of H.B. Higgins. Reflecting on

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[72] Peter Costello with Peter Coleman, *The Costello Memoirs: The Age of Prosperity*, Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2008, p. 36.
[73] Peter Costello, quoted in Roy Eccleston, 'The accidental treasurer,' *Weekend Australian*, 16 November 1996.
[74] D.D. McNicoll, 'Parted on Right's terms,' *Australian*, 9 November 2007.
[75] John Stone, 'The Origins and Influence of the H.R. Nicholls Society,' in *Let's Start All Over Again*, Proceedings of the Twenty-Seventh Conference of the H.R. Nicholls Society, Sydney, March 2006, http://archive.hrnicholls.com.au/archives/vol27/vol27-3.php

his career in 2010, Evans called this book his "Road to Damascus."[76] From it he concluded that Higgins was "a nut who, to the great detriment of his country, found himself able to give legal form and substance to his fantasies."[77] Not content with this pithy critique, he went on:

> Eccentrics and nuts are always more interesting than ordinary, sane folk, and Rickard's absorbing account of Higgins, who, at least in terms of far reaching influence, must be accounted as one of Australia's most damaging and delusioned nut cases, reveals just how malleable Australian society was at the time of Federation.[78]

As we have seen, Higgins was the *bête noire* of employers for bringing down the Harvester judgment in 1907, guaranteeing Australian workers a fair and reasonable wage. In 1911, the 81-year-old editor of the Hobart *Mercury*, Henry Richard Nicholls, was charged with contempt of court after editorialising about the suspect political motivations of Higgins in a dispute brought before the Court of Conciliation and Arbitration. Nicholls described Higgins as "a political Judge, that is, he was appointed because he had well served a political party."[79] He was forced to withdraw the statement and apologise before the full bench of the High Court, although he was eventually acquitted on the grounds that his comments did not technically constitute contempt of court.[80]

To most readers this might appear to have been a rather trivial affair, and it had certainly been treated as such by historians. But for Evans and his fellow New Right activists, Nicholls's role as a critic of Higgins elevated him to the status of political martyr. "Having discovered this octogenarian newspaperman of delightful character," Evans told Paul Kelly in 1989, "we decided that he should be brought back into contemporary debate as a symbol of what was right against Higgins in Higgins's own time."[81] As we will see in the following chapters, this was just the first example of Evans's peculiar "penchant for historical figures apposite and

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[76] Ray Evans, 'Particular Principles and Magic Words,' *Quadrant*, January–February 2011, p. 36.
[77] Evans, 'Justice Higgins,' p. 31.
[78] Evans, 'Justice Higgins,' p. 32.
[79] H.R. Nicholls, 'A modest judge,' *Mercury*, 7 April 1911.
[80] Rickard, *H.B. Higgins*, p. 187.
[81] Ray Evans, quoted in Kelly, *The End of Certainty*, p. 260.

sometimes opposite to the ginger group in question."[82]

Obviously long dead, we have no way of knowing whether Nicholls himself would have approved of the organisation named in his honour, but its members wasted little time in claiming to speak on his behalf. Stone declared Nicholls to be "keenly aware of the need to avoid the pollution of the real law, and the real courts, by the insidious incursion into them either of politicized Judges or of the administrative writ of the political executive."[83] In even more dramatic terms, John Hyde described Nicholls's editorial as concerning "the liberty of the subject faced with the tyranny of arbitrary power."[84]

These claims were met with scepticism, however. Academic Braham Dabscheck questioned whether Nicholls was an appropriate mascot, given that "his only excursion into industrial relations—if it can be called that—was his editorial criticizing Higgins. He does not appear to have either participated in or influenced industrial relations in his era.[85] Labor's minister for social security, Brian Howe, was so incensed at the New Right's attempt to recruit the dead for political purposes that he instructed a researcher at the Parliamentary Library to prepare a paper on Nicholls. The resulting overtly polemical document mocked Nicholls's transition from youthful radical to ageing, unhinged reactionary, and argued that he "is a very slender base upon which to construct a legend."[86]

Inaugural seminar

In January 1986 the steering committee sent out letters inviting potential members to an inaugural seminar in Melbourne the following month, where, it was promised, "a series of important papers will be given on the legal, constitutional, economic, philosophical, sociological and industrial relations aspects of what has

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[82] Cornell, 'Why Ray Evans is always right'.
[83] John Stone, 'Introduction,' in *Arbitration in Contempt*, p. 13.
[84] John Hyde, 'The Political Barriers to Changing Centralised Industrial Relations,' in *Arbitration in Contempt*, p. 156.
[85] Braham Dabscheck, 'New Right or Old Wrong? Ideology and Industrial Relations,' *Journal of Industrial Relations*, vol. 29, no. 4 (December 1987), p. 429.
[86] Kevin Tuffin, 'The Privatization of History: Henry Richard Nicholls and the H.R. Nicholls Society,' *Parliamentary Library Legislative Research Service*, Canberra: Department of the Parliamentary Library, 1987, p. 7.

been called 'our Higgins problem'."[87] This term came from a speech Hugh Morgan had given to the Industrial Relations Society of Victoria in June 1984.[88] It was appropriate, then, that Morgan agreed to deliver the opening address of the seminar, which was to be "an 'in club' affair so that we can discuss these matters without restraint."[89]

The seminar was held at the Country Women's Association headquarters in Toorak over the 28 February–2 March weekend and attended by between thirty and forty people, who Paul Kelly later described as "an honour roll of the free market counter-establishment of the 1980s."[90] In addition to the steering committee and Morgan, attendees included Gerard Henderson, John Hyde, Bert Kelly, Michael Porter, David and Rod Kemp, Andrew Hay of the Melbourne Chamber of Commerce and Australian Federation of Employers, Ian McLachlan and Paul Houlihan of the National Farmers' Federation (NFF), mining executive Charles Copeman and, most provocatively, former Governor-General John Kerr. Stone remarked to the press that he thought that Kerr "ought to be brought in from the cold" more than a decade after his dismissal of the Whitlam government.[91] No serving politicians were invited to attend the seminar. Neil Brown, the Liberal shadow minister for industrial relations, requested an invitation, but was refused on the grounds that the organisation wanted to avoid the impression that it was a front for the Liberal Party.[92]

A number of papers were given on recent industrial disputes, providing businessmen and lawyers with the opportunity to share ideas about the best ways to deal with the activities of militant trade unions. Especially important in this regard were the contributions of Wayne Gilbert on the South East Queensland Electricity Board dispute,[93] Houlihan on the Mudginberri abattoir case,[94] and Costello on his

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[87] John Stone, Ray Evans, Barrie Purvis and Peter Costello, 'The Invitation Letter, 16 January 1986,' in *Arbitration in Contempt*, p. 317.
[88] Tracey Aubin, *Peter Costello: A Biography*, Sydney: HarperCollins Publishers, 1999, p. 93.
[89] Stone, Evans, Purvis and Costello, 'The Invitation Letter,' p. 317.
[90] Kelly, *The End of Certainty*, p. 261.
[91] John Stone, quoted in Glenn Mitchell, 'Sir John brought in from the cold,' *Australian*, 3 March 1986.
[92] Carney, *Australia in Accord*, p. 89.
[93] Wayne Gilbert, 'The Queensland Power Dispute,' in *Arbitration in Contempt*, pp. 29–68.
[94] Paul Houlihan, 'A Brief History of Mudginberri and its Implications for Australia's Trade Unions,' in *Arbitration in Contempt*, pp. 91–116.

Dollar Sweets experience.[95] As Evans recalled in 2012:

> It was primarily an attempt to set up a combined think tank and support system for people who were under attack and didn't have anywhere to turn. So what we did then was to bring together quite a wide range of people who'd been involved in different disputes. And it was a bit like a revivalist meeting actually. People, many of whom had never met each other before, sort of coming together and telling their experiences.[96]

Stone accepted his nomination as the H.R. Nicholls Society's inaugural president, but resigned in 1989, at which point Evans took over and remained in the position for the next twenty-one years. Though the first seminar received a small amount of press coverage, it wasn't until some months later that the Society achieved true notoriety, as related industrial events came to occupy media attention.

Furore

For Peko-Wallsend chief executive Charles Copeman, the H.R. Nicholls seminar emboldened him to launch an almighty fight with the unions at the Robe River iron ore mine in Western Australia's Pilbara region. Having taken over the mine in December 1983, Peko-Wallsend was attempting to change work practices in order to improve its productivity and profitability. The new owners were met with fierce resistance from the unions and local management, and the WA Industrial Relations Commission stepped in to attempt a resolution. The Peko-Wallsend board—which John Stone had joined in May—found the Commission's orders unacceptable, and in late July Copeman took the drastic decision to sack the entire workforce of around 1200 people. The dispute continued throughout August, with staff eventually returning to work in early September. Giving his version of events the following year, Copeman claimed that productivity had doubled, and credited the H.R. Nicholls Society with having "played a vital part in giving me the

[95] Peter Costello, 'Legal Remedies Against Trade Union Conduct in Australia,' in *Arbitration in Contempt*, pp. 131–55.
[96] Evans, interview with author.

encouragement to initiate what we did."[97]

For the media, the connections between the union-busting mining giant and the shadowy H.R. Nicholls Society were irresistible. Pamela Williams—who, according to Stone, was disparagingly referred to in the Canberra Press Gallery as the press secretary of the ACTU's Bill Kelty[98]—published a cover story in *Business Review Weekly* which detailed all of the main players in the campaign to take on trade unions and destroy the arbitration system. "Almost every significant union defeat over the past year," she wrote, "can be connected with members of a small group who constitute the H.R. Nicholls Society."[99] Her article was the most complete account of the inaugural seminar to date. The major newspapers were soon following suit with long features on the New Right phenomenon and the numerous connections between individuals, businesses and think tanks.[100]

Meanwhile, the ALP and the union movement went on the attack. Speaking on Melbourne radio, Prime Minister Bob Hawke described the H.R. Nicholls Society as "political troglodytes and economic lunatics," a phrase that has since become part of the organisation's folklore.[101] WA Premier Brian Burke, ACTU president Simon Crean and Hawke government minister Mick Young were also forceful in their criticisms. But no one went further than ACTU official John Halfpenny, who called the group the "industrial relations branch of the Ku Klux Klan" in his Arthur Calwell Memorial Lecture at Monash University.[102] He was promptly sued for defamation by Evans and Costello, as was the *Age* for publishing his remarks. The action was successful, and both received damages. According to Evans, the cheques were signed by packaging magnate Richard Pratt.[103]

But the attacks weren't only coming from the expected sources on the left. In an extraordinary intervention, Brian Powell, the chief executive of employer group

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[97] Charles Copeman, 'The Robe River Affair,' in *The Light on the Hill*, Proceedings of the Third Conference of the H.R. Nicholls Society, Mooloolaba, June 1987, p. 65.
[98] Stone, 'The Origins and Influence of the H.R. Nicholls Society'.
[99] Pamela Williams, 'Union busters: their tactics and targets,' *Business Review Weekly*, 22 August 1986, p. 49.
[100] See for example, Sheridan, 'Just who are the New Right?'; David McKnight, 'The New Right: a consumer's guide,' *Sydney Morning Herald*, 6 September 1986.
[101] Bob Hawke, quoted in Michelle Grattan, 'Hawke hits "lunacy" of New Right,' *Age*, 29 August 1986.
[102] John Halfpenny, quoted in Brendan Donohoe, 'Halfpenny likens Right's tactics to Klan's,' *Age*, 9 September 1986.
[103] Evans, interview with author.

the Australian Chamber of Manufactures, accused members of the New Right of showing "truly fascist tendencies that make it harder and harder for us to negotiate change."[104] Powell's comments led to a war of words between employer groups, revealing deep divisions between the new radicals and the old guard members of the industrial relations club. Geoff Allen of the Business Council of Australia claimed the New Right had "solid acceptance" in the business community, while the CAI's Bryan Noakes warned about "extreme views and simplistic solutions being suggested to solve complex problems."[105]

Amidst all of this uproar, the H.R. Nicholls Society held a dinner at Melbourne's Southern Cross Hotel to launch *Arbitration in Contempt*, a hardback volume containing the proceedings of the inaugural seminar. Geoffrey Blainey gave the launching address, and noted the widespread publicity the organisation and its publication had received in the preceding weeks: "I can recall no other book of recent years whose launching has been so widely and excitedly discussed." He went on to mock the efforts of the government to turn public opinion against the Society:

> the publicity has come from the very politicians who hope that the book will *not* be read. In the last year Canberra has set in motion million-dollar advertising campaigns but hardly one of those propaganda campaigns has been as effective as that directed by the Labor ministry, unwittingly, against this book.[106]

More than 200 people paid $100 each to attend the dinner. The 'no politicians' rule had been relaxed, and invitations were sent to sitting members of both major parties. For obvious reasons, Labor politicians had no interest in attending and John Stone got plenty of laughs when he announced that ministers such as Ralph Willis

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[104] Brian Powell, quoted in Sonya Voumard, 'New Right shows fascism: Powell,' *Age*, 2 October 1986.
[105] Sonya Voumard and Brendan Donohoe, 'Extreme or acceptable? Business at odds over the New Right,' *Age*, 3 October 1986.
[106] Geoffrey Blainey, 'Padded Arguments from Padded Trade Unions,' Address launching *Arbitration in Contempt*, Southern Cross Hotel, Melbourne, 30 September 1986, http://archive.hrnicholls.com.au/archives/vol1/vol1-spch2.php

and John Button had sent their sincere apologies.[107] But in a sign that the Society's ideas were gaining traction within the Liberal Party, opposition leader John Howard and shadow treasurer Jim Carlton made appearances.

Howard, who had supplanted Andrew Peacock as opposition leader in September 1985, was in an awkward position. Along with Carlton, he was a prominent economic dry in the Liberal Party, and was thus supportive of industrial relations reform. But he was also conscious of the need to appeal to the wider community. "He was trying to play to the dries in the party as an IR reformer," recalled Costello, "but he was trying to play to the public as a reasonable man."[108] Associating with what was then seen as a quite radical group was fraught with political risk. According to Evans, he struck a decidedly uneasy figure at the dinner:

> Howard was there looking like a rabbit, frightened, you know, not wanting to be photographed, not wanting to be seen there. And he somewhat reluctantly gave a vote of thanks to Geoffrey Blainey, and he was obviously torn between, "Is this good for me or bad for me?" He didn't know.[109]

Nevertheless, Blainey invited Howard back to his home in East Melbourne afterwards, where they spoke "for some hours."[110]

Pamela Williams, whose *Business Review Weekly* article in August 1986 had kicked off the media furore about the New Right, wrote a follow-up cover story in December. This time her focus was on the role that the H.R. Nicholls Society and other business groups were playing in shaping the industrial relations policies of the Liberal Party. Despite the perception that she was a Labor-aligned journalist, Williams managed to get a number of New Right figures to speak on the record about their goals and tactics. She concluded with an alarming historical comparison, drawing parallels between the contemporary Liberal Party and the ALP prior to its split in 1955:

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[107] Matthew Moore, 'Not quite top set at Nicholls gathering,' *Sydney Morning Herald*, 1 October 1986.
[108] Peter Costello, quoted in Wayne Errington and Peter van Onselen, *John Winston Howard: The Biography*, Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2007, pp. 134–35.
[109] Evans, interview with author.
[110] Andrew Clark, 'In their own image,' *Australian Financial Review Magazine*, March 2001, p. 36.

> The way the New Right has manoeuvred its way inside the portals of the Liberal Party ideology and policy-making machines is reminiscent of the sort of infiltration that took place in the ALP in the 1950s. The tactics then were similar insofar as the Industrial Groups (or groupers) moved into pressure positions in the party's branches and policy-making structure.[111]

The extent to which the Liberal Party would embrace the New Right's radical plan to reform industrial relations was now one of the most pressing questions in Australian politics.

Aims

In their invitation letter sent to potential members in January 1986, the H.R Nicholls Society's steering committee declared that their broad aim was "to give new impetus for reform of our present labour market and to provide a forum for discussion of alternatives to the present regulation of industrial relations."[112] They had long been disenchanted with the state of industrial relations in Australia and felt that the time was right to gather the forces of reform and encourage open debate. "There needs to be an increase both in the tempo of the debate and of its depth and breadth of intellectual content," the letter continued. "Although it has started off well there is a risk that it may slow down and perhaps peter out."[113]

Hugh Morgan claimed that the Society had no edict, and was "only a collection of people a bit like a dining or debating club,"[114] but the group did develop a Statement of Purposes, which were promoted in newspaper advertisements:

- To promote discussion about the operation of industrial relations in Australia, including the system of determining wages and other conditions

[111] Pamela Williams, 'Liberals' secret plan to crack union power,' *Business Review Weekly*, 5 December 1986, p. 25.
[112] Stone, Evans, Purvis and Costello, 'The Invitation Letter,' p. 317.
[113] Stone, Evans, Purvis and Costello, 'The Invitation Letter,' p. 314.
[114] Hugh Morgan, quoted in Anon., 'The professionals form private club to swing Liberals to the right,' *Sydney Morning Herald*, 28 August 1986.

of employment.

- To support the reform of Australian industrial relations with the aim of promoting the rule of law in respect of employer and employee organizations alike, the right of individuals to contract freely for the supply and engagement of their labour by mutual agreement, and the necessity for labour relations to be conducted in such a way as to promote economic development in Australia.[115]

However, these goals still come across as somewhat vague and even benign, especially when contrasted with the furore the group's formation caused. They tell us which issues the H.R. Nicholls Society was concerned with, but provide minimal clues as to where they stood in the debate. So what did they really want to achieve? In order to answer this question we need to look more closely at the speeches and articles of the key players involved. These reveal three main themes continually taken up by the organisation, which are set out below.

Conciliation and arbitration

As the title of its first publication made clear, the H.R. Nicholls Society held Australia's conciliation and arbitration system in contempt. Ray Evans neatly captured the general view when he wrote in 1985: "There are, I suppose, a number of institutions that have contributed significantly to our economic decline, but in any catalogue of them the Commonwealth Conciliation and Arbitration Court, and its child the C & A Commission, would have to occupy first place."[116] Far from campaigning for reform of this institution, they wanted it abolished. Nowhere was this objective made more explicit than an anonymous member's comment reported in the *Sydney Morning Herald* in August 1986: "It really is an attempt to burn down Nauru House [the Commission's Melbourne headquarters] and everything the Arbitration Commission stands for."[117]

The H.R. Nicholls Society did not accept what it saw as the fundamental premise of Australia's conciliation and arbitration system, that employers and employees are by definition in conflict with each other and require an umpire to

[115] H.R. Nicholls Society, 'Advertisement,' *Weekend Australian*, 4 April 1987.
[116] Evans, 'Justice Higgins,' pp. 31–32.
[117] Anon., 'The professionals form private club'.

resolve their differences. In its eyes, implicit in the system was the mistaken assumption that profit was theft: employers taking for themselves what rightfully belonged to the workers whose labour produced the wealth. It wanted employers and employees to see each other not as adversaries, but partners in the same project of prosperity, and this could only be achieved by abandoning the arbitration system. "The key to industrial relations reform," said Gerard Henderson, "is to make it legal for employers and employees to reach their own agreements about work conditions and practices—free from the interference of trade unions or industrial tribunals."[118]

To members of the H.R. Nicholls Society, the notion that there is a power imbalance between capital and labour is a myth. As the homepage of its website states:

> The H.R. Nicholls Society believes that in a modern society there is no intrinsic imbalance in bargaining power between employers and employees and the regulation of workplace relations should be minimal. That is in the interests of both sides and in maximising economic growth for the economic and social benefit of the nation.[119]

This is a total rejection of one of the most basic notions of the labour movement: that employees need to be protected from exploitation by powerful employers. Ray Evans blamed such a misconception on the work of Karl Marx:

> The phrase "industrial relations" is a product of Marxism. The Marxist world is divided into classes, the working class, the bourgeoisie, and the capitalist class, and since, according to Marx, class warfare is inevitable, "industrial relations" is, like international relations, the study of war and peace between the classes.[120]

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[118] Gerard Henderson, 'The Fridge Dwellers: Dreamtime in Industrial Relations,' in *Arbitration in Contempt*, p. 287.
[119] H.R. Nicholls Society, 'Home,' http://hrnicholls.com.au
[120] Ray Evans, 'Are Workers Just Another Commodity?' in Tim Wilson, Carlo Carli and Paul Collits (eds), *Turning Left or Right: Values in Modern Politics*, Ballarat: Connor Court, 2013, p. 153.

Speaking in 2012, H.R. Nicholls Society board member Des Moore ridiculed the idea that Australian workers are susceptible to exploitation. "For the most part it's a lot of nonsense," he said. "You've got over 800,000 employers in Australia. They're competing in a labour market for the services of 11 million employees. There's absolutely no scope in general for exploitation, because we've got a competitive marketplace there right at the start."[121] Thus, once they are freed from the constraints of government interference, each party will be able to enter negotiations about wages and conditions on a level playing field.

It is notable that H.R. Nicholls members almost always referred to the arbitration system, rather than the conciliation and arbitration system. This rhetorical sleight of hand carried the subtle implication that the Commission itself promoted conflict between employers and employees. To include the word conciliation would detract from this characterisation, as it implied genuine efforts to overcome distrust and hostility between opposing parties. John Stone was one of the few to acknowledge the distinction, but nevertheless saw no need for the government to be involved in either process. "In the end I think the arbitration system will disappear," he said. "Not the conciliation system. I see that as quite distinct from the arbitration system. Conciliation processes don't have to be carried out by government-appointed people."[122]

Centralised wage fixation

Allied with the H.R. Nicholls Society's objective to bring down the conciliation and arbitration system was a desire to end Australia's tradition of centralised wage fixation. As we have seen, the notion of a basic wage set by government goes back to Higgins's 1907 Harvester judgment. Though they had reluctantly tolerated it, many conservatives had never liked this state of affairs. The most assertive challenge to centralised wage fixation arrived in 1985 when the AIPP published *Wages Wasteland: A Radical Examination of the Australian Wage Fixing System*, a collection of essays that included contributions from John Hyde, Ray Evans, Gerard Henderson and Paddy McGuinness, and was launched by John Stone. The H.R. Nicholls Society picked up on and expanded this debate. Recalling the

[121] Des Moore, interview with author, Melbourne, 10 August 2012.
[122] John Stone, quoted in Williams, 'Union busters,' p. 62.

inaugural seminar in his memoirs, Peter Costello wrote: "We all agreed on one general principle: that centralised wage fixation had failed and that Australia needed to liberalise and free up its industrial laws."[123]

The economic case against the minimum wage was laid out by Peter Hartley at the Society's thirteenth conference in 1992:

> Minimum wage laws are an example of a price control. Price controls limit the volume of transactions, and distort the quality of goods or services exchanged in the market place. In the case of a minimum wage, the costs are thought mainly to take the form of reduced employment and output, while the gains accrue mainly to those who keep their jobs at a higher wage rate.[124]

As Stone made clear in his 1984 Shann lecture, labour market deregulationists believe that labour is a commodity like any other, subject to the same laws of supply, demand and price. When governments interfere in this process on the side of workers, the market is distorted. As employers are increasingly forced to pay workers more than they are able, they are left with no choice but to let some staff go. The resultant unemployment is not only a disaster for the laid-off workers, it is damaging to the wider economy.

Gerry Gutman, who had earlier made the only submission to the Hancock committee to propose radical industrial relations reform, identified three key problems with the Conciliation and Arbitration Commission's handling of wage fixation in Australia:

> They are the problem of how to adjust relative wages between, say, truck drivers and tool makers in a situation where there develops a shortage of tool makers and surplus of truck drivers. There is further the question of equal pay for equal work; why cannot a toolmaker be paid more when he is employed in an efficient and expanding firm than when he is employed in a loss-making and declining enterprise? And finally, there is the problem of what to do when an expanding firm makes over-award payments and the Commission is urged

[123] Costello with Coleman, *The Costello Memoirs*, p. 41.
[124] Peter Hartley, 'The Effects of Minimum Wage Laws on the Labour Markets,' in *A New Province for Law and Order*, Proceedings of the Thirteenth Conference of the H.R. Nicholls Society, Adelaide, November 1992, p. 7.

> to see this as increased "capacity of the industry to pay" and promptly "flows it on" into its award structure.[125]

Centralised wage fixation made no allowance for the enormous variety of circumstances in different enterprises and industries. The H.R. Nicholls Society argued that this and many other economic problems could be solved by allowing the market to determine wages.

The Labor Party tried to deal with some of these issues with the Prices and Incomes Accord, agreed between the ALP and ACTU in February 1983, just prior to Bob Hawke's election victory. In an attempt to rein in inflation and promote employment and economic growth, the unions agreed to wage restraint in return for a social wage, such as improvements in health, education and welfare.[126] However, the H.R. Nicholls Society saw this as simply more unnecessary government intervention, as well as setting a dangerous precedent in allowing the union movement to become a "partner in government."[127] Gutman argued that an unintended consequence of the Accord was to consign the Conciliation and Arbitration Commission to irrelevance. "Since the Accord," he said, "the Commission's main role in wage fixing has been that of rubber-stamping agreements reached between the Government and the unions."[128]

Trade union reform

This leads us to the third key objective of the H.R. Nicholls Society, trade union reform. This goal was made patently clear when Hugh Morgan devoted the Society's opening address to "the origin, the nature, the purpose, of trade union power."[129] For anyone associated with the labour movement, his conclusions were not pretty:

> the fundamental nature of trade unionism, its subversive challenge to the authority of the State, its jealous dislike and hostility of the family, is

[125] G.O. Gutman, 'The Hancock Report: A Last Hurrah for the System,' in *Arbitration in Contempt*, p. 302.
[126] Kelly, *The End of Certainty*, p. 62.
[127] Evans, 'Particular Principles and Magic Words,' p. 36.
[128] Gutman, 'The Hancock Report,' p. 302.
[129] Morgan, 'The Nature of Trade Union Power,' p. 18.

> increasingly recognised and intuitively understood by more and more Australians. … Trade union power in Australia, and in Britain, is based on a residue of legal privilege. It is that legal privilege which has to be whittled away.[130]

For the H.R. Nicholls Society, this legal privilege had its origins in the *Conciliation and Arbitration Act*, which gave the government the power to "refuse to register any association as an organization if an organization, to which the members of the association might conveniently belong, has already been registered in the State in which the application is made."[131] Thus, those trade unions already established were given legal privilege over any other type of organisation that might like to represent workers. In the view of the Society, this made belonging to a trade union "practically compulsory,"[132] and explained Australia's high rate of trade union membership. "We will only find out whether trade unions are important social institutions, capable of attracting allegiance and loyalty, when the monopoly privileges they enjoy, bestowed by the State, are withdrawn by the State," said Ray Evans.[133]

Though in an ideal world the H.R. Nicholls Society would probably have liked to see trade unions disappear altogether, they were forced to accept the reality that unions would continue to play a role in the political and industrial landscape. Thus, they tasked themselves with discussing possibilities for trade union reform, a subject to which the second conference, held in December 1986, was devoted in its entirety. The theme has been returned to repeatedly throughout the Society's lifetime, and in 2006 John Stone was eager to claim a moral dimension for the campaign against trade unions:

> I want to emphasise that, from the outset, the Society was not solely aimed at reforming the labour market to increase productivity and raise average real incomes. It was also motivated—although this was never acknowledged by

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[130] Morgan, 'The Nature of Trade Union Power,' p. 28.
[131] Commonwealth of Australia, *Conciliation and Arbitration Act 1904*, s. 59, http://www.austlii.edu.au/au/legis/cth/num_act/ccaaa190413o1904441/
[132] Gutman, 'The Hancock Report,' p. 309.
[133] Ray Evans, 'Is Trade Unionism Dying?' in *Trade Union Reform*, Proceedings of the Second Conference of the H.R. Nicholls Society, Melbourne, December 1986, p. 12.

> our adversaries—by a strong sense of moral outrage about the effects of trade union power, operating through the arbitral tribunals, on the lives of the less fortunate in our society. Equally strong was our sense of outrage over the widespread corruption, and even violent crime, to which trade union privilege had given rise.[134]

Stone's was an attempt to rid the H.R. Nicholls Society of the impression that it was simply a union busting front group for big business. Reform of trade unions was necessary not only because their pernicious and pervasive influence damaged the economy; it also gave license to criminal behaviour that would not otherwise be tolerated.

Methods

Having looked at the H.R. Nicholls Society's main objectives, let us now consider how it went about achieving them. One of the first questions usually asked about think tanks and advocacy groups is where their funding comes from. But a key difference between the single-issue advocacy groups being examined in this thesis and the more established think tanks is that they are inexpensive to run. The H.R Nicholls Society has always been run by volunteers, and the limited funds required are raised through annual membership fees. Initially, the cost of an annual subscription was $30. It has gradually risen over the years and at the time of writing the fee is $80, with an additional joining fee of $30. Occasional dinners featuring guest speakers allow the organisation to raise additional funds. Those wanting to attend conferences pay their own way, which covers venue hire and associated costs, but the events barely break even financially. Ray Evans said in 2012 that the balance sheet of the H.R. Nicholls Society was around four to five thousand dollars, a miniscule amount compared to the multi-million dollar budgets of organisations such as the IPA and CIS.

As Peter Costello told the *Bulletin* in 1986, forming the H.R. Nicholls

[134] Stone, 'The Origins and Influence of the H.R. Nicholls Society'.

Society was "a provocative act."[135] Extremely dissatisfied with the Australian industrial relations debate, these men set out to change public opinion by offering a sharp break from eighty years of conventional wisdom. They wanted to change the thinking both of the political class—politicians, bureaucrats, business leaders and the media—and the wider public, without whose broad support reform is exceedingly difficult. Well aware that their ideas were quite radical within the Australian context, they were embarking on a long-term campaign to shift the debate. Their efforts took two main forms. Firstly, regular conferences were held in which guest speakers were invited to put forth various observations and arguments about Australia's industrial relations system. Secondly, they tried to spread their message in writing via the mainstream and business press, as well as through submissions to various government inquiries and reviews.

Conferences

The H.R. Nicholls Society has held conferences almost every year since 1986, including bi-annual conferences in most years up until 1994. Following the model set by the inaugural seminar, conferences are usually held over a weekend, with a Friday evening dinner and opening address followed by a number of papers and discussions on Saturday and Sunday. As we will see in the following chapters, the Samuel Griffith Society and Bennelong Society would also adopt this conference model.

Until his retirement as president in 2010, conferences were organised by Ray Evans, who also came up with the titles and themes. When I interviewed him in 2012, Evans was eager to stress not only the political and intellectual significance of the conferences, but the way in which they encouraged social networking:

> You form social attachments; it becomes a weekend to look forward to. It helps people form networks that otherwise wouldn't happen. It's a very important part, I think, of political life in Australia, which is outside formal membership of a political party, but which enables people who have similar views or similar concerns to get together and realise, "I'm not totally

[135] Peter Costello, quoted in Tim Duncan, 'Waving a mischievous Kerr flag,' *Bulletin*, 18 March 1986, p. 27.

> isolated." I still remember that first H.R. Nicholls conference. There were only 35 or 40 people there, but it did have this revivalist thing about it. So in political life, as in warfare, morale is everything.[136]

But aside from the social aspect, the conferences were a serious attempt to influence the political debate. Participants were usually a mix of business leaders, lawyers, academics, economists, employer advocates and consultants, think tank researchers (often from the IPA or CIS), journalists, politicians and even the occasional trade unionist.

Inviting politicians to participate in conferences was the most direct way the H.R. Nicholls Society could influence their views on industrial relations. Obviously Labor politicians were unlikely to feel inclined to attend, though finance minister Peter Walsh did give a paper in 1987 which robustly defended the Hawke government against criticisms from neoliberals. Following his retirement from politics, Walsh, a noted contrarian in the Labor Party, continued his association with Evans through the Lavoisier Group (see chapter 6).

Far more important than trying to convert the enemy were efforts to lobby Liberal MPs, who were struggling to come up with a coherent industrial relations policy in opposition. Fred Chaney, then shadow industrial relations minister and a known moderate, agreed to give a paper at the 1987 conference, but was unable to attend due to election commitments. His paper was delivered by his more hardline colleague Neil Brown, and Evans noted that despite it officially being Chaney's paper, Brown's advocacy was evident and appropriate for the conference.[137] Chaney then gave a follow-up paper in 1988, but the Society made its dissatisfaction with him plain by republishing in the conference proceedings a newspaper column strongly critical of Chaney's remarks.[138] Peter Reith addressed the 1989 conference during his first period in charge of industrial relations, marking the beginning of a hot and cold relationship with the Society. The guest of honour at the 1990 conference was John Howard, who had lost the leadership of the Liberal Party a year earlier. His awkwardness from the 1986 launch was

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[136] Evans, interview with author.
[137] Ray Evans, 'Introduction,' in *The Light on the Hill*, p. 5.
[138] David Clark, 'Opposition still unable to expand on its industrial relations policy,' in *The Light on the Hill*, pp. 33–34.

replaced by effusive praise for the organisation's "major contribution to the industrial relations debate."[139]

When the Coalition won government in 1996 after thirteen years in the political wilderness, the H.R. Nicholls Society continued to use its conferences to critique the government and urge further workplace reform. But this did not prevent Liberal politicians from becoming regular guests at conferences, including ministers Peter Reith, Tony Abbott and Nick Minchin. Eric Abetz, employment minister during Abbott's brief prime ministership, first addressed the H.R. Nicholls Society in 1992, prior to entering federal politics, then returned in 2010 and 2011 as the shadow minister for workplace relations.

Since 2001 conferences have included the presentation of the Charles Copeman Medal. Named after the hero of Robe River, the medal is awarded to those considered to have, like Copeman, promoted the cause of freedom in the labour market. Peter Costello returned to the H.R. Nicholls fold in 2001 to present the inaugural medal to Barry and Moera Hammonds, owners of a Queensland shearing run who had challenged the dominance of the Australian Workers' Union in the shearing industry. In 2002 Peter Reith was honoured for his role in the waterfront dispute, just five years after he had been savaged for his timid industrial relations reforms. Paul Houlihan, former industrial director of the NFF and founding member of the H.R. Nicholls Society, won the award in 2007 for his pivotal role in the Mudginberri dispute in the 1980s. Ray Evans was awarded a Copeman Medal for his long service to the Society upon his retirement in 2010. A year later it went to John Lloyd, who was appointed as the Australian Building and Construction Commissioner by the Howard government, and given extraordinary powers to investigate union activity, especially that of the militant Construction, Forestry, Mining and Energy Union.

As we have seen, the proceedings of the inaugural seminar were published and released to great fanfare in September 1986. This publication was such a success that a second print run was ordered in 1992. In the meantime, the organisation published the proceedings of each subsequent conference, albeit in a

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[139] John Howard, 'Guest of Honour's Address,' in *Public Interest or Vested Interest?* Proceedings of the Eighth Conference of the H.R. Nicholls Society, Sydney, March 1990, http://archive.hrnicholls.com.au/archives/vol8/vol8-9.php

less impressive A4-sized softcover format. These publications were sent free-of-charge to financial members and made available for sale to others. This process ceased in 1997 after eighteen volumes had been published, and since then conference proceedings have only been published online. All conferences up to and including 2012 are now archived and available for free on the H.R. Nicholls Society's website. The website was set up in the 1990s but until recently was really only a digital storage space for papers, articles and speeches. Younger members have since encouraged the use of social media such as Facebook, Twitter and YouTube, and the website was revamped in 2013 to provide more consistent coverage of industrial relations developments.

Writing

Aside from periodic bouts of publicity generated by their conferences, members of the H.R. Nicholls Society tried to keep the industrial relations debate alive by writing regular opinion pieces and letters to the editor in the daily newspapers. From the beginning this was a deliberate strategy to influence politicians, as revealed in Peter Costello's remarks in 1986:

> Basically, we come up with ideas. The Liberals and others say, "Oh no, this is too radical for us. We have to get re-elected." So we put them out into the public debate, writing articles and so on and the newspapers publish them and gradually people begin to talk about the ideas. Then the Liberals suddenly say, "This sounds like a good idea. Who can we get to help us on this?" And the natural choice is one of us, because we've already been talking about the same thing. Sometimes the idea has lost a few bits and pieces on the way, so you write more articles and wait to see if it comes around in the public debate again.[140]

Though they have often bemoaned the hostility with which the media greeted their ideas, leading members of the Society such as Evans, Stone and later Des Moore became go-to figures whenever the media sought comment on industrial relations issues. All three have been regular writers in the major daily newspapers

[140] Peter Costello, quoted in Williams, 'Liberals' secret plan to crack union power,' p. 25.

over the past three decades. When I asked Evans whether his organisations have deliberate media strategies, he emphasised the importance of the ideas first, after which media attention would naturally follow. "Getting people into the media is easy," he said, "provided you've got something to say about something that matters to people."[141]

Speaking in 2012, inveterate letter-writer Moore lamented the "tragedy" that, because "the *Age* swung so far to the left," his letters are no longer published in its pages.[142] They are still regularly published in the *Australian* and the *Financial Review*, however, and Moore was eager to point out the importance of those papers, despite their relatively small circulation numbers. For him it is a simple equation: they are read by politicians, therefore they are important. Thus, he continues to write to both papers whenever their articles pique his interest, hoping to grab the attention of politicians.

Another method of advocacy for the H.R. Nicholls Society was to make submissions to government inquiries and reviews. The organisation made written submissions to the Royal Commission into the Building and Construction Industry (2002), the House of Representatives Committee on Paving the Way to Paid Work (2003), the Fair Pay Commission's annual review of the minimum wage (2006), the Productivity Commission inquiry into Executive Remuneration (2009) and the Fair Work Act Review (2012). Given that such inquiries and reviews usually attract very large numbers of submissions from a diverse range of interests, it is difficult to believe that the Society was able to exert a huge amount of influence through such methods.

Interventions

Waterfront dispute

Though Prime Minister Paul Keating made some positive moves away from centralised wage fixation and towards enterprise bargaining in 1993, the H.R. Nicholls Society was never likely to be satisfied with the reforms of a Labor

[141] Evans, interview with author.
[142] Moore, interview with author.

government. So when the Coalition returned to power in 1996 they were hopeful that John Howard and Peter Reith would act decisively, especially when Paul Houlihan was appointed to the government's taskforce to help draft new industrial relations laws.[143] In introducing the government's legislation Reith echoed the sentiments of the H.R. Nicholls Society:

> The bill I introduce today represents a break with a system of industrial relations that has been based on a view that conflict between employer and employee is fundamental to the relationship and that an adversarial process of resolving disputes is appropriate to the relationship and inevitable.[144]

But the *Workplace Relations Act*, passed after extensive negotiations with the Australian Democrats, proved to be a huge disappointment. In January 1997 Evans wrote a letter to H.R Nicholls members in which he denounced the government in menacing terms:

> Having achieved office, the Government put on the clothes of pragmatism and collaborated with the enemies of labour market freedom and full employment to produce an act which was falsely touted as a solution to these problems. This is an example of political betrayal which will be long remembered.[145]

The letter was leaked to the press for maximum impact, and Reith suspected the involvement of his leadership rival Costello, a view he maintained in his recent memoir. Though reluctant to criticise someone he liked in Evans, he felt that "on this occasion, the society was used by Costello for his own ends."[146] The Society would not let up, however. The letter was followed in August by *Mission Abandoned*, a 10,000-word pamphlet that detailed the Society's objections to the Howard government's employment policies. Though Reith seemed unfazed by the criticisms, developments on the waterfront offered an opportunity to show that the

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[143] Brad Norington, 'Reith backs anti-union hardliners,' *Sydney Morning Herald*, 25 March 1996.
[144] Peter Reith, quoted in Braham Dabscheck, 'The Waterfront Dispute: Of Vendetta and the Australian Way,' *Economic and Labour Relations Review*, vol. 9, no. 2 (December 1998), p. 156.
[145] Ray Evans, quoted in Michelle Grattan, 'New Right denounces workplace reforms,' *Australian Financial Review*, 3 March 1997.
[146] Peter Reith, *The Reith Papers*, Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2015, p. 127.

government was serious about workplace reform.

Industrial relations reform on the waterfront had long been a concern of Australian employers and governments, and the twentieth century was replete with tense and sometimes violent confrontations on the docks. The militant maritime and stevedoring trade unions, such as the Seamen's Union of Australia and Waterside Workers' Federation (WWF)—amalgamated in 1993 to form the Maritime Union of Australia (MUA)—were widely viewed as having a stranglehold on the docks. According to academic Braham Dabscheck:

> 'Smashing the MUA' represented the end product of an ideological position which had been germinating in the minds of the opponents of Australian unionism for over a decade. Taking on and destroying the MUA, arguably one of Australia's strongest and most successful unions, would have constituted a fundamental, if not irrepairable [*sic*], blow to Australian unionism.[147]

Nowhere was this view held more strongly than among members of the H.R. Nicholls Society. Poor productivity standards in "Australia's most scandalous industry" were seen as damaging to the nation's international competitiveness.[148] Economic consultant David Trebeck first outlined some bold ideas for waterfront reform to the Society in 1988. "A group of strongly motivated individuals, companies and/or organisations," he declared, "backed by a more contestable market environment and, where necessary, access to civil remedies under common law, can provide the strength and cohesion necessary to break the union power which currently exists."[149] He was supported the following year by Houlihan, who also argued for a radical approach to waterfront reform: "There is no escape from this imperative—the power of the WWF has to be broken."[150]

Trebeck and Houlihan would go on to become pivotal figures in the Howard government's attempts to challenge the power of the MUA. In June 1996 they won

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[147] Braham Dabscheck, 'The Waterfront Dispute,' pp. 161–62.
[148] Ray Evans, 'Introduction,' in *The Legacy of the Hungry Mile*, Proceedings of the Seventh Conference of the H.R. Nicholls Society, Melbourne, August 1989, p. vii.
[149] David Trebeck, 'Achieving Institutional Change in Shipping and the Waterfront,' in *In Search of the Magic Pudding*, Proceedings of the Fifth Conference of the H.R. Nicholls Society, Lorne, August 1988, p. 72.
[150] Paul Houlihan, 'Some Vignettes from the Waterfront,' in *The Legacy of the Hungry Mile*, p. 24.

a government tender "to undertake a secret and comprehensive study of the waterfront industry and to develop options for tackling it."[151] In an attempt to break the MUA's monopoly on employment, Trebeck and Houlihan suggested that the government could be a catalyst by engineering a dispute, and then using the *Workplace Relations Act* and *Trade Practices Act* to limit the union's possibilities for legal strike action. Details remained secret until a leak to Pamela Williams led to a front-page story in the *Financial Review* in August 1997.[152] ACTU secretary Bill Kelty responded by promising "the biggest picket that's ever been assembled in the history of this country," if the government dared to take on the MUA.[153]

In the meantime one of the two major stevedoring firms, Patrick Stevedores, was in secret consultation with the government and the NFF. A plan was hatched for the NFF—"whose antipathy to the wharfies was as Australian as Vegemite"[154]—to set up its own stevedoring operation and employ non-unionised labour. In response, Patrick would sack its workforce, arguing that it couldn't compete with the NFF's cheaper labour. This provocative act would cause the MUA to strike, and the resultant legal action would cripple the union financially. After details were leaked in late 1997 about an ultimately unsuccessful plan to train ex-soldiers in Dubai as a replacement workforce, Patrick and the MUA spent the first few months of 1998 in what Patrick boss Chris Corrigan referred to as a "game of chicken."[155] When MUA workers were evicted from Webb Dock in Melbourne and replaced by non-union NFF staff, the MUA responded by establishing picket lines on the docks. Finally, at 11pm on 7 April, amid dramatic scenes complete with security guards in balaclavas and snarling dogs, Patrick sacked its entire workforce of 1400 people.

The following months saw a high stakes legal battle in the courts, and a public relations battle on the docks and in the media. Eventually the MUA prevailed and its members returned to work, but only after making concessions that

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[151] Helen Trinca and Anne Davies, *Waterfront: The Battle that Changed Australia*, Sydney: Doubleday, 2000, p. 29.
[152] Pamela Williams, 'Coalition's secret plan to break the docks union,' *Australian Financial Review*, 15 August 1997.
[153] Bill Kelty, quoted in Ewin Hannan, 'Unions threaten wharf blockade,' *Age*, 4 September 1997.
[154] Trinca and Davies, *Waterfront*, p. 11.
[155] Mark Davis and Stephen Long, 'Patrick feels the pinch in dock war,' *Australian Financial Review*, 26 March 1998.

led to productivity gains on the waterfront. Thus, the outcome was bittersweet for the hardliners of the H.R. Nicholls Society. Houlihan was at first adamant that they had been comprehensively defeated, but by December 1998 he was concluding that the MUA won the battle but lost the war.[156] Though their ultimate goal of breaking the MUA's closed shop ended in failure, subsequent reforms have significantly changed the culture on the waterfront, allowing businesses to become more profitable and pass on the gains to the Australian people. For the H.R. Nicholls Society, it only served to confirm that the way to deal with militant unionism was not through compromise and cowardice, but through principled, radical action.

Work Choices

Though John Howard's commitment to workplace reform was questioned in the 1980s, by the 2000s there was little doubt that his sympathies lay with the radicals. "For Howard, deregulation of the workplace was his deepest economic faith," wrote Paul Kelly. "This cast him as a political radical. The campaign against union power to achieve a more productive Australia was integral to John Howard's character."[157] For the H.R. Nicholls Society, the Howard government's boldness in the waterfront dispute made up for some of the failings of the *Workplace Relations Act*, but they were by no means satisfied.

Speaking at the Society's May 2003 conference, Ray Evans urged Howard to become a "truly great prime minister" by taking radical labour market reform to a double dissolution election:

> Opening up the labour market to those who are presently locked out of it will, of itself, generate huge increases in prosperity. The surest road to such an outcome is a double dissolution election, in which one of the trigger Bills is an omnibus labour market reform Bill; a Bill which will bring to a close the Higgins legacy of detailed, intrusive and debilitating regulation and control of

[156] Paul Houlihan, 'The 1998 Waterfront Dispute,' in *MUA–Here to Stay…Today!* Proceedings of the Nineteenth Conference of the H.R. Nicholls Society, Melbourne, August 1998, http://archive.hrnicholls.com.au/archives/vol19/vol19-8.php

[157] Paul Kelly, *The March of Patriots: The Struggle for Modern Australia*, Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2009, p. 303.

the Australian labour market.[158]

Evans continued his lobbying with a personal letter to the prime minister, but Howard, while sharing his frustration with the obstacles to radical reform, had no intention of taking the issue to a double dissolution. He remained a political pragmatist, and an election fought on one of Labor's strengths was too great a risk.

As it happened, no double dissolution was necessary. The Coalition unexpectedly won control of the Senate at the 2004 election and almost immediately began planning further industrial relations reform. Evans was determined to ensure that the opportunity to revolutionise industrial relations was not wasted, telling the *Financial Review*: "It'll take a huge amount of work to make sure the ambitions of the government are based on solid, theoretical economic grounds – and that we see off the whole industry of vested interests that have been running the show for 100 years."[159] In May 2005 'Work Choices' was announced, the government's plan to radically overhaul the industrial relations system. Protections that workers had enjoyed under existing legislation were to be stripped away, unions more heavily regulated, and the maligned Industrial Relations Commission sidelined in favour of a new Fair Pay Commission. Work Choices faced significant opposition from the trade union movement, which launched a nationwide campaign of protest, but with control of both houses of parliament the government had little trouble passing the *Workplace Relations Amendment (Work Choices) Act* into law in December 2005.

Most observers expected that the H.R. Nicholls Society would be enthusiastically supportive of the legislation, but this assumption proved to be mistaken. Instead, the group argued that it gave too much regulation power to the government and abandoned traditional liberal commitments to freedom and flexibility. "The tragedy is that Howard's Work Choices law, with minor exceptions, supports regulation and disparages freedom," wrote Evans shortly after the bill passed the Senate.[160] Later he went even further, likening Work Choices to

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[158] Ray Evans, 'The Bills We Need,' in *Lining Up the Bills: Preparing for a Double Dissolution*, Proceedings of the Twenty-Fourth Conference of the H.R. Nicholls Society, Melbourne, May 2003, http://archive.hrnicholls.com.au/archives/vol24/vol24-2.php

[159] Ray Evans, quoted in Cornell, 'Why Ray Evans is always right'.

[160] Ray Evans, 'Workplaces left in shackles,' *Australian Financial Review*, 19 December 2005.

"the old Soviet system of command and control, where every economic decision has to go to some central authority and get ticked off."[161] Howard, though, was dismissive of such criticisms:

> Evans said that we should legislate to cut the minimum wage in the name of reducing unemployment and that, as far as possible, we should throw industrial relations to the operation of the common law. He attacked the award system and the continuing role of the Industrial Relations Commission. His attitude was politically unrealistic, as no government could possibly embrace such a radical agenda.[162]

Workplace deregulation may well have been Howard's deepest economic faith, but compared to members of the H.R. Nicholls Society he was a lightweight, and they had no hesitation in telling him so.

In an apparent attempt to appease the hardliners in March 2006, finance minister Nick Minchin was secretly recorded telling his "soul mates" at the Society that though the Australian public "violently disagreed" with Work Choices, "we do need to seek a mandate from the Australian people at the next election for another wave of industrial relations reform."[163] This view was quickly shot down by Howard, which undoubtedly only reinforced the Society's view of his cowardice. Howard was scathing of Minchin in his autobiography: "He had been naïve, had broken very directly with the principle of cabinet solidarity and, worst of all, had played into the hands of the Labor Party. It reinforced a Labor argument that the Coalition had secret plans to reduce protection for Australian workers."[164]

Notably, Howard made no criticism of the substance of Minchin's remarks, only of their political implications. Ever the pragmatist, Howard knew the limits of what was achievable in the industrial relations arena. His criticisms of Minchin and the H.R. Nicholls Society seem to implicitly acknowledge that their (and his own) hardline views were detached from mainstream Australian sentiment. Eventually

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[161] Ray Evans, quoted in Meaghan Shaw, 'Old ally blasts Howard's "Soviet style" work laws,' *Age*, 27 March 2006.
[162] Howard, *Lazarus Rising*, p. 578.
[163] Nick Minchin, quoted in Adrian Rollins with Mark Skulley, 'PM cleans up Minchin IR slip,' *Australian Financial Review*, 9 March 2006.
[164] Howard, *Lazarus Rising*, p. 579.

the Australian people were able to deliver their verdict at the 2007 election, with many observers concluding that the Coalition's defeat could largely be blamed on the ideological overreach of Work Choices.

Today

The failure of Work Choices was obviously a huge setback for industrial relations reformers on the right. But the successful passage of Labor's replacement legislation in 2009 offered an opportunity for the H.R. Nicholls Society to again prove its relevance in the industrial relations debate. The group saw Labor's *Fair Work Act* as a disastrous re-regulation of the workplace, not only scrapping Work Choices, but returning Australia to the days prior to Paul Keating's 1993 enterprise bargaining reforms. Much of the focus of recent conferences has been on the flaws of the *Fair Work Act*, but to little avail. The Liberal Party's fear of an industrial relations scare campaign was made abundantly clear when Tony Abbott kicked off his 2010 election campaign by declaring Work Choices "dead, buried and cremated," despite having defended its provisions in his book published only a year earlier.[165]

The Society was also faced at this time with the challenge of losing the once indefatigable Ray Evans, who retired due to health problems. A dinner was held in October 2010 to honour his contribution, with tributes provided by Hugh Morgan, Bob Day and John Stone. Evans died in June 2014 at the age of 74. He was succeeded as president by solicitor Adam Bisits, who had been on the board since 2003. Bisits attempted to reinvigorate the Society, but with mixed success. In June 2011 he recruited public relations consultant Ian Hanke, a known hardliner who had advised Peter Reith during the waterfront dispute and Kevin Andrews during the Work Choices debate.[166] It was hoped that Hanke would be able to push the opposition towards a more combative approach, but the Coalition remained wary, unwilling to risk the chance of an election victory for the sake of appeasing a

[165] Tony Abbott, *Battlelines* (rev. edn), Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2013, pp. 87–90.
[166] Katharine Murphy, 'Lib MPs called to crusade,' *Age*, 8 June 2011.

minority of radicals. In 2012, Health Services Union corruption whistleblower Kathy Jackson gave the dinner address at the Society's conference, but this publicity coup later led to embarrassment, when Jackson faced serious corruption charges of her own.

The 2013 election brought renewed hope, not only because the Coalition returned to power, but also due to the election to the Senate of H.R. Nicholls Society board member Bob Day, representing the Family First party. Day had hoped to replace the retiring Alexander Downer in the lower house in 2008, but believes Downer "pulled the ultimate swiftie" on him, and ensured he failed to win Liberal preselection. He then left the Liberal Party and joined Family First.[167] Meanwhile, though the industrial relations policy the Coalition had taken to the election was viewed as timid, the new government was seen as "potentially receptive" to the Society's agenda.[168] The most promising development came in early 2014, when Tony Abbott announced the establishment of the Royal Commission into Trade Union Governance and Corruption. But despite its intense focus on exposing corrupt elements within the union movement, the Royal Commission's final report did not manage to significantly change the terms of the debate.

There was another glimmer of hope when Malcolm Turnbull replaced Tony Abbott as prime minister in September 2015, as H.R. Nicholls Society member Kelly O'Dwyer was promoted to Cabinet. But aside from its re-establishment of the Howard-era Australian Building and Construction Commission, the government has continued to tread cautiously. The Work Choices debate revealed an inconvenient truth for members of the H.R. Nicholls Society: though they would like deregulation of the workplace to go further, the majority of Australian voters disagree, and seem satisfied with Labor's industrial relations framework. The Society is now a lonely, marginal voice, and its poorly attended recent conferences are a far cry from what Evans described as the "revivalist" atmosphere of the early years.

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[167] Adam Creighton, 'A shock to the Senate,' *Weekend Australian*, 28 September 2013.
[168] Adam Bisits, 'President's report,' H.R. Nicholls Society, December 2013, http://hrnicholls.com.au/annual-report/

Conclusion

The fortunes of the H.R. Nicholls Society have ebbed and flowed throughout its three decades. Its influence has been variously dismissed and overstated by both supporters and detractors. As we have seen, Labor figures were quick to denigrate the group when it first emerged. But in December 1989, a confidential NSW Labor Council pre-election report was leaked to the press, and included the following alarming pronouncements:

> The likely election of the Kemps, Costellos, McLachlans, Copemans etc. combined with the Stones, Howards, Hewsons etc. essentially means the H.R. Nicholls Society will be in control of industrial relations. […] The H.R. Nicholls Society has won the intellectual and political debate and will soon have its collective hands on the levers of power.[169]

The leaking of this report was viewed as an act of disloyalty to Labor and its authors immediately faced calls that they be sacked from the party. Evans later recalled how pleased the Society was with the attention, but lamented the fact that the predictions proved incorrect when the Coalition finally won office in 1996.[170]

Josh Bornstein, a lawyer who represented the MUA during the waterfront dispute, argued in 2000 that the Howard government's industrial relations policy was being driven by the H.R. Nicholls Society and Des Moore's Institute for Private Enterprise.[171] Just a few years later, as the Society's renewed campaign for full deregulation of the labour market got under way, a *Financial Review* article affected surprise that the group was still in existence.[172] Following the implementation of Work Choices, the Society was again being described as an enormously influential backroom player in conservative politics. Shaun Carney described it as "the most effective political pressure group since the National Civic

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[169] Michael Costa and Mark Duffy, 'We must change, even if it conflicts with ACTU,' *Weekend Australian*, 2 December 1989.
[170] Ray Evans, 'A Retrospective,' in *Tenth Anniversary Conference*, Proceedings of the Seventeenth Conference of the H.R. Nicholls Society, Melbourne, May 1996, http://archive.hrnicholls.com.au/archives/vol17/vol17-11.php
[171] Paul Robinson, 'Contempt of court,' *Age*, 12 June 2000.
[172] Marcus Priest, 'Remember HR Nicholls? A new industrial agenda is born,' *Weekend Australian Financial Review*, 20 November 2004.

Council in its heyday in the 1950s and 1960s."[173] Michael Bachelard agreed, calling it "one of the most influential non-government groups in the country in the past twenty years."[174]

Though John Howard was always sympathetic to the Society's aims, he kept the group at arms length throughout his prime ministership, keenly aware of the necessity of not appearing too radical to the voting public. Thus, the Society's influence on government policy was incremental and indirect. Upon his retirement, Evans highlighted the importance of political debate and networking over and above any direct influence on policy:

> What did we accomplish? We provided a network, a fortress complete with a magazine loaded with arguments, experiences of successful battles with trade union intimidation, and contacts where people could find help and succour. […] What the H.R. Nicholls Society did was to raise the flag of freedom in a vital sphere in Australian life.[175]

It cannot be doubted that the H.R. Nicholls Society played an important role in transforming the debate about centralised wage fixation and arbitration, one of the pillars of the twentieth century Australian Settlement.

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[173] Shaun Carney, 'Howard's big IR gamble,' *Age*, 1 April 2006.
[174] Michael Bachelard, 'Right-wing warriors who changed the workplace,' *Age*, 15 December 2007
[175] Evans, 'Particular Principles and Magic Words,' p. 37.

4

THE SAMUEL GRIFFITH SOCIETY AND THE CONSTITUTION

The Australian Constitution was drafted by delegates of the various Australian colonies at a series of Constitutional Conventions in Sydney in 1891, then in Adelaide, Sydney and Melbourne throughout 1897–98. Of course, at this time the delegates were all British subjects, so naturally they saw the British Westminster system of responsible government as the most useful constitutional model to work from. But they were also strongly influenced by the federalist system of the United States, in which sovereignty was divided between state and national governments.

Though the convention delegates were almost exclusively of British origin, they had also come to identify strongly with their respective colonies. According to Geoffrey Sawer:

> an overwhelming majority of the delegates at all stages were State-righters. It was federation they aimed at, and furthermore a federation in which there was a strong emphasis on preserving the structure and powers of the States so far as consistent with union for specific and limited purposes. Few consistently advocated outright unification."[1]

Thus, the founders came up with a "hybrid constitutional system,"[2] combining the two constitutional principles of responsible government and federalism. The British monarchy was retained and the colonies "agreed to unite in one indissoluble Federal Commonwealth under the Crown of the United Kingdom of Great Britain

[1] Geoffrey Sawer, *The Australian Constitution*, Canberra: Australian Government Publishing Service, 1975, p. 23.
[2] Brian Galligan, *A Federal Republic: Australia's Constitutional System of Government*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995, p. 38.

and Ireland."[3] In a highly influential 1980 article, political scientist Elaine Thompson referred to Australia's unique blend of both Westminster and Washington influences in its constitutional framework as "the Washminster mutation."[4]

Brian Galligan has identified three defining attributes of a federal system of government: "first, the existence of two levels of government, national and state; second, the guarantee that neither has sovereignty over the other; and third, some allocation of powers between the two."[5] Australia's founding fathers adopted three features of the US Constitution to codify this system: a Senate (sometimes known as the states' house), in which each state is represented equally regardless of population differences; constitutionally specified division of powers between the Commonwealth and states; and judicial review, whereby a court (in Australia's case the High Court) acts as a judicial umpire in disputes between the Commonwealth and states.[6]

From a federalist point of view, the first two decades after Federation saw the High Court treating the Commonwealth and states as equal, coordinate partners. However, the High Court's judgment in the 1920 Engineers' case brought radical change. The judgment is widely considered to be one of the most important in Australian history, which "has had a profound impact on the course of later decisions and has become a touchstone against which those later decisions are constantly measured."[7]

At issue in the Engineers' case was the question of whether the Commonwealth had the power to legislate in industrial disputes that extended beyond the limits of one state, and have that legislation binding on all states involved. In a five to one majority, the High Court ruled that the Commonwealth did have such power, overturning a key element of its approach to the Constitution to that point. For non-legal minds the case's focus on doctrines of

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[3] Commonwealth of Australia, *Australia's Constitution*, Canberra: Australian Government Publishing Service, [1901] 1995, p. 5.
[4] Elaine Thompson, 'The "Washminster" Mutation,' *Politics*, vol. 15, no. 2 (1980), pp. 32–40.
[5] Galligan, *A Federal Republic*, p. 32.
[6] Andrew Parkin and John Summers, 'The Constitutional Framework,' in Dennis Woodward, Andrew Parkin and John Summers (eds), *Government, Politics, Power and Policy in Australia* (9th edn), Sydney: Pearson Australia, 2010, pp. 57–58.
[7] Michael Coper and George Williams (eds), *How Many Cheers for Engineers?* Sydney: Federation Press, 1997, p. xiii.

intergovernmental immunities and reserved state powers may appear abstract and obscure, but the practical result was that the Commonwealth was increasingly permitted to move in on areas previously thought to be the sole preserve of the states.

Further blows to federalism came with the Uniform Tax cases of 1942 and 1957. The first case upheld four pieces of Commonwealth legislation, the obvious intent of which was to take over the income taxing powers of the states. Though the decision did not preclude the states from raising their own income taxes, the reality was that the rate set by the Commonwealth rendered it practically impossible for the states to do so. The second case affirmed the constitutionality of the first, albeit with one minor exception. The resultant vertical fiscal imbalance, in which the states have significant financial responsibilities yet little ability to raise revenue, has left the states dependent on the Commonwealth for revenue ever since.

The strength of the Australian federal system has also been complicated by political partisanship. The conservative side of politics has since federation been supportive of federalism, stemming from "a deep if vague understanding of the link between 'federalism' on the one hand, and notions like 'liberalism', 'conservatism' and even 'democracy' on the other."[8] But this support has not always been as consistent as some would like. "From its very beginnings," wrote John Roskam, "the Liberal Party's rhetorical commitment to federalism was strong. But once the party had achieved government, that commitment in practice was weak."[9] This ambivalence was captured by Robert Menzies in a 1966 speech:

> Now, I am a Federalist myself. I believe, as I am sure most of you do, that in the division of power, in the demarcation of powers between a Central Government and the State governments, there resides one of the true protections of individual freedom. And yet how true it is that as the world grows, as the world becomes more complex, as international affairs engage our attention more and more, and affect our lives more and more, it is frequently ludicrous that the National Parliament, the National Government,

[8] Greg Craven, 'A Constitution that Deserves Better Mates,' *IPA Review*, March 2005, p. 25.
[9] John Roskam, 'Federalism and the Liberal Party,' in *Upholding the Australian Constitution*, vol. 18, Proceedings of the Eighteenth Conference of the Samuel Griffith Society, Canberra, May 2006, p. 371.

> should be without power to do things which are really needed for the national security and advancement.[10]

Though its status as a federalist or states' rights party has become increasingly tenuous, the Liberal Party still maintains its formal commitment to federalism to this day. "We believe," says its official platform, "in a federal system of government and the decentralisation of power, with local decisions being made at the local level."[11]

The Australian Labor Party, on the other hand, has never been shy in declaring its dissatisfaction with federalism, viewing it as an unnecessary obstruction of its objective to enact great social reforms. In a 1957 lecture, provocatively titled 'The Constitution versus Labor,' Gough Whitlam outlined Labor's concerns:

> Much of the frustration, and even demoralisation, in Labor ranks in recent years flows from the fact that the Australian Labor Party, unlike the British and New Zealand Parties, is unable to perform, and therefore finds it useless to promise, its basic policies. It has been handicapped, as they were not, by a Constitution framed in such a way as to make it difficult to carry out Labor objectives and interpreted in such a way as to make it impossible to carry them out.[12]

Whitlam's view was shared by his bitter political foe, Malcolm Fraser, who in January 1975 argued that "a federalist system of government offers Liberals many protections against those elements of socialism which Liberals abhor."[13] However, for Brian Galligan, Fraser's later record in government only served to confirm that "federalism is taken for granted on the Liberal and conservative side of politics and only championed when under perceived threat from federal Labor

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[10] Robert Menzies, *Central Power in the Australian Commonwealth: An Examination of the Growth of Commonwealth Power in the Australian Federation*, London: Cassell, 1967, p. 24.
[11] Liberal Party of Australia, *Federal Platform*, December 2015, https://cdn.liberal.org.au/pdf/FederalPlatform_TN.PDF
[12] E.G. Whitlam, *On Australia's Constitution*, Melbourne: Widescope, 1977, p. 16.
[13] Malcolm Fraser, 'National Objectives: Social, Economic and Political Goals,' *Australian Quarterly*, vol. 47, no. 1 (March 1975), p. 25.

governments."[14] Events in the 1980s strengthened Galligan's thesis and eventually led to the formation of the Samuel Griffith Society.

Formation and personnel

Constitution under attack

By the late 1970s and into the 1980s, defenders of the Australian Constitution became increasingly wary of threats coming from the ALP. In 1979 Bob Hawke delivered the ABC's Boyer Lectures. At the time Hawke was president of the Australian Council of Trade Unions, and was widely coming to be seen as a future Labor prime minister. Suggesting that Australians "have come to be infatuated by an assiduously cultivated phenomenon called 'States' Rights'," Hawke's lectures were a forthright challenge to the very nature of Australia's federal system.[15] He went as far as to call for states to be abolished, arguing that they "no longer serve their original purpose and act as a positive impediment to achieving good government in our current community."[16] For John Stone, whose opposition to centralism had been building through the 1970s, the threat could hardly have been more explicit.

One of Hawke's main election promises in 1983 was to prevent Tasmania's Hydro-Electric Commission from building the Gordon-below-Franklin Dam, which environmentalists argued would destroy much of south-west Tasmania's pristine wilderness. Upon winning the election, Hawke immediately set about honouring this promise by enacting legislation prohibiting construction of the dam. The Tasmanian government, believing that this was a state matter in which the Commonwealth had no power to intervene, ordered work to continue. The Commonwealth then took the case to the High Court in what became known as the Tasmanian Dam case. In a controversial judgment, the Court ruled in favour of the Commonwealth on the grounds that the site had been included on UNESCO's World Heritage List, and therefore fell under the Commonwealth's external affairs

[14] Galligan, *A Federal Republic*, p. 49.
[15] R.J.L. Hawke, *The Resolution of Conflict: 1979 Boyer Lectures*, Sydney: Australian Broadcasting Commission, 1979, p. 15.
[16] Hawke, *The Resolution of Conflict*, pp. 18–19.

power, which covers international treaties. This very course of action had actually been recommended by Gough Whitlam in the lecture cited above:

> A Labor Government should make more use of the external affairs power to extend its legislative competence, in particular by implementing conventions and treaties, such as those made through the International Labor Organisation and the World Health Organisation. [...] There would seem good ground for believing that the High Court would not be prone to invalidate Commonwealth legislation in such fields.[17]

Needless to say, federalists—both inside and outside the Liberal-National Coalition—were appalled. Here was what seemed like collusion between the Labor Party and the High Court to manipulate the meaning of the Constitution to achieve transparently political ends. Nevertheless, the environmentalists had won and there was seemingly nothing that appeals to the federalist principles of the Constitution could do about it. Paul Kelly has argued that this should have been a wake-up call for conservatives to unshackle themselves from the "dead weight" of federalism: "The Coalition fell victim to its states rights philosophy at a time when public opinion was behind the use of Commonwealth powers to protect the environment in the national interest."[18] Misuse of the external affairs power would later become one of the most persistent topics of discussion (and irritation) at Samuel Griffith Society conferences.

The attacks continued. In 1985 attorney-general Lionel Bowen announced the Constitutional Commission, a panel of hand-picked eminent lawyers provided with the following terms of reference:

> To inquire into and report, on or before 30 June 1988, on the revision of the Australian Constitution to:
>
> (a) adequately reflect Australia's status as an independent nation and a Federal Parliamentary democracy;
>
> (b) provide the most suitable framework for the economic, social and political development of Australia as a federation;

[17] Whitlam, *On Australia's Constitution*, pp. 40–1.
[18] Paul Kelly, *The End of Certainty: The Story of the 1980s*, Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1992, p. 528.

(c) recognise an appropriate division of responsibilities between the Commonwealth, the States, self-governing Territories and local government;
(d) ensure that democratic rights are guaranteed.[19]

Though these terms indicated that Labor had reconciled with federalism, the threat to the Constitution by no means ended there. The Commission produced a 1200-page report with thirty pages of recommendations for constitutional reform, although most were largely speculative with no realistic prospect of enactment.

The government did, however, take some specific constitutional amendments to the people in four simultaneous referendums in September 1988. The proposals—to provide for four-year parliamentary terms; to provide for fair and democratic elections throughout Australia; to recognise local government; and to extend certain rights and freedoms—were chosen by the attorney-general for their reasonable prospects of success.[20] However, all were defeated by huge margins, with the highest national yes vote only reaching a miserable 37.6 per cent. Even taking into account Australians' historical wariness of constitutional change (to that point just eight of thirty-eight referendum proposals had been passed), this was a dismal result which, for constitutional conservatives, only served to confirm that political elites were out of touch with the people. According to John Stone, this comprehensive rejection did not deter the Labor Party, but forced it to shift to a "softly, softly process to achieve its ends."[21]

Constitutional Centenary Foundation

Over four days in April 1991 a Constitutional Centenary Conference was held in Sydney to commemorate the one hundredth anniversary of the National Australasian Convention of 1891, which created the first draft of the Australian Constitution. The event was presided over by Sir Ninian Stephen, former Justice of the High Court and Governor-General, and convened by law professors Cheryl Saunders and James Crawford. The gathering saw academics, public servants,

[19] Constitutional Commission, quoted in Galligan, *A Federal Republic*, p. 125.
[20] Galligan, *A Federal Republic*, p. 126.
[21] John Stone, 'Keeping power in the people's hands,' *Australian Financial Review*, 23 July 1992.

lawyers, politicians, journalists, businessmen and various others set out to "identify the constitutional issues that needed attention in Australia at the beginning of the decade leading up to the constitutional centenary in 2001."[22] By the conclusion of the conference the attendees had resolved to establish a Constitutional Centenary Foundation, which would, throughout the 1990s, continue a "public process of education, review and development of the Australian constitutional system, in the interests of all Australians."[23] Twelve key issues were identified:

1. The head of state
2. Guarantees of basic rights
3. Responsible government and its alternatives
4. The effectiveness of parliaments
5. Four year terms for the House of Representatives
6. Accountability for taxing and spending
7. Voter or state initiative for referenda
8. Federalism and economic union
9. Legislative powers
10. The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and the Australian constitutional system
11. Judicial independence
12. Trial by jury[24]

Though the convenors sought to avoid any perceptions of political partisanship, John Stone was unconvinced. The following week he used his *Financial Review* column to attack the conference and its organisers. He suggested that Saunders was politically compromised by her marriage to Ian Baker, then a minister in the Victorian Labor government, and went on to ridicule the whole enterprise, likening it to such failed 1980s projects as the Australian Bicentennial

[22] Cheryl Saunders, 'Chair of the Constitutional Centenary Foundation,' in Tim McCormack and Cheryl Saunders (eds), *Sir Ninian Stephen: A Tribute*, Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2007, p. 57.
[23] Saunders, 'Chair of the Constitutional Centenary Foundation,' p. 65.
[24] Constitutional Centenary Foundation, 'Concluding Statement: A Constitutional Review Process,' quoted in John Stone, 'White-Anting the Constitution: The Constitutional Centenary Foundation,' in *Upholding the Australian Constitution*, vol. 4, Proceedings of the Fourth Conference of the Samuel Griffith Society, Brisbane, July 1994, pp. 243–47.

Authority and the Constitutional Commission. "Whatever public figureheads (or worse) may be appointed to this body," he wrote, "it will as usual be run by much the same bunch of centrist left-leaning lawyers who, since the previous committee of inquiry into constitutional reform disappeared into ignominy in 1988, have clearly been under-employed."[25]

Stone would later give a paper in which he elaborated on the many areas where he took issue with the Foundation. Proceeding from the hypothesis that it "bears the appearance of a constitutional termite,"[26] Stone investigated how the organisation was established, how it was governed and financed, and what its leading lights—Saunders in particular—had said on constitutional matters that might draw into question their claims to political impartiality. His conclusion was unequivocal:

> It is a body brought into being with a purpose – to gnaw away at our constitutional foundations in the hope that, one day, the structure erected nearly 100 years ago will crumble away and a new construct, more centralist, more unicameral, and of course republican, can be put in its place.[27]

Saunders remained unperturbed, continuing to lead the Foundation until its planned disbanding in December 2000. In a 2007 paper she downplayed Stone's position as merely that of a noisy minority, whose "sustained suspicion … gives warning that impartiality is likely always to be a contested claim from some perspective."[28]

Greg Craven (1958–)

Greg Craven studied arts and law at the University of Melbourne before completing a Master of Laws in 1984. Since then he has enjoyed a successful career as a legal academic, holding positions at the University of Melbourne, the University of Notre Dame and Curtin University before his appointment as the Vice-Chancellor of Australian Catholic University in 2008. He has published widely in the field of constitutional law and has been a regular newspaper

[25] John Stone, 'Constitution criticism lacks foundation,' *Australian Financial Review*, 11 April 1991
[26] Stone, 'White-Anting the Constitution,' p. 184.
[27] Stone, 'White-Anting the Constitution,' p. 214.
[28] Saunders, 'Chair of the Constitutional Centenary Foundation,' p. 77.

columnist for many years. Outspoken and independent, his career has not been without controversy, especially during his tenure as Crown Counsel to the Victorian attorney-general in the 1990s. This was seen as a "unique appointment, which straddles the role of ministerial adviser and senior public servant," and Craven was widely seen as being at the forefront of the Kennett government's attempts to shake up the legal profession.[29]

Craven has always considered himself to be a constitutional conservative, so it was with some disappointment that he read John Stone's attack on Cheryl Saunders in April 1991. While sympathetic to Stone's constitutional views, Craven was unimpressed with the ferocity of his attack on Saunders, who was not only a colleague at the time, but had also supervised his masters thesis in the early 1980s. As luck would have it, members of the H.R. Nicholls Society—including, of course, Stone—were due to meet in Melbourne for their tenth conference that very weekend, and one of the scheduled speakers was none other than Greg Craven. A committed federalist, he delivered a paper on 'Constitutional and Other Constraints on State Governments Seeking Labour Market Reform,' in which he was extremely critical of the High Court's interpretation of the Constitution, resulting in increasing centralisation of power in Canberra:

> Since the *Engineers Case* the general thrust of the Court's interpretation has been powered by an entirely non legal agenda and that non legal agenda has been the desire to expand the power of the Commonwealth, to expand the legislative competence of the Commonwealth, at the expense of the States. That is perhaps not a political agenda but an institutional political agenda.[30]

This was music to the ears of members of the H.R. Nicholls Society, who, as we saw in chapter 3, had been railing against the centralised nature of Australian industrial relations since 1986.

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[29] Penelope Debelle, 'The Craven controversy,' *Age*, 15 May 1995.
[30] Greg Craven, 'Constitutional and Other Constraints on State Governments Seeking Labour Market Reform,' in *No Vacancies*, Proceedings of the Tenth Conference of the H.R. Nicholls Society, Melbourne, April 1991, p. 12.

Discord prompts action

Craven was not only interested in arguing about centralisation of power and the High Court, however. With Stone sitting in the front row of the audience, Craven took the opportunity to return fire on behalf of Saunders. Though the published proceedings suggest quite a polite and civilised exchange, Craven has since recalled that the live debate was much more robust:

> What actually happened was, when I gave the speech—and I don't know if it's in the version of the speech published in the H.R. Nicholls proceedings—I actually had a go back at John, who I didn't know. I said look, basically the constitutional right in Australia has always been good at attacking positions, it's never been good at putting forward any sort of cohesive constitutional philosophy.[31]

Craven had lain down the challenge. Conservatives may disagree with the views of the Constitutional Centenary Foundation, but what were they going to do about it? Instead of just criticising, asked Craven, "why aren't you making that type of constitutional contribution?"[32] His was a plea for a more organised constitutional conservatism, which he regarded as "perennially inherently disorganised," and therefore unable to effectively argue its case.[33]

To Craven's great surprise, given the forcefulness of his comments, Stone responded in the discussion period by essentially agreeing with him. Stone's remarks are published in the conference proceedings and are worth quoting at length:

> I happen to agree almost totally with everything that was said, and I urge Mr Craven in the light of that to do what some people in this room did five years ago, namely to promote a genuine debate on federalism. After all, some people in this room started a genuine debate upon the industrial relations situation in this country, the disgraceful situation which obtained in industrial relations. I would agree wholeheartedly with everything that Mr Craven said

[31] Greg Craven, phone interview with author, 27 October 2015.
[32] Craven, interview with author.
[33] Craven, interview with author.

> toward the end of his remarks, that federalism was probably the wave of the future and the reasons he gave for it.
>
> I suggest to him that he should consider forming a Parkes Society to promote the cause of federalism – a society for the promotion of federalism. I am sure you would get a lot of members from this room. That's a serious suggestion. I think that needs to be done and it is a society which needs to be totally divorced from governments, attorneys-general, and other people who are involved in manipulative processes and public funding."[34]

Having expected the famously combative Stone to launch into a tirade, Craven was pleasantly surprised by this constructive response. It was promptly agreed that they should begin planning a new organisation—modelled, as Stone suggested, along similar lines to the H.R. Nicholls Society—focused on federalism and the Constitution.

Thus, throughout 1991 a number of lunch meetings were held in which the direction of the proposed organisation was discussed. Ray Evans, who by this point had taken over from Stone as president of the H.R Nicholls Society, was enlisted to help with organisational matters. Craven was not particularly interested in that side of things, seeing himself as more of a consultant: "an expert constitutional lawyer and a critical friend" who could provide advice about which topics most urgently needed to be discussed.[35] He was particularly keen to avoid the kind of narrow, antagonistic approach that had seen the H.R. Nicholls Society characterised as dangerous radicals. He recalled telling his fellow organisers:

> If you're going to be a conservative constitutional voice you're going to have your greatest effect as a *mainstream* conservative constitutional voice. […] You should be hitting on the things that really, really matter rather than particular hobby horses that are never going to go anywhere.[36]

The extent to which this has remained the case throughout the organisation's existence is debatable, as we shall see below. But at the outset it was agreed that

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[34] John Stone, quoted in Peter Costello and Phil Gude, 'Discussion,' in *No Vacancies*, p. 39.
[35] Craven, interview with author.
[36] Craven, interview with author.

the focus of the group should be on the central, defining issue: "the expansion of Commonwealth power by the High Court and the general issue of federalism in all its various emanations: financial, judicial, parliamentary and so on."[37]

Sir Samuel Griffith (1845–1920)

John Stone's initial "top-of-the-head thought" had been to form a federalist Parkes Society in honour of Sir Henry Parkes, commonly known as the father of Federation. However, at the first planning meeting Ray Evans suggested that Sir Samuel Griffith, "in his role as (arguably) the principal draftsman of the Constitution, and because of his subsequent role as the first Chief Justice of the High Court, would be a preferable choice," to which there was no disagreement.[38] The Society's original Statement of Purposes made plain its admiration for the distinguished politician and jurist, noting especially that "he consistently supported the rights of States against the powers of the Federal Government."[39]

Born in Wales, Samuel Griffith migrated to Australia with his family at the age of eight and eventually settled in Brisbane. A brilliant student, he had completed an arts degree at the University of Sydney by the time he was 18, before returning to Queensland to study law. In 1867 the Supreme Court of Queensland admitted him as a barrister. He entered the Queensland Legislative Assembly in 1872, serving in various ministries before becoming premier in 1883. He held that role until 1888, and again from 1890 to 1893, at which point he happily retired from politics and was appointed Chief Justice of Queensland's Supreme Court. Having contributed significantly to the Federation movement throughout the 1890s, he became the inaugural Chief Justice of the High Court of Australia in 1903. (Incidentally, he was the author of the 1911 judgment acquitting H.R. Nicholls of his contempt of court charge, referred to in chapter 3). Griffith suffered a stroke in 1917, which greatly reduced his ability to hear cases. He finally retired from the bench in 1919 and died the following year.

Known as a radical liberal reformer for much of his political career, Griffith

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[37] Craven, interview with author.
[38] John Stone, email to author, 23 December 2015.
[39] Samuel Griffith Society, 'Statement of Purposes,' in *Upholding the Australian Constitution*, vol. 1, Proceedings of the Inaugural Conference of the Samuel Griffith Society, Melbourne, July 1992, p. 272.

in the 1880s even "displayed some sympathy with the emerging labour movement."[40] In 1886 he introduced a bill legalising trade unions, and his 1888 election manifesto included the declaration that: "the great problem of this age is not how to accumulate wealth but how to secure its more equitable distribution."[41] These were certainly not words to impress the H.R. Nicholls Society one hundred years later. But Griffith's reputation as a friend of the working man was not to last. His views hardened during the bitter shearers' strike of 1891, in which, as premier, he brought in the military to end the dispute and oversaw the trial and imprisonment of twelve strikers on conspiracy charges.[42] His general view from then on was that employers and employees should never see each other as enemies, but partners in a mutually beneficial relationship, a line that would later be closely echoed by the H.R. Nicholls Society.

But for the venerators of the Constitution now forming a separate organisation in Griffith's name, it was his constitutional views that were held in the highest esteem. As Chief Justice of the High Court Griffith fought for the federalist principles that were fundamental to the Constitution, against the more centralist tendencies of justices Sir Isaac Isaacs and H.B. Higgins, both of whom were appointed to an expanded bench in 1906. Griffith held firm against extensions of Commonwealth power until his retirement, but just weeks after his death came the decision in the Engineers' case, "reversing a central part of the work of his chief justiceship."[43] This pivotal turning point in Australia's constitutional history has been lamented by federalists ever since.

Sir Harry Gibbs (1917–2005)

Having formed largely as a reaction to the Constitutional Centenary Foundation, led by the highly regarded Sir Ninian Stephen, the Samuel Griffith Society sought a leader of similar stature for their own organisation. Stone, having ruled himself out due to a lack of legal qualifications, proposed Sir Harry Gibbs, who had not long retired as Chief Justice of the High Court. Born in Queensland, Gibbs enjoyed a

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[40] Roger B. Joyce, *Samuel Walker Griffith*, Brisbane: University of Queensland Press, 1984, p. 123.
[41] Samuel Griffith, quoted in Joyce, *Samuel Walker Griffith*, p. 147.
[42] Joyce, *Samuel Walker Griffith*, p. 168.
[43] Joyce, *Samuel Walker Griffith*, p. 360.

stellar legal career before joining the High Court in 1970. Upon Sir Garfield Barwick's retirement from the bench in 1981, Gibbs was appointed Chief Justice, and was greeted as "Sir Harry the Healer" following Barwick's controversial tenure.[44] He served in that position until 1987, when he was forced to retire at the age of 70 due to a 1977 constitutional amendment. Conveniently, Gibbs was a great admirer of his fellow Queenslander Samuel Griffith, whose portrait took pride of place in his chambers.[45]

Most importantly for the Society's purposes, Gibbs was as federalist as they come, "a bulwark for States' rights" in the words of his biographer.[46] He dissented from the majority judgment in the Tasmanian Dam case in 1983, and later said that the use of the Constitution's external affairs power in that judgment "threatens the very basis of federalism."[47] On the question of Commonwealth versus state powers, Gibbs was unequivocal: "My view of the appropriate division of power in a federal system can be summed up in one sentence: nothing should be done by the Commonwealth that could be done equally well by the individual States themselves."[48]

Gibbs was initially cautious about involving himself with the Samuel Griffith Society, and suggested some changes to the draft Statement of Purposes that Stone had sent him before agreeing to become the inaugural president. He was joined on the board by Stone, Evans, Hugh Morgan, mining executive Sir Bruce Watson and Nancy Stone, a retired research biochemist and wife of John. The bulk of the administrative work of the Society for the next two decades would be carried out by the Stones.[49] But far from being a mere figurehead, Gibbs was also an enthusiastic participant in the activities of the Society: meticulously chairing board meetings, delivering conference papers and closing remarks, and each year

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[44] Joan Priest, *Sir Harry Gibbs: Without Fear or Favour*, Mudgeeraba: Scribblers Publishing, 1995, p. 86.
[45] Priest, *Sir Harry Gibbs*, p. 88.
[46] Priest, *Sir Harry Gibbs*, p. 73.
[47] Harry Gibbs, 'The Threat to Federalism,' in *Upholding the Australian Constitution*, vol. 2, Proceedings of the Second Conference of the Samuel Griffith Society, Melbourne, July 1993, p. 187.
[48] Harry Gibbs, 'Re-Writing the Constitution,' in *Upholding the Australian Constitution*, vol. 1, p. xiv.
[49] J.D. Heydon, 'The Public Life of John and Nancy Stone,' in *Upholding the Australian Constitution*, vol. 22, Proceedings of the Twenty-Second Conference of the Samuel Griffith Society, Perth, August 2010, pp. 236–38.

composing an Australia Day message to be sent to members.

In 2003, at the last Samuel Griffith Society conference he was to attend, the Society made a special presentation to Gibbs "as a testament to the respect and affection in which he and Lady Gibbs are held, not only by the Board but by our membership in general."[50] Following his death in 2005, the board promptly resolved that they would establish a lecture in his honour, the Sir Harry Gibbs Memorial Oration, as well as devote part of the 2006 conference to an appreciation of his life and work from various perspectives. "Sir Harry Gibbs was one of the finest men it has ever been my privilege to come to know," Stone told me. "The Society will be forever in his debt."[51]

Inaugural conference

In May 1992 John Stone sent letters to about 900 people, inviting them to attend the inaugural conference of the Samuel Griffith Society in July, as well as encouraging them to apply for membership.[52] In addition to his own personal and professional acquaintances, Stone sent the letter to members of the IPA, where he was a senior fellow at the time.[53] The conference commenced with a dinner and speeches on Friday, 24 July 1992. The launching address was to be given by Gibbs, but instead he had to fly to London for the hanging of his heraldic banner as a Knight Grand Cross of the Order of St Michael and St George, and so his speech was delivered on his behalf by David Russell, a lawyer and prominent Queensland National Party figure.[54] A day and a half of papers and discussion followed over the weekend, divided into six themed sessions on various aspects of the Constitution: 'Nine Decades of Achievement,' 'the Demands for Change,' 'the Slide into Centralism,' 'the External Affairs Power,' 'the Head of State Debate' and 'the Aboriginal Question.' Around 120 people were in attendance over the course of the weekend.

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[50] David Flint, 'Presentation to Sir Harry Gibbs,' in *Upholding the Australian Constitution*, vol. 15, Proceedings of the Fifteenth Conference of the Samuel Griffith Society, Adelaide, May 2003, p. 128.
[51] Stone, email to author, 2 January 2016.
[52] John Stone, 'Invitation letter of 5 May 1992,' in *Upholding the Australian Constitution*, vol. 1, pp. 268–71.
[53] Stone, email to author, 27 March 2016.
[54] Priest, *Sir Harry Gibbs*, p. 133.

The combative approach of the Samuel Griffith Society was made clear from the outset, with warning shots fired at its opponents, especially the Constitutional Centenary Foundation. "It has been proposed that for the rest of the century there should be a process of public education and debate in Australia for the purpose of reviewing the Constitution," wrote Harry Gibbs in his launching address. "The Samuel Griffith Society must ensure that education does not degenerate into propaganda, and that the debate is not one-sided."[55] His speech did not once name-check the Constitutional Centenary Foundation, but no one could be in the slightest doubt as to whom he was referring.

The conference itself didn't cause an immediate stir, but this was to change only three weeks later, when Governor-General (and former Labor minister) Bill Hayden gave a speech in which he warned about the "thoroughly radical agenda" of the Samuel Griffith Society. He noted that its membership overlapped with that of the H.R. Nicholls Society, and cautioned his friends on the left against complacency:

> I recall some dismissive giggles greeting the formation of that body in circles in which I once moved. "Political troglodytes and economic lunatics," one such said. It does seem, however, that there has been a most extraordinary range of radical reforms in the field of industrial relations since then, and the H.R. Nicholls Society cannot be left out of account when assessing major influences creating the environment which accommodated this change. For those reasons, I would suggest that it would be wrong to treat the formation of the Samuel Griffith Society in any other way than with serious attention.[56]

Asked to respond to Hayden's remarks, Stone welcomed the opportunity for some free publicity. He argued that the Society's formation represented a groundswell of public opposition to centralisation of power in Canberra. "Little individual people … feel helpless because they say: 'Oh, what can I do?'" he told the *Age*. "There is a growing feeling in the community for this sort of movement. Time and again, people come up and say: 'This is dreadful, why is Canberra doing

[55] Gibbs, 'Re-Writing the Constitution,' p. xx.
[56] Bill Hayden, quoted in Michael Gordon, 'Hayden warns of new "radical" conservative body,' *Sunday Age*, 16 August 1992.

this? What's it got to do with Canberra?'"[57] In a separate interview, he also played down the links Hayden had made between the organisations, stating that of more than 400 members of the new group, "just 60 are members of the H.R. Nicholls Society."[58] Journalist Geoffrey Barker thought both were guilty of paranoia and vast exaggeration of the influence of their opponents, arguing that in pluralistic Australia "there is a multitude of groups clamoring to be heard on constitutional issues, [which is] a thoroughly good thing."[59]

Following the example of its sister organisation, the first Samuel Griffith Society conference was followed some months later by the official launch of the publication of its proceedings, titled *Upholding the Australian Constitution*. Two dinners were held in November 1992, the first in Melbourne with Harry Gibbs and NSW Supreme Court Justice Roderick Meagher as speakers. Meagher's address drew front-page media attention for its "vigorous, even extraordinary, attack on certain fellow judges and other advocates of change in Australian society."[60] Chief among his targets were Justice Gerard Brennan, lead author of the High Court's Mabo judgment (of which more later), and various members of the "chattering classes," such as authors Patrick White, Manning Clark, Thomas Keneally and Donald Horne, whose principal crime seemed to be their republicanism.[61] The second launch was held in Perth a week later, with former Liberal minister and Governor-General Sir Paul Hasluck scheduled to speak. However, illness forced him to cancel and his son delivered the address on his behalf. Hasluck—who was also a hero to members of the Bennelong Society, as we will see in chapter 5—died shortly afterwards, so this turned out to be his final public statement.

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[57] John Stone, quoted in Megan Backhouse, 'Canberra's powers rising, warns Stone,' *Age*, 17 August 1992.
[58] John Stone, quoted in Jenny Hutchison, 'Samuel Griffith Society enters the debate on constitutional reform', *Parliament Program*, 4 September 1992, http://parlinfo.aph.gov.au/parlInfo/search/display/display.w3p;query=Id%3A"media%2Fradioprm%2FQE110"
[59] Geoffrey Barker, 'Why fear a new society focusing on federalism,' *Age*, 18 August 1992.
[60] Tony Stephens, 'The republican debate: wigs v tea-cosies,' *Sydney Morning Herald*, 20 November 1992.
[61] Roderick Meagher, 'Address launching *Upholding the Australian Constitution*, Volume 1,' in *Upholding the Australian Constitution*, vol. 3, Proceedings of the Third Conference of the Samuel Griffith Society, Fremantle, November 1993, pp. 145–53.

Aims

In contrast with the brief outlines provided by the other organisations being examined in this thesis, the Samuel Griffith Society's Statement of Purposes is a detailed 950 words. It begins with a biographical note about Samuel Griffith, then sets forth on a long-winded preamble about the role of constitutions and parliamentary and legal institutions in "maintaining civil peace and concord, and of protecting the citizen from the arbitrary abuse of power, including executive power."[62] It then goes on to extol the virtues of Australia's political institutions, but warns about their decay, and in the process reveals the three broad objectives of the Society: defence of the Constitution, promotion of federalism, and restoration of the separation between the legislative, executive and judicial powers of the Commonwealth.

Defence of the Constitution

Upholding the Australian Constitution is the general objective from whence all other Samuel Griffith Society objectives followed, and it naturally became the title of the group's annual publication of its conference proceedings. The Society's approach to the Constitution is set out in the Statement of Purposes:

> The strength of our parliamentary and legal institutions, of our political conventions and modes of behaviour is, arguably, Australia's greatest asset. The Constitution which Australians drafted and accepted in the 1890's, and which established the framework of the Australian nation as a sovereign federal state, is the keystone of this structure and has served us well. It has protected our democracy, and our liberties, by providing for independent centres of political authority and the diffusion of power which flows from that. The Australian people have voted many times against proposed amendments. We must presume that they regard the Constitution, on the whole, with approval.
>
> All institutions, nevertheless, require refurbishment and repair. There is growing concern at the decline in the prestige, standing and influence of

[62] Samuel Griffith Society, 'Statement of Purposes,' p. 272.

> parliament, and the growing centralisation of power and authority in the executive. There is also concern at the expansion of the power of the Commonwealth at the expense of the States, the increasing centralisation of power in Canberra, and the consequent growth of a Commonwealth bureaucracy which, in many areas, deals with matters which were originally the sole concern of the States.[63]

The second paragraph of this excerpt clearly indicates that the group is not blindly opposed to any and all proposed changes to Australia's constitutional arrangements. If there are proposals that the group sees as possibly restoring the original, federal intentions of the founding fathers, it is willing to consider them. But if the proposals look like moving the country even further away from these foundations, they will be given short shrift. "If any changes are to be made in our Constitution," wrote Stone, "they should only occur after the widest range of thought and opinion has been canvassed."[64] Thus, the Society saw itself as having an educational role, hoping through its efforts to "encourage a wider understanding of Australia's Constitution and the nation's achievements under the Constitution."[65]

The Samuel Griffith Society's attitude to the Constitution would later set it on a collision course with the Howard government. As Paul Kelly observed, Howard's approach as prime minister was unapologetically pragmatic. "He dislikes debate about abstractions or principles of governance, from ministerial responsibility to the separation of powers, and distrusts debate on governmental models," wrote Kelly.[66] This approach was anathema to the Samuel Griffith Society.

Federalism

If encouraging public discussion and respect for the Constitution was the Society's most broad objective, the promotion of federalism was the issue it identified as being of the utmost immediate importance. As we have seen, Stone's initial

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[63] Samuel Griffith Society, 'Statement of Purposes,' pp. 273–74.
[64] John Stone, 'Foreword,' in *Upholding the Australian Constitution*, vol. 1, pp. vii–viii.
[65] Samuel Griffith Society, 'Statement of Purposes,' p. 275.
[66] Paul Kelly, 'How Howard Governs,' in Nick Cater (ed.), *The Howard Factor: A Decade that Changed the Nation*, Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2006, p. 4.

proposal in April 1991 was to form a society for the promotion of federalism, and in his launching address Harry Gibbs asserted that "federalism is the essence of the Constitution."[67] But in the Society's view the preceding seventy years had witnessed a long march towards the complete centralisation of power in Canberra, and its job was to halt, or at the very least slow, this march. Therefore, at the top of its list of priorities was "the need to redress the federal balance in favour of the States, in view of the excessive expansion of Commonwealth power and the need to decentralise decision making."[68]

Given its questionable support for federalism—and the fact that it was in government at the time—the Labor Party was naturally the focus of early discussions. Its record in government, some of which has been discussed above, meant it was unquestionably seen as the biggest barrier to the renewal of the federal structure. So when the Coalition took power in 1996, the Society might have been forgiven for allowing itself to breathe a sigh of relief and look to the future with optimism. At the tenth conference in 1998, legal academic Geoffrey de Q. Walker even spoke of a "new age of federalism," with worldwide interest in it being "greater today than at any other time in human history."[69]

But members of the Samuel Griffith Society were later appalled to witness the Coalition under the prime ministership of John Howard "spitting out Australian federalism like so much constitutional gristle."[70] Stone made his feelings known in no uncertain terms at the Society's 2005 conference:

> Few things have been more dismaying during the six months since last year's federal election than the swelling tide of ignorant centralism rushing out of Canberra, whether it be in the field of health, education, infrastructure, rorts for rural roads, or whatever. Even the Prime Minister has not been immune from this disease, while the immature mouthings of the Ministers for Health and Education, Messrs Abbott and Nelson, have been nothing short of appalling. A friend of mine, a person high in Liberal Party circles, recently

[67] Harry Gibbs, 'Re-Writing the Constitution,' p. x.
[68] Samuel Griffith Society, 'Statement of Purposes,' p. 275.
[69] Geoffrey de Q. Walker, 'Ten Advantages of a Federal Constitution,' in *Upholding the Australian Constitution*, vol. 10, Proceedings of the Tenth Conference of the Samuel Griffith Society, Brisbane, August 1998, p. 283.
[70] Craven, 'A Constitution that Deserves Better Mates,' p. 25.

> said to me that he believed that the only member of the Cabinet who had any genuine belief in federalism was the Minister for Finance, Senator the Honourable Nick Minchin.[71]

Coincidentally, the prime minister was due to give a speech on federalism just days later. Addressing criticisms such as Stone's (though without naming him), Howard was dismissive:

> These fears of a new centralism rest on a complete misunderstanding of the Government's thinking and reform direction. Where we seek a change in the Federal-State balance, our goal is to expand individual choice, freedom and opportunity, not to expand the reach of the central government.[72]

But the Society remained unconvinced, and things would only get worse during the subsequent Work Choices debate (discussed in chapter 3). So furious was Ray Evans with Howard's approach that he called him the most centralist prime minister since Gough Whitlam.[73] He would maintain this rage for the rest of his life. Upon his retirement from the H.R. Nicholls Society, Evans declared:

> Until the Coalition and the conservative side of the culture wars in Australia can restore federalism as an essential element of our political life, Coalition governments will have nothing to offer the Australian people that is fundamentally different from what Labor governments have been offering during my lifetime.[74]

Separation of powers

The third key area that the Samuel Griffith Society set out to address was the increasingly blurred lines between the legislative, executive and judicial arms of

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[71] John Stone, 'Introductory Remarks,' in *Upholding the Australian Constitution*, vol. 17, Proceedings of the Seventeenth Conference of the Samuel Griffith Society, Coolangatta, April 2005, pp. xxxi–xxxii.
[72] John Howard, 'Reflections on Australian Federalism,' Address to the Menzies Research Centre, Melbourne, 11 April 2005, p. 2, http://www.menziesrc.org/images/Research/economic-reports/australian_federalism_final.pdf
[73] Ray Evans, quoted in Stephen Long, 'IR changes bring unlikely alliances,' *Inside Business*, ABC TV, 26 March 2006, http://www.abc.net.au/insidebusiness/content/2006/s1600985.htm
[74] Ray Evans, 'Particular Principles and Magic Words,' *Quadrant*, January–February 2011, p. 38.

government. This issue had dual elements. Firstly, the independence of the courts, particularly the High Court, had been undermined by the political influence of successive governments. Secondly, the authority of parliament had been weakened by the dominance of the executive. In line with the Constitution, the Society wanted to emphasise "the need to safeguard judicial independence in light of increasing executive encroachments" and "the need to re-assert the role of Parliament (including that of the Speaker and President of the Senate) vis a vis the Executive."[75]

With regard to the High Court, the Society was eager to preserve judicial independence while warding off judicial activism. As recounted by legal scholar Tanya Josev, the charge of judicial activism was imported from the United States and became a convenient term of criticism for conservatives who disapproved of what they perceived as the liberal leanings of recent High Court decisions.[76] Barrister Ian Callinan suggested in 1994 that its recent decisions left the High Court open to the criticism that it was becoming an "over-mighty Court"[77] (a view that was not forgotten by critics when Callinan himself was appointed to the bench just four years later). The Society argued that the High Court should not be influenced by the political needs of the government of the day, but on the other hand should be careful not to overstep its constitutional boundaries and attempt to make law itself. Greg Craven saw these concepts as going hand in hand:

> Judicial independence necessitates the independence of the courts not only from politicians, but from politics itself. Once a court embarks on a routine course of policy formulation, it inevitably becomes part of the political process, and this by definition. It therefore makes no sense to talk of the independence of the judiciary from politicians, if the judiciary has itself chosen to be an integral part of the very political process which defines the very concept of a politician.[78]

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[75] Samuel Griffith Society, 'Statement of Purposes,' p. 275.
[76] Tanya Josev, 'The Late Arrival of the Judicial Activism Debate in Australian Public Discourse,' *Public Law Review*, vol. 24, no. 1 (March 2013), pp. 17–36.
[77] Ian Callinan, 'An Over-Mighty Court?' in *Upholding the Australian Constitution*, vol. 4, pp. 81–118.
[78] Greg Craven, 'Reflections on Judicial Activism: More in Sorrow than in Anger,' in *Upholding the Australian Constitution*, vol. 9, Proceedings of the Ninth Conference of the Samuel Griffith Society, Perth, October 1997, pp. 205–6.

Members of the Society were in little doubt that this process had indeed taken place, and hence made reversing it one of their key objectives.

The Samuel Griffith Society's position on the role of parliament was most clearly articulated by Australia's longest-serving Chief Justice, Sir Garfield Barwick, in 1995. Seeking to return to constitutional first principles, Barwick argued that "the essence of parliamentary democracy is that the Parliament is in control of the ministry at all times and independent of it."[79] He then went on to lament the damage that the party system has done to the authority of parliament, in particular the way in which individual members are not free to speak and vote according to their own (or their electorate's) preference, but must toe the party line. The result is that the executive controls the parliament, rather than the other way around. The ever-increasing power invested in the office of the prime minister was also of great concern to Barwick, an issue that Stone had earlier warned about when he hyperbolically accused Paul Keating of being "not a parliamentarian, but a dictator."[80]

Methods

The Samuel Griffith Society made plain from the beginning how it intended to spread its message, by including in its Statement of Purposes the specific objective: "to arrange conferences, hold meetings, publish papers, and inform people and governments in accordance with the general objectives set out above."[81] It also aimed to "attract for the Society a stable membership and funding base."[82] In this aspect it was very successful. Writing just six weeks after the inaugural conference, John Stone stated that 470 Australians had either joined or applied to join, having paid a joining fee of $20 and an annual subscription of $50.[83] (The annual subscription is now $75.) Membership numbers have remained relatively strong

[79] Garfield Barwick, 'Parliamentary Democracy in Australia,' in *Upholding the Australian Constitution*, vol. 5, Proceedings of the Fifth Conference of the Samuel Griffith Society, Sydney, March 1995, p. 211.
[80] John Stone, 'PM's Constitution threat,' *Australian Financial Review*, 10 December 1992.
[81] Samuel Griffith Society, 'Statement of Purposes,' p. 275.
[82] Samuel Griffith Society, 'Statement of Purposes,' p. 276.
[83] John Stone, 'Not paranoid, just public spirited' (letter to the editor), *Age*, 2 September 1992.

despite an age demographic tipped towards seniors; the 2013 president's report advised that membership stood at 384, thirty of whom had signed up that year.[84]

In setting up the Society, Stone wanted to provide a civilised, respectful and democratic contribution to debates about the constitution. He told the *Age* in 1992 that groups such as the Samuel Griffith Society are a useful way to ward off some of the noisier—and more dangerous—elements of political debate:

> I think if people are not given a vehicle by which to express their views in a democratic matter, in accordance with the best traditions of democracy, then they tend to express their views in an undemocratic manner. It's not about marching or having street marches or nonsense of that kind, or breaking up meetings to stop people speaking to students. It's not about that sort of ridiculous, adolescent, childish, basically fascist behaviour; it's about a peaceful and law-abiding process of stimulating public debate.[85]

Stone seemed to be suggesting that Australia might witness a popular uprising against centralisation of power in Canberra. Noble as his efforts to prevent such an occurrence might have been, there was no evidence that anything of that nature was imminent. And while Stone may have seen what he was doing as channelling popular anger into something productive, the fact remains that the majority of the Society's membership has been made up of a privileged elite—judges, lawyers, politicians, academics—whose concerns could hardly have been more remote from those of ordinary Australians. This is only natural given the Society's focus on legal and political matters, although it is not the entire story. Stone was eager to point out that tradesmen, policemen, farmers, engineers, doctors, accountants, retired military officers and teachers have also been contributors over the years.[86]

Conferences

The Samuel Griffith Society has held twenty-eight conferences since 1992, following the same weekend format as the conferences of the H.R. Nicholls

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[84] Ian Callinan, 'President's report,' Samuel Griffith Society, November 2013, http://samuelgriffith.org.au/files/2013/11/SGS-Presidents-Report-2013.pdf
[85] John Stone, quoted in Backhouse, 'Canberra's powers rising, warns Stone'.
[86] Stone, email to author, 27 March 2016.

Society. Meticulously planned down to the minute by Stone, the conferences were usually divided into a number of constitutional themes, with multiple papers on each theme, followed by discussion periods. In addition to the core issues of defence of the Constitution, federalism/anti-centralism and judicial activism, a handful of issues have been repeatedly discussed throughout the life of the Society. These include the republic, the prospect of an Australian bill of rights, the external affairs power, the financial relationship between the Commonwealth and the states, and "the Aboriginal Question," Stone's catch-all term for anything relating to Indigenous affairs. Since 2011 conferences have been broadcast on pay television and online via Australia's Public Affairs Channel (A-PAC).

Consistent with the professional make-up of the membership, Samuel Griffith Society conferences have usually been rather formal affairs, even compared to those of its sister organisation, the H.R. Nicholls Society. This contrast was noted by Paul Houlihan at the Samuel Griffith Society's 2007 conference. "When John Stone asked me to speak to this gathering, I was a little taken aback," Houlihan joked. "I am used to the less elevated areas of the H.R. Nicholls Society rather than this august body."[87] Despite this reputation, Greg Craven has noted that there have been occasional papers that were "a little bit off centre, a little bit eccentric."[88]

The formal, civilised tone of the conferences did not preclude strong disagreement and debate. While the three other organisations being examined in this thesis might be accused of encouraging an atmosphere of furious agreement, the Samuel Griffith Society seems genuinely interested in robust debate about its area of focus. Andrew Norton found it refreshing in this way:

> It wasn't just people who completely agreed sitting around saying, "Yes, you're right, aren't our enemies bad?" which is how these things can often turn out. There was actually sort of serious questions about the papers being given and robust debate from the floor, and from people who are actually really serious: academic constitutional lawyers, former High Court judges like

[87] Paul Houlihan, 'A Constitutional Fairy Tale,' in *Upholding the Australian Constitution*, vol. 19, Proceedings of the Nineteenth Conference of the Samuel Griffith Society, Melbourne, August 2007, p. 207.
[88] Craven, interview with author.

> Callinan. So people were actually in a very strong position to give that argument.[89]

While its emphasis remains federalist and constitutionally conservative, dissenters from the 'party line' are welcome to contribute their views at Society conferences. Examples include journalist Frank Devine, who argued for a bill of rights at the inaugural conference, historian John Hirst, convenor of the Australian Republican Movement and member of Paul Keating's Republic Advisory Committee, who was invited to put the case for a republic in 1993, and, most significantly, co-founder of the Society Greg Craven, whose position on the republic gradually evolved to the point that he endorsed the model put to a national referendum in 1999. The Samuel Griffith Society was born amid disagreement between Craven and Stone in 1991, so it was perhaps appropriate that Craven's dissenting position on the republic created a fresh round of acrimony, as will be seen below.

Some moments of conflict came courtesy of John Stone himself. As Dyson Heydon observed in a 2010 tribute, "John is peppery and pugnacious" and "does not shy away from a fight." He went on:

> Many a speaker at a *Quadrant* dinner or a Samuel Griffith Society conference or an H.R. Nicholls Society meeting will take to their graves the vivid recollection of the puzzled and frowning face of John, advancing towards the podium in order to extirpate the speaker's fallacies with the intellectual equivalent of fire and sword.[90]

One of those on the receiving end of Stone's ire was David Jull, minister for administrative services in the Howard government, who in 1996 argued that, for a variety of reasons, Australia's official flag should not be constitutionally entrenched. Shortly afterwards Stone used his newspaper column to denounce Jull's "truly pathetic paper,"[91] before apologising to members in the published proceedings for the way in which the paper had not measured up to "the high

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[89] Andrew Norton, interview with author, Melbourne, 14 August 2012.
[90] J.D. Heydon, 'The Public Life of John and Nancy Stone,' p. 238.
[91] John Stone, 'Early days, but signs of trouble,' *Australian Financial Review*, 20 June 1996.

standards set by every previous contributor."[92]

As stated earlier, the Society established the Sir Harry Gibbs Memorial Oration following the death of its founding president. Most conferences since 2006 have hosted the oration, with speakers including former High Court Justices Dyson Heydon and Ian Callinan, Bryan Pape, a barrister who unsuccessfully challenged the Rudd government's stimulus spending in the High Court, shadow attorney-general George Brandis, Federal Court judge Richard Tracey, and former NSW director of public prosecutions Nicholas Cowdery.

Published proceedings

The other major way in which the Samuel Griffith Society tries to spread its message is the publication of its conference proceedings in hardback volumes under the series title *Upholding the Australian Constitution*. Copies of the proceedings are included with membership, and are available for non-members to purchase directly from the Society for $30 each. All papers can also be accessed free of charge through the Society's website, which was first set up in 1997. Although it hosts a considerable amount of material, the site is rather rudimentary and is updated infrequently, signalling its secondary status in promoting the work of the Society. However, it has been noted by the Society that there is often increased traffic to the website towards the end of university semesters, indicating its usefulness to students.

John Stone was editor and publisher of *Upholding the Australian Constitution* for its first twenty-one volumes, from 1992 until 2009. The proceedings would usually be published within a few months of the relevant conference. Their format has remained consistent throughout, and Stone agreed with the proposition that they have played an important part in bolstering the organisation. "They are handsome books, with good-sized print, wide margins and an 'uncluttered' look about their pages that make them easily readable," he told me. "They are also, of course, a ready-to-hand source of not infrequent reference."[93] Greg Craven agreed that despite the uneven quality of some volumes, the

[92] John Stone, 'Foreword,' in *Upholding the Australian Constitution*, vol. 7, Proceedings of the Seventh Conference of the Samuel Griffith Society, Adelaide, June 1996, p. viii.
[93] Stone, email to author, 27 March 2016.

proceedings have been important:

> It is remarkable how that Society has managed to assemble now, over twenty years of conservative papers and positions around the Constitution. Quite astonishing. If you get those books and you sort of line them up—and some of them are not great works of scholarship and some of them are not meant to be, I mean they're effectively meant to be polemic, and highly effective polemic—I think they have had a significant effect.[94]

The publication was also often supplemented by Stone's newspaper columns, where he took the opportunity to promote the work of the Society, complete with a phone number for those readers who wanted to enquire about membership or order a copy of the proceedings. Since Stone's retirement responsibility for editing and publishing the proceedings has been shared between John Nethercote and Julian Leeser, both of whom worked under Craven at Australian Catholic University. The format has been maintained, but the timeliness of their publication has become less reliable. A wait of two years between conference and publication now seems to be standard. At the time of writing both the 2015 and 2016 volumes are yet to be published or made available online.

Interventions

Republic

The 1990s saw the emergence of a serious and concerted campaign for an Australian republic. The Australian Republican Movement was founded in July 1991 by a group of prominent Australians including Thomas Keneally, Donald Horne, Neville Wran, David Williamson and Malcolm Turnbull. Their cause received a boost when Paul Keating ousted Bob Hawke from the prime ministership in December 1991, and swiftly put the republic at the centre of his political agenda. The formation of the Samuel Griffith Society coincided with this campaign, and though John Stone was quick to point out that this was not the

[94] Craven, interview with author.

reason for the Society's formation, he was certain that the debate would "figure in its deliberations" in the future.[95] Indeed, the inaugural conference saw three papers given on various aspects of the debate.

Meanwhile, an organisation with the specific purpose of campaigning against the republic, Australians for Constitutional Monarchy (ACM), was founded by another group of eminent Australians almost simultaneously. There has been considerable overlap between ACM and the Samuel Griffith Society. Harry Gibbs was on ACM's original foundation council. David Flint, who has served on the board of the Samuel Griffith Society and given many papers at its conferences over the years, has been ACM's national convenor since 1998. John Stone was also heavily involved in ACM's campaigning, as he recounted to the Samuel Griffith Society in 2006.[96]

Paul Keating's election victory in March 1993 has been described as giving "the kiss of life to the republic for the first time in Australia's history as a nation."[97] Almost immediately the prime minister fulfilled a campaign promise by setting up the Republic Advisory Committee, with Malcolm Turnbull as chairman. Keating saw this appointment as an act of bipartisanship, but members of the opposition were sceptical, and Liberal leader John Hewson declined an invitation to appoint an opposition representative to the committee. In an address to the Samuel Griffith Society in July 1993, Victorian Premier Jeff Kennett declared his determination to oppose Keating and Turnbull's plans, arguing that transitioning to a republic would be technically complex, divisive, and could lead to the dangerous expansion of executive power.[98] The Republic Advisory Committee's report, *An Australian Republic: The Options*, was released in October and tried to allay such concerns with an emphasis on minimal, symbolic change. Constitutional conservatives remained unpersuaded, however.

Samuel Griffith Society conferences over the next few years saw only occasional interventions in the republic debate. But despite Paul Keating's 1996

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[95] Stone, 'Invitation Letter of 5 May 1992,' p. 270.
[96] John Stone, 'The Republic Referendum – Issues and Answers: An Historical Note,' in *Upholding the Australian Constitution*, vol. 18, pp. 247–302.
[97] Paul Kelly, *The March of Patriots: The Struggle for Modern Australia*, Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2009, p. 180.
[98] Jeff Kennett, 'The Crown and the States,' in *Upholding the Australian Constitution*, vol. 2, pp. ix–xxx.

election defeat to monarchist John Howard, momentum towards a republic continued, and in February 1997 Howard honoured an election commitment by announcing that a Constitutional Convention would be held the following year to discuss the issue. From this point on the Society became much more engaged in the issue. In a March 1997 address Harry Gibbs warned that if Australia were to become a republic and the powers of the governor-general transferred to a president, absent constitutional conventions that have evolved over centuries, "the President would be in the position of a dictator."[99] The 1998 conference included a post-mortem on the Constitutional Convention, in which four speakers were, in the words of Stone, "united on one point: namely, that the malformed proposal which emerged from the Convention is not merely unsatisfactory, but positively dangerous."[100]

In July 1999, with a referendum on the republic just months away, David Flint opened the eleventh conference with yet another warning about the dangers of the "Keating-Turnbull Republic."[101] The first session of the conference proper was to include contrasting papers on the republic from Greg Craven and Sir David Smith. Craven had moved from being a "pragmatic monarchist" to a supporter of a minimalist republic in which the transition could be made with as little change to the Constitution as possible. This, to put it mildly, was not a popular position within the Samuel Griffith Society. Stone, who planned the session, thought that Craven "had made a fool of himself in the course of his Republican advocacy, and I wanted his views to be exposed to someone, in David Smith, who would be competent to take them apart."[102]

Craven rather boldly told a room full of monarchists that the Convention model "should be adopted in the upcoming debate by any thoughtful constitutional conservative who genuinely wishes to preserve intact Australia's existing

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[99] Harry Gibbs, 'A Republic: The Issues,' in *Upholding the Australian Constitution*, vol. 8, Proceedings of the Eighth Conference of the Samuel Griffith Society, Canberra, March 1997, pp. 4–5.
[100] John Stone, 'Foreword,' in *Upholding the Australian Constitution*, vol. 10, p. vii.
[101] David Flint, 'The Republic Referendum: Mere Symbolism or Substantial Change?' in *Upholding the Australian Constitution*, vol. 11, Proceedings of the Eleventh Conference of the Samuel Griffith Society, Melbourne, July 1999, pp. xiii–xxix.
[102] Stone, email to author, 14 April 2016.

constitutional genius."[103] A republic of some kind was inevitable, Craven argued, so the model on offer should be supported in order to prevent a more radical version, such as one involving direct election of the president. Much to Craven's dismay, Smith then responded with full force, devoting half of his 4000-word paper to an attack on Craven. He questioned Craven's integrity and ridiculed his changes of position on the republic as "constitutional *Karma Sutra* [*sic*]."[104] Craven had expected a civilised debate, and was extremely unimpressed with Smith having so thoroughly "played the man."[105] Even Stone was taken aback by Smith's vehemence, and offered his apologies to Craven, as did a number of others. But for Craven the experience was so unpleasant that he had little to do with the Samuel Griffith Society for some time afterwards.

The November 1999 referendum resulted in a heavy defeat for the republicans. Not a single state returned a yes majority, and the nationwide yes vote reached only 45 per cent. The following year's Samuel Griffith Society conference included a triumphant "referendum post-mortem" session in which David Smith spoke of his pride in having helped kill off the republic,[106] Nancy Stone examined the press coverage leading up to the referendum and found it overwhelmingly biased towards a yes vote,[107] and Malcolm Mackerras analysed the results seat-by-seat and concluded that the republic was overwhelmingly supported by inner-city voters, but aroused little interest in outer-metropolitan, provincial and rural areas.[108] The republic issue has struggled to gain traction ever since, despite periodic attempts to revive the debate.

Mabo and native title

Another significant constitutional issue that neatly coincided with the forming of

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[103] Greg Craven, 'The Republican Debate and the True Course of Constitutional Conservatism,' in *Upholding the Australian Constitution*, vol. 11, p. 1.
[104] David Smith, 'What a Nice Referendum – Pity About the Debate,' in *Upholding the Australian Constitution*, vol. 11, p. 59.
[105] Craven, interview with author.
[106] David Smith, 'The Referendum: A Post-Mortem' in *Upholding the Australian Constitution*, vol. 12, Proceedings of the Twelfth Conference of the Samuel Griffith Society, Sydney, November 2000, pp. 141–80.
[107] Nancy Stone, 'The Referendum Debate: A Note on Press Coverage,' in *Upholding the Australian Constitution*, vol. 12, pp. 197–208.
[108] Malcolm Mackerras, 'The Inner Metropolitan Republic,' in *Upholding the Australian Constitution*, vol. 12, pp. 209–40.

the Samuel Griffith Society was the High Court's Mabo judgment, which was handed down on 3 June 1992. In a case brought before it by Eddie Mabo and other Meriam people from Murray Island in the Torres Strait, the High Court ruled that the common law "recognizes a form of native title which, in the cases where it has not been extinguished, reflects the entitlement of the Indigenous inhabitants, in accordance with their laws or customs, to their traditional lands."[109] The doctrine of *terra nullius*—literally "nobody's land"—that had been used as a legal defence of the dispossession of Indigenous people was explicitly rejected. Furthermore, the High Court opined on the morality of white settlement, describing the "conflagration of oppression and conflict which was spread across the continent to dispossess, degrade and devastate the Aboriginal peoples and leave a national legacy of unutterable shame."[110] David Solomon has written that the momentous judgment "can be likened to the imposition of a peace treaty on the winning side in a war that had lasted more than two centuries."[111]

The moral language of the Mabo judgment, as well as its legal reasoning, infuriated John Stone and other constitutional conservatives. Stone described the decision as "a fit of self-indulgent personal remorse, [which] overturned two centuries of settled Australian property law."[112] As there was only one dissenter, staunch conservative and federalist Justice Daryl Dawson, Stone took to describing the judicial majority as the "Mabo six," who were examples of judicial activism *par excellence*. Hugh Morgan fumed with rage at the inaugural Samuel Griffith Society conference (in an address almost certainly penned by Ray Evans):

> With this judgment … the justices of our High Court have de-robed themselves. The High Court has placed itself at the epicentre of what will become, arguably, the most important political debate of the history of this country since federation; the debate concerning the territorial integrity and the effective sovereignty of Australia as proclaimed in the Commonwealth of Australia Constitution Act of 1900. It could rival the conscription debates of

[109] *Mabo v. Queensland [No. 2]* (1992) 175 CLR 1, http://www.austlii.edu.au/cgi-bin/sinodisp/au/cases/cth/high_ct/175clr1.html
[110] *Mabo v. Queensland [No. 2]*.
[111] David Solomon, *The Political High Court: How the High Court Shapes Politics*, Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1999, p. 27.
[112] John Stone, 'Strains of the Third World,' *Australian Financial Review*, 5 August 1993.

> the Great War for bitterness and divisiveness.[113]

Though Morgan was being characteristically hyperbolic, his prediction was not entirely incorrect. The debates became especially heated following Paul Keating's 1993 election victory, as the prime minister set about legislating in response to the Court's decision. But over the course of the next year it was Morgan himself who caused most of the controversy, even earning a rebuke in parliament from the prime minister:

> Mr Morgan has always painted himself as a thoughtful thinker on the right. He has never been thoughtful, and he has never been a thinker. What we have here is just bigotry. It is the voice of ignorance, the voice of hysteria and the voice of the 19th century.[114]

In June 1993 Morgan gave a provocative address to the Victorian branch of the Returned and Services League in which he defended European settlement in Australia as "properly, lawfully, and peacefully constituted," and called for a referendum to overturn the Mabo decision.[115] At this point even his colleagues in the mining industry began to distance themselves from him.[116]

The Samuel Griffith Society held two conferences in 1993 and the consequences of Mabo were of utmost importance at both. In an echo of the H.R. Nicholls Society's emphasis on the legal privilege of trade unions, former WA Liberal leader Bill Hassell argued in July that "Mabo creates privilege – legal privilege based on race."[117] He also laid out his theory that "Mabo is but a small part of a wider agenda, which certainly includes a separate, sovereign, Aboriginal

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[113] Hugh Morgan, 'The Australian Constitution: A Living Document,' in *Upholding the Australian Constitution*, vol. 1, pp. 18–19.
[114] Paul Keating, quoted in Margaret Easterbrook, 'Morgan a bigot over land rights, says PM,' *Age*, 14 October 1992.
[115] Hugh Morgan, quoted in Bain Attwood, 'Mabo, Australia and the End of History,' in Bain Attwood (ed.), *In the Age of Mabo: History, Aborigines and Australia*, Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1996, p. 104.
[116] Peter Gill, 'Morgan splits miners after Mabo outburst,' *Australian Financial Review*, 1 July 1993.
[117] Bill Hassell, 'Mabo and Federalism: The Prospect of an Indigenous Peoples' Treaty,' in *Upholding the Australian Constitution*, vol. 2, p. 53.

state within Australia capable of conducting international affairs."[118] Peter Connolly followed, referring derisively to "the legislation of 3 June, 1992,"[119] while fellow barrister S.E.K. Hulme felt that the judgment's reference to "a national legacy of unutterable shame" recalled the way the mediaeval church held the Jews responsible for the crucifixion of Jesus a millennium earlier.[120] These two papers were soon afterwards published and circulated by the Association of Mining and Exploration Companies as part of the mining industry's campaign to undermine Mabo.[121] Further critiques of Mabo, from barrister Colin Howard and maverick Labor MP Graeme Campbell, were heard at the Samuel Griffith Society in November.

In December 1993, following the longest debate in Senate history, the Keating government's legislative response to Mabo, the *Native Title Act*, was passed into law. Critiques of the legislation were provided at the Society's next conference in July 1994. Barrister and legal academic John Forbes predicted that institutions such as the National Native Title Tribunal and Federal Court would be biased in favour of claimants.[122] Colin Howard was concerned that the passage of the *Native Title Act* might embolden the High Court further:

> It would be sad indeed if, on top of *Mabo*, the High Court became minded to arrive at further decisions of a comparably radical nature in the belief that the passage of the *Native Title Act* was in some sense confirmation of the propriety of a court, any court, taking upon itself, at the expense of the law of the land, the teaching of an ill-considered lesson in atonement for supposedly inherited guilt.[123]

The conference also included a paper by Geoffrey Partington devoted to attacking historian Henry Reynolds, whose scholarship had been cited in the Mabo

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[118] Hassell, 'Mabo and Federalism,' pp. 72–73.
[119] Peter Connolly, 'Should the Courts Determine Social Policy?' in *Upholding the Australian Constitution*, vol. 2, p. 88.
[120] S.E.K. Hulme, 'The High Court in Mabo,' in *Upholding the Australian Constitution*, vol. 2, p. 154.
[121] Peter Connolly and S.E.K. Hulme, *The High Court of Australia in Mabo: Two Papers Delivered to the Samuel Griffith Society*, Perth: Association of Mining and Exploration Companies, 1993.
[122] John Forbes, 'Proving Native Title,' in *Upholding the Australian Constitution*, vol. 4, pp. 31–64.
[123] Colin Howard, 'The High Court,' in *Upholding the Australian Constitution*, vol. 4, p. 78.

judgment.[124]

Following the election of the Howard government in 1996, the future of native title law became an issue of intense focus at Samuel Griffith Society conferences. The man most frequently consulted was John Forbes, described by the Society at the time as "one of our foremost experts on the law of native title."[125] In three papers between June 1996 and October 1997, Forbes developed his argument for amendments to the *Native Title Act*, conceding that the higher objective of scrapping the legislation altogether was a lost cause. In May 1997, Howard announced his 'Ten Point Plan' to amend the *Native Title Act*, an attempt, among other things, to provide certainty to mining and pastoral leaseholders in the wake of the High Court's Wik judgment. The plan received general endorsement from members of the Society, though they were pessimistic about its prospects of getting through the Senate unscathed, and then surviving a High Court challenge.

But following the successful passage of the *Native Title Amendment Act* in July 1998 (albeit with 217 Senate amendments) much of the heat went out of the debate, as none of the most catastrophic predictions about native title came to pass. This did not prevent the Society from returning to the issue throughout the 2000s, however. Keith Windschuttle, by this time notorious as a revisionist historian who believed that stories of frontier violence against Aborigines had been fabricated, argued in 2003 that the High Court had relied on such fabrications as evidence in its Mabo judgment.[126] Gary Johns, a minister in the Keating government who will play a prominent role in the next chapter, addressed the Society in 2012 to mark twenty years since Mabo. He concluded that despite great expectations, native title has proved to be a disappointment for Aboriginal people.[127]

Historians Andrew Markus and Bain Attwood have provided useful analyses of the conservative reaction to Mabo. Markus identified five themes, all of which, to varying extents, can be found in Samuel Griffith Society rhetoric: a focus on the

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[124] Geoffrey Partington, 'The Aetiology of Mabo,' in *Upholding the Australian Constitution*, vol. 4, pp. 1–30.
[125] Samuel Griffith Society, 'Contributors,' in *Upholding the Australian Constitution*, vol. 8, p. 297.
[126] Keith Windschuttle, 'Mabo and the Fabrication of Aboriginal History,' in *Upholding the Australian Constitution*, vol. 15, pp. 283–308.
[127] Gary Johns, 'Native Title 20 Years On: Beyond the Hyperbole,' in *Upholding the Australian Constitution*, vol. 24, Proceedings of the Twenty-Fourth Conference of the Samuel Griffith Society, Brisbane, August 2012, pp. 169–215.

devastating consequences of the decision; a preference for a non-sentimental view of history; a belief that Aborigines, far from being disadvantaged, were privileged; a view that the High Court "had betrayed the demands of their high position"; and a critical view of Aboriginal culture.[128] Somewhat more dramatically, Attwood argued that "Mabo forms part of a new historical narrative which portends for conservatives the end of (Australian) history as they have conceived it and, therefore, the end of their Australia."[129] Looking back on the Samuel Griffith Society's hysterical reaction to Mabo in its entirety, it is difficult to disagree with this characterisation.

Today

The Samuel Griffith Society has been in a period of transition for much of the past decade, largely due to the advancing age of its founders. When Nancy Stone relinquished her secretarial role in 2004, her husband John took it on in addition to the position of conference convenor which he had held since 1992. When he retired in 2009, the end of an era had been reached. Responsibility for conferences was passed to Julian Leeser, but in July 2016 he moved on after being elected to federal parliament as the Liberal member for Berowra in NSW. The presidency, which had passed to David Smith following the death of Harry Gibbs, has been held by Ian Callinan since 2011.

Stone's secretarial role was assumed in 2009 by long-time board member Bob Day and his personal assistant Joy Montgomery, based at the office of Day's Homestead Homes business in the Adelaide suburb of Modbury. Once Day established the Bert Kelly Research Centre in inner-city Kent Town in 2011, the Samuel Griffith Society became one of a number of conservative tenants, alongside the Family First political party, the Australian Taxpayers' Alliance and Senator

[128] Andrew Markus, 'Between Mabo and a Hard Place: Race and the Contradictions of Conservatism,' in Attwood, *In the Age of Mabo*, pp. 89–93.
[129] Attwood, 'Mabo, Australia and the End of History,' p. 100.

Cory Bernardi's Conservative Leadership Foundation.[130] But Day was forced to relinquish his leading role in the Society after taking up a seat in the Senate representing Family First in July 2014. Melbourne barrister Stuart Wood has since taken over as secretary and treasurer.

In November 2016 Bob Day resigned from the Senate, ostensibly due to the financial collapse of his business. But in an ironic twist for an avowed constitutional defender, it was soon revealed that Day faced questions over whether he had breached section 44 of the Constitution, which disqualifies anyone from sitting in parliament who "has any direct or indirect pecuniary interest in any agreement with the Public Service of the Commonwealth."[131] At issue was his use of the aforementioned Kent Town property as his electorate office. Though he claimed to have "disposed of his interest in the building," and was thus not receiving a benefit in the form of rent from the Commonwealth, he remained linked to the mortgage.[132] Day denied any wrongdoing, but the matter was referred to the High Court, which ruled in April 2017 that his election was invalid.

On an intellectual level, the most intriguing outcome of generational change within the Society has been its evolving position on the issue of Indigenous constitutional recognition. In October 2007—just days before calling a federal election—John Howard announced that, if re-elected, he would hold a referendum to formally recognise Indigenous Australians in the Constitution. Though Howard went on to lose the election, Indigenous constitutional recognition has enjoyed bipartisan political support ever since. But members of the Society were wary, and when Prime Minister Julia Gillard announced an expert panel to advise on the issue in November 2010, John Stone was quick to respond with mockery. "What is it about our politicians (from all sides)," he asked, "that moves them to these flights of faux-symbolic fancy?"[133] Stone's rhetoric was echoed by Gary Johns, who outlined his arguments against recognition at the 2013 and 2014 Samuel Griffith Society conferences.

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[130] Liam Mannix, 'Inside Adelaide's conservative HQ,' *InDaily*, 4 September 2013, http://indaily.com.au/news/2013/09/04/inside-adelaides-conservative-hq/
[131] Commonwealth of Australia, *Australia's Constitution*, p. 16.
[132] Sarah Martin, 'Day "sold" office but benefit remained," *Australian*, 3 November 2016.
[133] John Stone, 'Another divisive referendum out of tune with national thinking,' *Australian*, 22 November 2010.

But in the meantime prominent members of the Society such as Julian Leeser and Greg Craven were meeting with Cape York Indigenous leader Noel Pearson to discuss the issue more constructively. They hoped to come up with a compromise that would both uphold the Constitution and achieve reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians. In April 2015 Pearson gave the launching address for a new organisation called Uphold & Recognise, the centrepiece of which was an 'Australian Declaration of Recognition,' a proposal co-authored by Leeser and Damien Freeman.[134] By placing the symbolic aspects of recognition outside the Constitution, the authors hope to avoid the dangers of tinkering with Australia's highest law, while still acknowledging the unique place of Indigenous people within the nation.

But when Leeser sought to advance the proposal at the Samuel Griffith Society in August 2015, his predecessor was unimpressed. Stone doesn't see the proposal as a compromise at all, regarding it "as unacceptable as the idea(s) it purported to replace."[135] He said as much in response to Leeser's paper and, he told me, was greeted with applause by the audience. While Greg Craven views the proposal as a positive example of the way in which the Society is able to "promote a deeper conservative understanding and contribution to quite complicated issues,"[136] Stone remains unmoved. "The whole 'recognition' push has been dangerous nonsense from beginning to end," he said. "It is serving as a nice little earner for all the usual suspects in the Aboriginal industry, at taxpayers' expense, but if it is ever put to a vote, which I doubt, it will go down in flames."[137]

Conclusion

Though it faces a number of challenges, the Samuel Griffith Society is still a relatively strong organisation. This is especially apparent when one compares its

[134] Damien Freeman and Julian Leeser, *An Australian Declaration of Recognition: Capturing the Nation's Aspirations by Recognising Indigenous Australians*, 2014, http://damienfreeman.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/11/DTF-14.pdf
[135] Stone, email to author, 14 April 2016.
[136] Craven, interview with author.
[137] Stone, email to author, 14 April 2016.

recent fortunes to those of the other groups being examined in this thesis. But as the Society prepared to celebrate its twentieth anniversary, Julian Leeser, perhaps concerned about its ageing, declining membership, was eager to discuss ways in which the group could become more relevant:

> I believe that the mission for the Society in its next twenty years is to move from being a learned debating society to becoming a much more direct influence in the public debate of our nation. If the values of our Society: respect for our Constitution, federalism, the rule of law, skepticism of international law and what the Americans might call "judicial modesty" are to flourish, we must do more to promote our ideas. We must build a coalition for the values of this Society in the law, in the parliaments of our nation, in academia and among students.[138]

Leeser seemed to be acknowledging a paradox about the Society: that while it has maintained a strong membership and held successful conferences over a long period of time, its political successes have been few and far between. From a federalist perspective, centralisation of power remains just as much of a problem as it was in the 1980s. Upon his retirement John Stone even admitted that he and Nancy had sometimes succumbed to doubts about whether the Samuel Griffith Society was actually accomplishing anything at all.[139]

But while the fight to restore Australian federalism may appear to some as a lost cause, Greg Craven sees this as part and parcel of the life of the conservative, in which one takes a heroic stand against the zeitgeist. "I think if you're a federalist—and I've been a federalist all my life—it's a life of constant retreat," he told me. "It's that theory of conservatism in which you're never actually going to win, but you are going to force change to be either slower or better."[140] Craven also takes heart in the belief that the people are on the side of the Samuel Griffith Society, even if they don't know it. "The true constitutional conservatives are the

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[138] Julian Leeser, 'Introduction,' in *Upholding the Australian Constitution*, vol. 23, Proceedings of the Twenty-Third Conference of the Samuel Griffith Society, Hobart, August 2011, p. x.
[139] John Stone, 'Some Words of Thanks,' in *Upholding the Australian Constitution*, vol. 22, pp. 271–72.
[140] Craven, interview with author.

Australian people themselves," he wrote recently. "The so-called 'Con Cons' are merely the pointy, frigid tip of an iceberg of national sentiment."[141]

[141] Greg Craven, 'The Law, Substance and Morality of Recognition,' in Damien Freeman and Shireen Morris (eds), *The Forgotten People: Liberal and Conservative Approaches to Recognising Indigenous Peoples*, Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2016, p. 36.

5

THE BENNELONG SOCIETY AND INDIGENOUS AFFAIRS

The dispossession of Australia's Indigenous people by the British began with Lieutenant James Cook's charting of the east coast of Australia in 1770, when Cook claimed the land for King George III and named it New South Wales. Later, Captain Arthur Phillip was instructed to establish a British colony in Australia. In January 1788 he arrived with the First Fleet, which was comprised of eleven ships and around 1350 people. The Indigenous population of the continent at this time is disputed, but the most common estimate is 750,000, and Indigenous people are believed to have occupied the land for around 60,000 years. But despite Phillip having been told "to live in amity and kindness" with the natives,[1] the arrival of the British signalled the beginning of what Charles Rowley later termed "the destruction of Aboriginal society."[2]

The next 150 years or more of Australian race relations alternated between violence and indifference towards Aboriginal people. But as the anthropologist W.E.H. Stanner explained in his 1968 Boyer Lectures, many Australians were either blissfully unaware of this shameful history, or were not prepared to acknowledge it. He called this phenomenon "the great Australian silence":

> What may well have begun as a simple forgetting of other possible views turned into habit and over time into something like a cult of forgetfulness practised on a national scale. We have been able for so long to disremember the Aborigines that we are now hard put to keep them in mind even when we

[1] Instructions to Arthur Phillip, quoted in W.E.H. Stanner, *The Dreaming and Other Essays*, Melbourne: Black Inc, 2010, p. 93.
[2] C.D. Rowley, *The Destruction of Aboriginal Society*, Melbourne: Penguin, 1970.

most want to do so.[3]

By the late 1960s, Stanner was pleased to observe that this silence was coming to an end, and in the following decades the work of Rowley, Henry Reynolds, Peter Read and many others brought significant attention to Australia's lamentable history of race relations.

In the post-war period up until the 1960s the most clearly articulated government policy in relation to Aborigines was assimilation. This policy was closely associated with the minister for territories from 1951 to 1963, Paul Hasluck, though as he later pointed out, he "inherited both the word and the purpose it expressed."[4] Hasluck did acknowledge that he gave "greater precision to the idea," however, which is evident in his address to the Australian and New Zealand Association for the Advancement of Science in Sydney in August 1952:

> [assimilation] means, to my mind, that we expect that, in the course of time, all persons of aboriginal blood or mixed-blood in Australia will live in the same manner as white Australians do, that they will have full citizenship and that they will, of their own desire, participate in all the activities of the Australian community. Full assimilation will mean that the aboriginal shares the hopes, the fears, the ambitions and the loyalties of all other Australians and draws from the Australian community all his social needs, spiritual as well as material. Whether biological assimilation goes hand-in-hand with cultural assimilation is a matter which time will reveal but my own guess would be that, if cultural assimilation occurs, mating will follow naturally.[5]

Hasluck refused to accept the commonly held belief that Aborigines were doomed to extinction, and wanted to see them prosper. Historians have disagreed about the extent to which he respected Aboriginal culture and tradition, but Geoffrey Bolton makes the important point in his biography that Hasluck "was not urging that Aboriginal people should make themselves into imitation white Australians, but that they should have access to the same opportunities and rights

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[3] Stanner, *The Dreaming and Other Essays*, p. 189.
[4] Paul Hasluck, *Shades of Darkness: Aboriginal Affairs, 1925–1965*, Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1988, p. 70.
[5] Paul Hasluck, *Native Welfare in Australia*, Perth: Paterson Brokensha, 1953, pp. 56–57.

of citizenship."[6] In reality, though, Aborigines were expected to conform to white norms and ways of living. As part of an inevitable process of integration, the lifestyle that had sustained them for thousands of years was to be abandoned for their own good. While some might have lamented this break from traditional culture, the process was seen as essential to avoid a situation in which Aborigines lived as outcasts in marginal and impoverished settlements.

As Tim Rowse has noted, assimilation "remains an elusive category for historians" and thus, it is difficult to pinpoint the moment when it came to an end.[7] However, it is generally agreed that things began to shift around the time of the 1967 referendum, which proposed that two references to Aborigines in the Constitution be removed. The first was contained in section 51 (xxvi), which gave Parliament legislative power with respect to "the people of any race, other than the aboriginal race in any state, for whom it is deemed necessary to make special laws."[8] The second was section 127, which stated that "in reckoning the numbers of the people of the Commonwealth, or of a State or other part of the Commonwealth, aboriginal natives shall not be counted."[9] With the support of 90 per cent of the Australian population, the words "other than the aboriginal race in any state" were removed from section 51 (xxvi), and section 127 was repealed entirely. The effect of the first change was to give the Commonwealth concurrent powers with the states in Aboriginal affairs, which had previously been the primary responsibility of state governments (apart from in the Northern Territory, where the Commonwealth had been in charge since 1911). The repeal of section 127 meant that Aboriginal people would now be counted in the census and so brought into the nation as Australians.

The referendum is commonly cited as a major turning point in Indigenous affairs, but some historians have challenged this narrative, in which "the referendum comes to stand in for, or to symbolise (in the way that myth usually

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[6] Geoffrey Bolton, *Paul Hasluck: A Life*, Perth: UWA Publishing, 2014, p. 75.
[7] Tim Rowse, 'Introduction,' in Tim Rowse (ed.), *Contesting Assimilation*, Perth: API Network, 2005, p. 2.
[8] Commonwealth of Australia, *Australia's Constitution*, Canberra: Australian Government Publishing Service, [1901] 1995, p. 19.
[9] Commonwealth of Australia, *Australia's Constitution*, p. 44.

does), something much more complex and diffuse."[10] Support for this interpretation comes from the fact that Aborigines were soon frustrated with the lack of progress that followed the referendum.[11] It wasn't until 1972 under Prime Minister William McMahon—aided by the influential public servant H.C. 'Nugget' Coombs—that the Commonwealth began to use its new power over Aboriginal policy. That year also saw the establishment of the Aboriginal Tent Embassy on the lawns outside Parliament House, which amplified the pressure on the Commonwealth to consider the views of Indigenous people. Meanwhile Coombs, as chairman of the Council for Aboriginal Affairs, worked to end the policy of assimilation and usher in the era of self-determination, which was formally adopted as government policy following Labor's election victory under Gough Whitlam in December 1972.

As processes of decolonisation took place around the globe following the Second World War, self-determination became a defining principle of the era. Historically oppressed peoples were now demanding the right to determine their own future, and official resistance to such ideas was weakening. For Indigenous Australians, self-determination came to involve three essential features:

> the legislated recognition of 'land rights' (in a series of Acts passed by seven parliaments between 1966 and 1991), the enumeration practices initiated in the 1971 census (allowing respondents' choice of cultural identity), and the rise of the Indigenous sector – the thousands of incorporated bodies that are publicly funded to represent Indigenous Australians, to administer services to them and to hold title to their lands.[12]

Though self-determination policies were never entirely free of political controversy, they were generally adopted by both major parties until the election of the Howard government in 1996. Around this time, as Peter Sutton has documented, the liberal consensus on Indigenous affairs began to break down.[13]

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[10] Bain Attwood and Andrew Markus, *The 1967 Referendum: Race, Power and the Australian Constitution*, Canberra: Aboriginal Studies Press, 2007, p. 67.
[11] John Gardiner-Garden, 'From Dispossession to Reconciliation,' *Parliamentary Library Research Paper No. 27, 1998–99*, Canberra: Department of the Parliamentary Library, 1999, pp. 4–5.
[12] Tim Rowse, 'Introduction,' p. 19.
[13] Peter Sutton, *The Politics of Suffering: Indigenous Australia and the End of the Liberal Consensus* (rev. edn), Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2011.

Nowhere was this more evident than in the emergence of a neo-assimilationist movement, which would eventually lead to the birth of the Bennelong Society.

Formation and personnel

Conservatives and land rights

The conservative backlash against Aboriginal self-determination can be traced back to the first major piece of land rights legislation in 1976, the *Aboriginal Land Rights (Northern Territory) Act*, and was closely tied to mining interests.[14] Hugh Morgan, in his capacity as the executive director of Western Mining, emerged in the 1980s as one of the most outspoken opponents of Aboriginal land rights. He fired his first shot in an address to an AMIC seminar in Canberra in May 1984, with Labor ministers Clyde Holding, Barry Cohen and Peter Walsh present. Morgan employed Christianity to make a moral case for mining, denigrated Indigenous spiritual and cultural traditions, and made spurious claims regarding Aboriginal cannibalism.[15] Andrew Markus described the speech as an attempt to "undermine the legitimacy of Aboriginal claims by attacking the moral basis of their society."[16] Gerard Henderson, who was in the audience, thought it "perhaps the toughest speech I have ever heard. At times you got the impression that the paint was peeling from the ceiling."[17]

The AMIC address was written by Ray Evans, and was consciously designed to be politically explosive. The speech received front-page coverage in several major newspapers. As the *Age* reported, Morgan drew criticism from all corners: "The Federal Government accused him of trying to set up a divine right of miners, church groups scolded him with biblical quotes, historians took issue with him on cannibalism and Aboriginal groups called him a hypocrite. It wasn't Hugh

[14] See Murray Goot and Tim Rowse, *Divided Nation? Indigenous Affairs and the Imagined Public*, Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2007, pp. 61–96.
[15] Published as Hugh Morgan, 'Aboriginal Land Rights: A View,' in Australian Mining Industry Council, *Minerals Outlook Seminar 1984: Proceedings*, Canberra: AMIC, May 1984, pp. 80–92.
[16] Andrew Markus, *Race: John Howard and the Remaking of Australia*, Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 2001, p. 61.
[17] Gerard Henderson, *Australian Answers*, Sydney: Random House, 1990, p. 243.

Morgan's day."[18] This interpretation presumed that the criticism concerned Morgan. However, he and Evans were operating according to the adage that any publicity is good publicity, and in this sense their strategy could hardly have been more successful. Morgan later described it as being "like a grenade thrown at the right time in the right place."[19] They did find at least one friend in the government however, the minister for resources and energy, Peter Walsh, who defended Morgan by saying that "the terms in which a case is put or exaggerated do not in my view necessarily invalidate the case itself."[20] Walsh was very much a contrarian in the Labor Party, and later became a leading member of the Lavoisier Group, as we will see in chapter 6.

Ronald Libby described Morgan's speech as "an exegesis for the religious basis of mining" which had a significant effect on the mining industry.[21] Morgan had provided the industry with an ideology from which it could launch an unprecedented public advocacy campaign against proposed land rights legislation, concentrating on Western Australia. The Labor government in WA, led by Premier Brian Burke, was promptly forced to abandon its support for land rights due to the impact of the campaign. The threat of a nationwide campaign then put paid to any possibility of the federal Labor government passing land rights legislation in the near future.

Later, Morgan and Evans were able to expand on their religious defence of mining by commissioning a book by Bendigo academic Roger Sworder, eventually published in 1995 as *Mining, Metallurgy and the Meaning of Life*.[22] Meanwhile, they continued to rail against the concept of Aboriginal land rights up to and following the High Court's Mabo judgment in 1992 and the Keating government's subsequent *Native Title Act*.[23] As we saw in the previous chapter, these issues were also being debated extensively at conferences of the Samuel Griffith Society.

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[18] Margot O'Neill and Jill Baker, 'The wrath of God and man descends on Hugh Morgan,' *Age*, 4 May 1984.
[19] Hugh Morgan, quoted in Henderson, *Australian Answers*, p. 243.
[20] Peter Walsh, quoted in Amanda Buckley, 'Land rights criticism splits Govt,' *Sydney Morning Herald*, 4 May 1984.
[21] Ronald T. Libby, *Hawke's Law: The Politics of Mining and Aboriginal Land Rights in Australia*, Perth: University of Western Australia Press, 1989, p. 59.
[22] Roger Sworder, *Mining, Metallurgy and the Meaning of Life*, Sydney: Quakers Hill Press, 1995.
[23] For a critical analysis of Morgan's anti-land rights speeches in this period, see Geoff Page, 'Rugged Nostalgia: The Rhetoric of H.M. Morgan,' *Quadrant*, December 1993, pp. 67–71.

Opposition to land rights was also growing within the Liberal Party, but the need for action did not become clear until the Coalition lost the "unloseable" 1993 election, despite Paul Keating's apparent unpopularity. David Kemp, Liberal frontbencher and key member of the New Right, decided enough was enough, as Ray Evans recounted:

> Kemp, realising that the Liberal Party's understanding of Aboriginal affairs was confused and contradictory, organised this dinner with Peter Howson and other senior Liberals, to see if some coherence could be brought to intra-party debates. I was invited because I had achieved some small notoriety as a fierce critic of the Mabo judgement.[24]

Liberal hardliners felt that their party had become soft on Indigenous issues. Especially concerning was opposition leader John Hewson's refusal to campaign against Mabo, despite pressure from within the party. Kemp and Evans felt that Howson in particular could do something to solve the problem.

Peter Howson (1919–2009)

Peter Howson, minister for the environment, Aborigines and the arts in the short-lived McMahon government, is the most important figure in the history of the Bennelong Society. Born in London, Howson moved to Australia following the Second World War and soon became an active member of the Liberal Party. Following unsuccessful attempts in 1951 and 1954, he eventually won the seat of Fawkner thanks to the Labor Party split and entered parliament in 1955. He was minister for air from 1964 until 1968, but his political career suffered following the death of Prime Minister Harold Holt in December 1967.[25] Demoted from the ministry by Holt's successor John Gorton, Howson worked to undermine Gorton's prime ministership. In March 1971 William McMahon took the job.

By the time Howson was given responsibility for Indigenous affairs in May 1971, Nugget Coombs had become a powerful, disrupting influence in the area,

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[24] Ray Evans, 'Memories of Peter and Kitty Howson,' *Quadrant*, April 2009, p. 53.
[25] Ray Evans, 'Peter Howson (1919–2009),' *Quadrant*, March 2009, p. 62.

and Howson was soon "besieged by his portfolio's strong personalities."[26] Labor's election victory in December 1972 saw Howson lose his seat and his formal political career came to what he viewed as a premature end. He refrained from active involvement in Indigenous affairs for about twenty years, "and could only sit on the sidelines watching the destruction of all the ideas and projects that I and others had set in place."[27] But following the dinner organised by Kemp in 1993, Howson and Evans began regularly lunching together and strategising a long campaign: "the overthrow of the Coombsian doctrine of self-determination and separatism which was destroying the lives of Aborigines all over Australia and threatening the territorial integrity of the nation."[28]

Christopher Pearson, the late conservative columnist and former speechwriter for John Howard, has described Howson as "a much-loved Liberal Party patriarch" and "one of the few federal ministers to have had Aboriginal affairs responsibilities in his portfolio and to have emerged from the experience with an enhanced reputation."[29] He also argued that Howson "saw from the outset that Coombsian policy would prove disastrous and there's a sense in which his whole post-political career can be read as an act of redress."[30] This does not explain why Howson consciously chose to stay out of Indigenous affairs for twenty years, but it is certainly true of the period from 1993 until his death in 2009.

Pearson's overwhelmingly positive view of Howson does not appear to have been shared by Paul Hasluck, who reviewed Howson's political diaries for the *Age* in 1984. Hasluck suggested that Howson was a peripheral figure, "never close to the centre of power" but rather "busy on the gossip fringe of the government."[31] He even mischievously likened Howson to the vain, bungling Jim Hacker, the title character from the British television comedy series *Yes Minister*, who is constantly thwarted by the public servants who are ostensibly subservient to him. These were rather unkind words from the man who Howson had urged to run for the Liberal

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[26] Tim Rowse, *Obliged to be Difficult: Nugget Coombs' Legacy in Indigenous Affairs*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000, p. 63.
[27] Peter Howson, 'Dedication,' in Gary Johns, *Aboriginal Self-Determination: The Whiteman's Dream*, Ballan: Connor Court, 2011, p. 11.
[28] Evans, 'Memories of Peter and Kitty Howson,' p. 53.
[29] Christopher Pearson, 'Vivid memories of 1973,' *Weekend Australian*, 21 June 2008.
[30] Christopher Pearson, 'Separatism's tireless foe,' *Weekend Australian*, 7 February 2009.
[31] Paul Hasluck, 'Howson's role on the political fringe,' *Age*, 9 June 1984.

Party leadership in 1968.

Tim Rowse, biographer of Nugget Coombs, is also no admirer of Howson, seeing in his "sustained negative reflection on Coombs" something rather pathetic:

> His diaries reveal him to be a man of limited social range. He was moved increasingly to dismay and self-pity when the spirit of the times produced monsters undreamt of over his many lunches at the Melbourne Club. Rather than try to engage intellectually with that troubling world, Howson demonised Coombs as its Machiavellian embodiment. There was a kind of innocence in this, a crippling truncation of the liberal imagination.[32]

In this description of Howson, one can't help being reminded of William F. Buckley's memorable image of the conservative standing athwart history, yelling "Stop."

Galatians Group

The first institutional vehicle for the right's renewed enthusiasm for Indigenous affairs was somewhat indirect. In 1994, along with some disgruntled Uniting Church ministers, Howson and Evans helped form the Galatians Group.[33] It took its name from a passage out of the New Testament's Epistle to the Galatians: "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Galatians 3:28). Reverend Max Champion, who became its president, wrote that this signified "that human civilisation is constituted not by distinctions of race, class, gender or religion but by a shared body of traditions and institutions which are maintained by laws which apply to all and discriminate against none."[34]

The Galatians Group was active from 1994 until 1999, in which time it held five conferences and published its proceedings under the umbrella theme 'The Churches and the Challenge of Australian Civilisation.' Topics covered included Indigenous affairs, multiculturalism, social justice, education, values and the arts.

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[32] Rowse, *Obliged to be Difficult*, p. 59.
[33] Marion Maddox, *God Under Howard: The Rise of the Religious Right in Australian Politics*, Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 2005, pp. 213–14.
[34] Max Champion, 'Foreword,' in *The Churches: Native to Australia or Alien Intruders?* Proceedings of the Inaugural Conference of the Galatians Group, Melbourne, 1994, p. v.

While principally a project of members of the Uniting Church, other denominations such as the Catholic, Lutheran and Anglican churches were represented.

The immediate concern of the Galatians Group in 1994 was the Uniting Church's 'Covenanting Statement,' in which the leadership of the Church formally apologised to Aboriginal people "for all those wrongs done knowingly or unknowingly to your people by the Church," a gesture it hoped would "unite us in a multi-racial bond of fellowship which will be a witness to God's love for us all and a constant challenge to the continuing racism which oppresses you and separates us in this land."[35] The Galatians Group found this "campaign to engender shame among Australians" very disturbing, and saw it as part of a wider trend of the churches being more concerned with advocating progressive politics than with preaching the Gospel.[36] The first Galatians conference was held in Melbourne in August 1994, in which a variety of views were aired, all dissenting from the Uniting Church leadership's position on Aboriginal reconciliation. Conservative columnist Frank Devine promoted the conference in the *Australian*.[37]

A number of New Right identities and associates addressed the Galatians Group during its short existence, including Geoffrey Blainey, Harry Gibbs, Ron Brunton, B.A. Santamaria, Peter Walsh, John Hyde and Alan Oxley. Reflecting in 2009, Ray Evans was as forthright as ever in outlining the reasons for founding the Galatians Group, calling it "a small group of Uniting Church and other clergy who found the support given by the churches to the cause of Aboriginal separatism wanting in theological soundness, and extremely distasteful in the way the work and sacrifice of the missionaries of previous generations was denigrated."[38] Patrick Morgan described it as a group for "traditionalist Protestant ministers of religion who, though in the majority in their congregations as far as their views went, were being marginalised by trendy clerics who had grabbed control of the ruling organs of their denominations."[39]

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[35] Uniting Church of Australia, 'Covenanting Statement,' 10 July 1994, http://assembly.uca.org.au/resources/covenanting/item/135-covenanting-statement-1994
[36] Max Champion, quoted in Geraldine O'Brien and James Woodford, 'Church divided over apology to Aborigines,' *Sydney Morning Herald*, 15 August 1994.
[37] Frank Devine, 'Guilt-edged views threaten stability,' *Australian*, 22 August 1994.
[38] Evans, 'Memories of Peter and Kitty Howson,' p. 54.
[39] Patrick Morgan, 'The Life and Career of Ray Evans,' *Quadrant*, September 2014, p. 80.

Foundational text

According to Peter Howson, it was through the Galatians Group that historian Geoffrey Partington was recruited to write what would become the neo-assimilationist movement's foundational text: *Hasluck versus Coombs: White Politics and Australia's Aborigines*.[40] Partington was a prolific contributor to *Quadrant* who had also given a paper at the Samuel Griffith Society on the Mabo judgment. Published in 1996 with a preface by Howson, his book is a patently subjective account of half a century of Indigenous affairs, nostalgic for Hasluck and scathing of Coombs, with very few shades of grey. The following passage provides a neat summary of Partington's thesis:

> The assimilationist policies [Hasluck] advocated were in place for less than twenty years during the 1950s and 1960s, but, on the basis of the meagre amount of available information about educational standards, employment opportunities, health, family structures, criminal offences, and so on, there is every reason to believe that this was the period in which Aborigines achieved more real progress than in any other, before or since. At the very least it had positive features which it is foolish to ignore on ideological grounds.[41]

Partington emphasises the political differences between Hasluck and Coombs, though in reality they shared a relationship of mutual respect. Reviewing a book by Coombs in 1980, Hasluck wrote that Coombs's "highly practical intelligence … has been applied eminently for nearly forty years to several phases of policy formation and public administration in Australia and he played an influential part in shaping comment and policy on Aborigines during the nineteen-seventies."[42] Coombs, responding through a family spokesman to the media attention surrounding the publication of Partington's book, said that though he disagreed with Hasluck's policies, their relationship was "functional and cordial."[43]

Hasluck versus Coombs was launched in June 1996 at Parliament House in

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[40] Howson, 'Dedication,' pp. 11–12.
[41] Geoffrey Partington, *Hasluck versus Coombs: White Politics and Australia's Aborigines*, Sydney: Quakers Hill Press, 1996, pp. 152–53.
[42] Paul Hasluck, review of C.D. Rowley, *A Matter of Justice* and H.C. Coombs *Kulinma: Listening to Aboriginal Australians*, in *Aboriginal History*, vol. 4, no. 2 (1980), p. 201.
[43] Dennis Shanahan, 'Herron promotes 50s black policy call,' *Australian*, 17 June 1996.

Canberra by the newly appointed Liberal minister for Indigenous affairs, John Herron. This apparent government endorsement of a return to assimilation proved to be quite controversial, and the *Australian* in particular seized the opportunity to highlight divisions in policy circles. Herron claimed that his launching of the book was not an endorsement, though he did describe its thesis as "exciting and interesting," but Indigenous leader Noel Pearson nevertheless found it "a bit worrying that the minister is excited about such a simplistic and ideological tract."[44] A group of sixty-six academics saw Herron's involvement and the *Australian*'s coverage as "promotion and endorsement" of Partington's views and expressed their outrage in a letter to the editor.[45] Conservative commentator Gerard Henderson was also critical of the book and Herron for agreeing to launch it.[46] When it later emerged that John Howard had greeted Partington at the launch it was considered sufficiently newsworthy to warrant a 400-word article in the *Weekend Australian*.[47] Such was the sensitivity at the time regarding the legacy of assimilation.

In a review of the book published in *Meanjin*, Tim Rowse was critical of the way in which Partington "makes a fetish" of Hasluck, as well as the censoriousness of the sixty-six academics' letter to the *Australian*. He was also sceptical of the notion that Herron's launching of the book represented an alignment of interests between Partington and the government:

> Such an empty and tendentious book as *Hasluck versus Coombs* could not lay the basis for a new approach to indigenous affairs by the Howard government. … Partington's contribution has rather been his momentary fillip to Liberal nostalgia. The amity between author and minister at the book launch was probably the zenith of their mutual satisfaction.[48]

With the benefit of hindsight we can see that Rowse was too quick to dismiss the

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[44] John Herron and Noel Pearson, quoted in Lisa McLean, 'Assimilation policies still have relevance: Herron,' *Australian*, 18 June 1996.
[45] Suvendrini Perera et al., 'Chilling return to support for assimilation' (letter to the editor), *Australian*, 26 June 1996.
[46] Gerard Henderson, 'Time to lift your game, Minister,' *Sydney Morning Herald*, 2 July 1996.
[47] Dennis Shanahan, 'Howard greets assimilation policy supporter,' *Weekend Australian*, 29 June 1996.
[48] Tim Rowse, '"Past has merit": Minister,' *Meanjin Quarterly*, vol. 55, no. 4 (1996), p. 628.

neo-assimilationists. A political and intellectual shift was taking place, the significance of which he was not yet able to see.

Quadrant takes charge

Public support for reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians was gathering pace following the publication of the report of the National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from Their Families, *Bringing Them Home*, in 1997. The neo-assimilationists were alarmed, and got busy preparing their response. In February 1998 the IPA published a pamphlet by anthropologist Ron Brunton challenging the findings of *Bringing Them Home*.[49] Under the editorship of Paddy McGuinness, *Quadrant* published two articles along similar lines in June 1999, one of which was written by Peter Howson.[50] Meanwhile Frank Devine, Christopher Pearson, Andrew Bolt, Piers Akerman and Michael Duffy began to air their own concerns about *Bringing Them Home* in their regular newspaper columns.

By this time it was being reported that conservatives were mounting "a calculated assault on advocates of an apology over discredited government policy."[51] When Robert Manne also warned of a conservative campaign of historical denial, Howson was dismissive. "It is fanciful to imagine such a large number of individuals with diverse views and backgrounds could mount a campaign," he wrote. "Manne seems unable to distinguish between a campaign and an obvious concern to establish the truth."[52] Meanwhile, McGuinness was converting words into action by hosting two *Quadrant* seminars on Indigenous affairs: 'Rousseau versus Reality' in August 1999 (where John Herron gave the after-dinner address) and 'Truth and Sentimentality' in September 2000, both of which received significant coverage in the *Australian*.

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[49] Ron Brunton, 'Betraying the Victims: The "Stolen Generations" Report,' *IPA Backgrounder*, vol. 10, no. 1 (February 1998). The IPA had earlier published Brunton's *Black Suffering, White Guilt: Aboriginal Disadvantage and the Royal Commission into Deaths in Custody*, Melbourne: Institute of Public Affairs, 1993.

[50] Peter Howson, 'Rescued from the Rabbit Burrow: Understanding the "Stolen Generation",' *Quadrant*, June 1999, pp. 10–14; Reginald Marsh, '"Lost", "Stolen" or "Rescued"?' *Quadrant*, June 1999, pp. 15–18.

[51] Megan Saunders, 'Stolen children "rescued", by rights,' *Australian*, 16 June 1999.

[52] Peter Howson, 'Academia's sorry obsession,' *Age*, 3 April 2001. Howson was responding to Robert Manne, 'In Denial: The Stolen Generations and the Right,' *Quarterly Essay*, no. 1 (2001).

This period also saw the rise to national prominence of Keith Windschuttle. A former media studies academic and Marxist who had transformed into an ultra-conservative amateur historian, Windschuttle was now devoting his energies to disproving the work of Australian historians regarding massacres of Indigenous people. His arguments—suggesting that there was significantly less violence than previously reported—were first published across three issues of *Quadrant* in late 2000, and were a significant element in Australia's so-called history wars.[53] His research had the strong backing of McGuinness, who had taken over the editorship of *Quadrant* from Manne in 1998 following significant disagreements over Indigenous issues.[54]

Windschuttle found a prominent supporter in John Howard, who awarded him a Centenary Medal in 2003 and later appointed him to the board of the ABC. Addressing *Quadrant*'s fiftieth anniversary dinner in 2006, Howard said that "of the causes that *Quadrant* has taken up that are close to my heart none is more important than the role it has played as counterforce to the black-armband view of Australian history."[55] This term—suggesting that left-wing historians had painted an unfairly negative picture of Australian history—came from Geoffrey Blainey's 1993 Sir John Latham Memorial Lecture,[56] and its repetition was a feature of Howard's early years as prime minister.[57] Windschuttle's historical revisionism was thus received with delight. In the words of one journalist, "if Keith Windschuttle hadn't existed, John Howard would have been sorely tempted to invent him."[58]

Woollarawarre Bennelong (c.1764–1813)

Spurred into action by the *Quadrant* seminars, Peter Howson organised a follow-up workshop, 'Aboriginal Policy: Failure, Reappraisal and Reform' in December

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[53] See Stuart Macintyre and Anna Clark, *The History Wars*, Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2003.
[54] Manne, 'In Denial,' pp. 57–58.
[55] John Howard, 'A Tribute to *Quadrant*,' *Quadrant*, November 2006, p. 23.
[56] Published as Geoffrey Blainey, 'Drawing Up a Balance Sheet of Our History,' *Quadrant*, July–August 1993, pp. 10–15.
[57] Mark McKenna, 'Different Perspectives on Black Armband History,' *Parliamentary Library Research Paper No. 5, 1997–98*, Canberra: Department of the Parliamentary Library, 1998, pp. 9–12.
[58] Andrew Stevenson, 'A voice from the frontier,' *Sydney Morning Herald*, 22 September 2001.

2000. Those present included Ray Evans, Des Moore, Gary Johns, Geoffrey Partington, Ron Brunton, Keith Windschuttle, Paddy McGuinness and Geoffrey Blainey, and "it was resolved that an organisation, with the name of the Bennelong Society, should be incorporated."[59] Evans later described this moment as the culmination of "eight years of continuing effort to try to find an effective vehicle for responding to the hegemony of Coombsian doctrine."[60]

As with all of the groups being examined in this thesis, the name the Bennelong Society adopted is significant. It was named after Woollarawarre Bennelong, who one historian described as "the most significant Indigenous man in early Sydney."[61] Following his capture at the behest of Governor Arthur Phillip in 1789, Bennelong served as an intermediary between his people, the Eora, and the British invaders. Dirk van Dissel's brief biographical article, published on the Bennelong Society website, approvingly relates how Bennelong learned English and adopted European behaviour and dress while residing with Governor Phillip.

It is clear that for the members of the Bennelong Society, Bennelong was the earliest example of successful assimilation of Indigenous culture into what would inevitably become the dominant British culture. Van Dissel's article goes on to conclude:

> Time and time again, Bennelong exhibited skills of determination, diplomacy and resolve that could be likened to that of an astute and seasoned politician. He was considered a vital link between the white settlers and the Aborigines because of his ability to speak both languages and behave accordingly in both cultures. His closeness to Governor Phillip and influential Aborigines such as Colby guaranteed his position within both societies as he was the intermediary between the two different peoples. Through his own actions, Bennelong cemented his image and position as an important and influential part of the establishment of Sydney Cove during the 1790s.[62]

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[59] Geoffrey Partington, 'The Origins of the Bennelong Society,' Bennelong Society, May 2001, p. 24.
[60] Ray Evans, quoted in Pearson, 'Separatism's tireless foe'.
[61] Keith Vincent Smith, 'Bennelong Among His People,' *Aboriginal History*, vol. 33 (2009), p. 7.
[62] Dirk van Dissel, 'Woollarawarre Bennelong, the Bush Politician,' Bennelong Society, 2004, http://www.bennelong.com.au/papers/Articles/bennelongbio.html

However, this conveniently uplifting story is incomplete. Some time around 1800, struggling with alcoholism following three years in England, "Bennelong, who had seen at first-hand the best and worst of European civilisation chose to reject it," and "returned to a respected position in the Eora clan networks from which he had taken temporary leave."[63] The Bennelong Society's poster boy for assimilation himself resisted it and returned to his own culture, but van Dissel appears to have deliberately left out this important coda to Bennelong's story.

Van Dissel's article also notes that Bennelong developed a taste for wine while residing with Phillip, but did not drink to excess until he spent time in England from 1792 to 1795. The focus on Bennelong's drinking habits is noteworthy. As Aboriginal anthropologist Marcia Langton has argued, "Bennelong was the first reconstruction of an Aboriginal person as a 'drunken Abo', and from there the stereotype was developed."[64] She sees this popular image as part of a broader white ideology in which Aborigines are blamed for their disadvantage, while whites absolve themselves of responsibility:

> Today it remains the background and popular explanation for the extraordinary arrest rates of Aboriginal people, for the continuing removal of Aboriginal children and the continuing exclusion of Aboriginal people from employment, education, health services, rental accommodation, and a range of other services.[65]

As we will see, there are parallels here with the rhetoric of the Bennelong Society.

John Herron (1932–)

Before they had time to celebrate the formation of the Bennelong Society, the group was faced with a setback, though it was quickly converted into an opportunity. John Howard announced a ministerial reshuffle in December 2000 that saw Philip Ruddock replace John Herron as minister for Indigenous affairs. Herron's appointment in 1996 had itself been a product of Peter Howson's

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[63] Smith, 'Bennelong Among His People,' p. 22.
[64] Marcia Langton, 'Rum, Seduction and Death: "Aboriginality" and Alcohol,' *Oceania*, vol. 63, no. 3 (March 1993), p. 200.
[65] Langton, 'Rum, Seduction and Death, p. 198.

influence, and demonstrated Howard's determination to change the course of Indigenous affairs after thirteen years of Labor rule.[66] The Liberal shadow minister in opposition had been Chris Gallus, who Ray Evans described as "a leading South Australian wet … who was completely entrapped inside the Coombsian fantasy,"[67] and Gary Johns even suggested was close to the ALP Left.[68] Whether or not these views about Gallus were true is less important than the fact that conservatives perceived her that way. Howson worked the phones to ensure Gallus didn't hold onto the portfolio in government, and Herron, with no prior interest in Indigenous affairs, was appointed. As Howson later wrote, "the slow deconstruction of separatism could begin."[69]

According to Evans, Howson's influence was also crucial in saving Herron's job when representatives of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission lobbied to have him replaced in 1998: "Peter used every contact he had within the Liberal Party to rally support for Herron and, probably by a hair's breadth, Herron was saved, at least until just before the 2001 election."[70] For journalist Tony Koch, Herron's sacking was evidence that "Howard never considered Herron tough enough to maintain his (Howard's) own hard-line attitudes to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. That's the price one pays for being honest and decent, presumably."[71] This interpretation ignores the fact that Herron had been deliberately appointed in 1996 because it was felt that he would be on board with Howard's hardline attitudes, which resulted in regular clashes with Indigenous leaders throughout almost five years as minister.[72] Tim Rowse had earlier speculated that "Herron's ministry may one day be recalled as one of the more grotesque episodes in the politics of indigenous accountability."[73]

The neo-assimilationists no longer had someone on the inside, as it were, but Herron's demotion and subsequent retirement from the ministry freed him to say

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[66] John Herron, interview with author, Brisbane, 20 July 2012.
[67] Evans, 'Memories of Peter and Kitty Howson,' p. 54.
[68] Gary Johns, 'Steering Aboriginal Policy onto a Better Path,' in Keith Windschuttle, David Martin Jones and Ray Evans (eds), *The Howard Era*, Sydney: Quadrant Books, 2009, p. 392.
[69] Peter Howson, 'No More Sit-Down Money,' *Quadrant*, November 2004, p. 23.
[70] Evans, 'Memories of Peter and Kitty Howson,' p. 55.
[71] Tony Koch, 'Too decent for politics,' *Courier-Mail*, 20 December 2000.
[72] John Howard, *Lazarus Rising: A Personal and Political Autobiography*, Sydney: HarperCollins, 2010, pp. 270–74.
[73] Tim Rowse, *Obliged to be Difficult*, p. 220.

and do whatever he liked regarding Indigenous affairs. He soon agreed to become the inaugural president of the Bennelong Society, and launched its website at Parliament House in May 2001. His speech, published in Brisbane's *Courier-Mail*, argued that "the symbolism of land rights and reconciliation, while important to the intelligentsia of the Sydney-Melbourne-Canberra axis, has little relevance to the daily grind in communities such as Port Keats, Finke and Yuendumu," echoing Howard's pronouncements favouring practical reconciliation over symbolic gestures such as an apology to the stolen generations.[74]

In addition to Herron, the inaugural board of the Bennelong Society included Howson, Evans, Johns and Moore.[75] Herron's role was largely ceremonial, with the other four men taking on the bulk of the work. Herron resigned his position as president in 2002, following his retirement from politics and appointment as ambassador to Ireland and the Holy See. He was briefly replaced by sitting Liberal Senator Jeannie Ferris, before Johns became president in 2004. Howson remained vice-president of the Bennelong Society from its formation until his death in 2009. Moore and Evans took on the respective roles of treasurer and secretary.

Gary Johns (1952–)

Along with Howson and Evans, Gary Johns is a pivotal figure in the history of the Bennelong Society. A Labor member of parliament from 1987 to 1996, his most senior position was as special minister of state from 1994 until he lost his seat in the ALP's 1996 election defeat. In 1997 he was appointed as a senior fellow at the IPA, and he also began work on a PhD in political science, which was awarded in 2001. His post-political career has made him an outcast in Labor circles, something that doesn't appear to bother him at all. Asked about his shift to the right since leaving politics, Johns points out that he became a "right-winger" as far back as 1980, well before he entered parliament, and that political parties are simply a vehicle for one's own views. Though he insists that he was a good team player while in parliament, he did feel compelled to speak out on some issues.[76]

Johns had never paid particular attention to Indigenous affairs until the

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[74] John Herron, 'Realistic reconciliation,' *Courier-Mail*, 16 May 2001.
[75] Bennelong Society, 'About Us,' http://www.bennelong.com.au/pages/ben-aboutus.html
[76] Gary Johns, interview with author, Brisbane, 19 July 2012.

controversy over mining at Coronation Hill in the Northern Territory in 1990. "It stimulated my interest in Aboriginal politics, and the falsity of it," he told me. "I thought it was intellectually quite bereft."[77] Johns was lobbied by Ron Brunton to push the government to allow mining at the site, and he subsequently did so, but to no avail. Prime Minister Bob Hawke overruled his Cabinet and Coronation Hill was incorporated into Kakadu National Park. Johns called the decision "a result of environmental and Aboriginal myth-making and mischief-making" and "a daft way to run a nation."[78] Hawke bitterly attacked his Cabinet colleagues' "rather brutal, innate prejudice" and remains in no doubt that the dispute was a key element in his loss of the Labor leadership to Paul Keating six months later.[79]

Aside from a minor role in native title issues, Johns had little further involvement in Indigenous affairs until Howson contacted him in 1999 and asked him to give a paper at *Quadrant*'s 'Rousseau versus Reality' seminar. With the help of Brunton, the paper was expanded and published by the IPA.[80] Johns later described it as "still the only paper that seeks to evaluate rather than indulge Reconciliation."[81] He gave another paper at Howson's 2000 workshop in Melbourne and agreed, at Evans's request, to get involved in the formation and administration of the Bennelong Society. From this point on he became a key player in the neo-assimilationist movement.

Johns has also been an occasional participant in the other groups being examined in this thesis. He presented a paper on trade unions at the 2002 H.R. Nicholls Society conference, and has addressed the Samuel Griffith Society on three occasions, firstly on the bill of rights debate in 1999, then on Aboriginal policy in 2006 and 2013. While he had no formal involvement with the Lavoisier Group, he has used his regular column in the *Australian* to warn against action on climate change, echoing the Lavoisier line.

The inaugural Bennelong Society board also included two Indigenous people:

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[77] Johns, interview with author.
[78] Gary Johns (ed.), *Waking Up To Dreamtime: The Illusion of Aboriginal Self-Determination*, Sydney: Quadrant eBook, 2012, p. iv.
[79] Bob Hawke, quoted in Damien Murphy, 'The Right, and prejudice, brought me down: Hawke,' *Age*, 1 January 2016.
[80] Gary Johns and Ron Brunton, 'Reconciliation: What Does it Mean?' *IPA Backgrounder*, vol. 11, no. 4 (November 1999).
[81] Johns, *Waking Up To Dreamtime*, p. iv.

public servant Helen McLaughlin and singer Maroochy Barambah. A third, Fitzroy Crossing community leader Joe Ross, was named in a Bennelong press release as being on the board, but he was quick to dispute this, saying that he had been approached and asked to write something for the website, but that he "wouldn't want to be aligned with what looks like a fairly right-wing sort of think-tank."[82] The most active Indigenous member of the board was Wesley Aird. Aird, who was the first Indigenous graduate of the Royal Military College at Duntroon, has worked as an Indigenous adviser in the mining industry and as a subcontractor to the Australian government on aid programs.[83] As a strong proponent of a pragmatic approach to Indigenous development, he was introduced to Johns, who asked him to give a paper at the 2002 Bennelong Society conference. He joined the board the following year.[84]

Paradigm shift

The Bennelong Society arrived at a time of renewed optimism on the right with regard to Indigenous affairs, with conservative commentators noting with satisfaction a changing mood in the national reconciliation debate. Paddy McGuinness had sensed the new mood following the first *Quadrant* seminar in August 1999. "The old certainties of those who present themselves as the defenders of Aborigines are being shaken as emerging Aboriginal leaders, such as Noel Pearson and Senator Aden Ridgeway, accept that the policies of the recent past are not working satisfactorily," he wrote.[85] Paul Sheehan echoed him a year later in a report on Howson's submission to a Senate committee on the stolen generations.[86]

Indications of a paradigm shift also came from the left. One was the publicity surrounding Noel Pearson's discussion paper, 'Our Right to Take Responsibility,' first distributed in May 1999, which focused on the twin disasters in his

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[82] Joe Ross, quoted in Michael Madigan, 'Thanks but no think-tanks – appointee,' *Courier-Mail*, 15 May 2001.
[83] Misha Schubert and Stuart Rintoul, 'Face of alternative vision for blacks,' *Australian*, 20 April 2004.
[84] Wesley Aird, interview with author, Brisbane, 19 July 2012.
[85] P.P. McGuinness, 'Change of tone in Aboriginal debate,' *Sydney Morning Herald*, 26 August 1999.
[86] Paul Sheehan, 'Stolen Generation report a "disgrace",' *Sydney Morning Herald*, 19 August 2000.

community: binge drinking and passive welfare.[87] According to Christopher Pearson (no relation), the Cape York leader had spoken to both Gary Johns and John Herron in 1996 about the future of Indigenous affairs. Johns told him to "avoid the endless circuit of junkets to Geneva and instead lead his people on the ground, by example," while Herron urged Pearson to speak out about "dysfunctional communities plagued by alcohol and violence and the syndrome of welfare dependency."[88] By mid 2000 many of Pearson's proposals for reform had been adopted by Queensland's Labor government.[89] Another sign was anthropologist Peter Sutton's Berndt Foundation lecture, 'The Politics of Suffering,' at the University of Western Australia in September 1999, in which he spoke unflinchingly about the failures of Aboriginal policy since the 1970s.[90]

By 2001 Christopher Pearson was boasting that "the left-liberal consensus on indigenous affairs has been broken," citing a number of recent events.[91] First was the backlash against the design of the Gallery of First Australians at the National Museum of Australia, which controversially drew inspiration from Berlin's Holocaust-themed Jewish Museum. Second was a speech by Andrew Bolt highlighting financial waste within ATSIC. He also noted the increased media coverage of violence in remote communities, the emergence of new, pragmatic Indigenous voices such as Joseph Elu and Marcia Langton, and the fact that the National Press Club invited Keith Windschuttle to debate historian Henry Reynolds about Indigenous massacres, rather than providing Reynolds with a platform solely to himself.

Robert Manne, an outspoken critic of the neo-assimilationists, was by now in agreement with conservatives that the Indigenous debate had shifted markedly to the right.[92] Manne was especially alarmed at the prominence given to the publication of anthropologist Roger Sandall's collection, *The Culture Cult:*

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[87] Later published in book form: Noel Pearson, *Our Right to Take Responsibility*, Cairns: Noel Pearson and Associates, 2000.
[88] Christopher Pearson, 'Culture Wars,' in Nick Cater (ed.), *The Howard Factor: A Decade that Changed the Nation*, Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2006, pp. 23–24.
[89] Tony Koch, 'New deal gives voice to Aborigines,' *Courier-Mail*, 20 May 2000.
[90] Published as Peter Sutton, 'The Politics of Suffering: Indigenous Policy in Australia Since the 1970s,' *Anthropological Forum*, vol. 11, no. 2 (2001), pp. 125–73.
[91] Christopher Pearson, 'Indigenous affairs seen in a new light,' *Australian Financial Review*, 23 April 2001.
[92] Robert Manne, 'Aboriginal debate makes a sharp right,' *Sydney Morning Herald*, 4 June 2001.

Designer Tribalism and Other Essays, in April 2001. Sandall, a former editor of *Quadrant*, argued that many "spoiled, white, discontented urbanites" had been taken in by "romantic primitivism—the idealizing of social simplicity and the world of the 'noble savage'."[93] Over the course of the next two months the book was heavily featured and fiercely debated in the press. *The Culture Cult* was an academic text that the neo-assimilationist movement was able to rally behind, and the attention paid to it provided further evidence of a shifting political atmosphere.

Aims

Having outlined the key events leading to the formation of the Bennelong Society, let us now look more closely at what it was trying to achieve. When its website went live in May 2001, the Bennelong Society announced that it was established to:

- promote debate and analysis of Aboriginal policy in Australia, both contemporary and historical;
- inquire into the causes of the present appalling plight of many contemporary Aboriginal people;
- seek to influence public opinion so that the prospects for amelioration of the condition of these people are improved;
- encourage research into the history of the interaction between Australia's Indigenous people and the Europeans and others who settled in Australia from 1788 onwards, and of the ideas through which this interaction was interpreted by both Europeans and Aborigines;
- make available to the Australian community, particularly through the Internet, the results of these activities.[94]

Much like the H.R. Nicholls Society, these rather benign and inoffensive goals masked the more radical nature of the group's intentions. They also

[93] Roger Sandall, *The Culture Cult: Designer Tribalism and Other Essays*, Boulder: Westview Press, 2001, pp. ix–x.
[94] Bennelong Society, 'Home,' http://www.bennelong.com.au/pages/ben-home.html

suggested an openness to new ideas and freedom from rigid ideology that was not reflected in their subsequent words and actions. Eve Vincent observed the 2006 Bennelong Society conference and wrote:

> it's important to stress the sincerity, reasonableness and obviousness assumed within the Society about its own ideas. This internally imagined sense of itself strikes a contrast with the fanaticism that characterises the work of Society stalwarts Johns, Howson and Geoffrey Partington.[95]

Gary Johns told me that "of course we have a very strong view of what we think would work, but we don't have an ideological view."[96] However, there was never any real doubt in the minds of these activists that the solutions to Indigenous problems were to be found in returning to long abandoned policies. If one were to come up with a more explicit version of the Bennelong Society's aims based on the voluminous articles and speeches produced by its members over the years, a number of key objectives would stand out, which are detailed below.

Exclusion versus inclusion

In a paper delivered at the Bennelong Society's formative workshop in December 2000, Ray Evans asserted that "the central issue in Aboriginal policy, from the earliest days of settlement up until the present day, has been exclusion versus inclusion."[97] In policy terms, this meant self-determination versus assimilation. As Geoffrey Partington's book laid out in detail, the Bennelong Society saw the era of self-determination from the 1970s onwards as an unmitigated disaster for Aboriginal people. Meanwhile, the assimilation era was recalled with rose-tinted glasses, ignoring the overwhelming evidence of egregious racism and prejudice, both official and unofficial, during those years. The Bennelong Society's first objective, then, was to bring an end to self-determination and return to assimilation, though terms such as 'inclusion' and 'integration' were preferred

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[95] Eve Vincent, 'Who is Bennelong?' *Arena Magazine*, June–July 2007, p. 47.
[96] Johns, interview with author.
[97] Ray Evans, 'Aboriginal Land Rights in Australia,' in *Aboriginal Policy: Failure, Reappraisal and Reform*, Proceedings of the Formative Workshop of the Bennelong Society, Melbourne, December 2000, http://www.bennelong.com.au/conferences/workshop2000/Evans2000.php

because, as Evans argued in 1996, "the word 'assimilation' has been damaged by misrepresentation."[98]

Self-determination was also often equated with separatism and segregation,[99] terms that may for some evoke negative connotations with objectively racist policies such as apartheid in South Africa (1948–94) or the 'Jim Crow' laws in the United States that lasted from the 1870s until the 1960s. This flawed characterisation, and its associated whitewashing of assimilation, was noted by Rosemary Neill in her 2002 book *White Out: How Politics is Killing Black Australia*. "It is perverse of the abolitionists and revisionists to paint the assimilation era as a high-water mark for progress in indigenous affairs," she wrote.[100] Howson could at least say that he was consistent, given that he had taken this line while still a minister. "I have felt for some time," he wrote in his diary in May 1972, "that the present policy being carried out by the council is to promote racist discrimination, to put the Aboriginals apart from the other Australians rather than to encourage them to become one people or one nation."[101]

One way in which conservatives tried to demonstrate the benefits of assimilation was in their fixation on inter-marriage. Time and time again figures were cited regarding the high rate of Indigenous inter-marriage (the most common statistic given was 70 per cent), which to them revealed that Aborigines were voting with their feet by rejecting separatism and embracing integration with the wider community.

Land rights

The neo-assimilationists also invoked separatism when they discussed the issues of land rights and native title, another major focus of the Bennelong Society. Land rights and native title legislation was seen as privileging Indigenous people to the detriment of everyone else, which was completely unacceptable in a democracy

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[98] Ray Evans, 'Reflections on the Aboriginal Crisis,' in *Upholding the Australian Constitution*, vol. 7, Proceedings of the Seventh Conference of the Samuel Griffith Society, Adelaide, June 1996, p. 190.
[99] Gary Johns, 'The Failure of Aboriginal Separatism,' *Quadrant*, May 2001, pp. 9–18; Peter Howson, 'The Failure of Aboriginal Segregation,' *Quadrant*, May 2003, pp. 50–53.
[100] Rosemary Neill, *White Out: How Politics is Killing Black Australia*, Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 2002, pp. 42–43.
[101] Peter Howson, *The Howson Diaries: The Life of Politics* (edited by Don Aitkin), Melbourne: Viking Press, 1984, p. 861.

that prizes equality before the law. They also argued that once land was handed back to Indigenous people, they no longer had any incentive to participate in the "real economy."

Though all Bennelong Society members would probably have agreed that the issue of land rights was problematic, the group's position was muddied by differences of opinion about whether they should be arguing for repeal or trying to work with the legislation as it stood. In a blistering attack at the 1998 Galatians Group conference, Ray Evans said that the Mabo judgment:

> delegitimises the British settlement of Australia by declaring the basis of settlement (the doctrine of *terra nullius*) unlawful and morally unacceptable. In doing this the High Court brings into question the authority and legitimacy of the Australian nation and consequently of the High Court itself.[102]

In characteristically absolutist terms, Evans went on to argue that Mabo should be overturned via a constitutional referendum, so that the structure of property law could be rebuilt.[103]

Peter Howson was also a vociferous opponent of land rights, and blamed the dysfunction evident in many remote communities on land rights legislation. He argued that by handing over to Indigenous collectives land that was once productively used for mining and pastoral purposes, economic development was being denied to Aborigines:

> the doctrine of land rights has been an instrument of imprisonment for our Aborigines, and if they are to make their way in the modern world, they must break down the prison walls which were established by the Northern Territory Land Rights Act and the various state acts which followed. When Aborigines have exactly the same rights in land and mineral titles as other Australians, then they will be free; but not till then.[104]

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[102] Ray Evans, 'Gnosticism and the High Court of Australia,' in *Surrendered Values: The Challenge for Church and Society*, Proceedings of the Fifth Conference of the Galatians Group, Melbourne, August 1998, p. 27.
[103] Evans, 'Gnosticism and the High Court of Australia,' p. 39.
[104] Peter Howson, 'Land Rights: The Next Battleground,' *Quadrant*, June 2005, p. 29.

Like Evans, Howson was a land rights absolutist. Along with the return of assimilation, he saw the repeal of land rights legislation as crucial in bringing to an end "the epidemic of suicide, alcohol and drug abuse" in Indigenous communities.[105]

Gary Johns, on the other hand, took a slightly more nuanced position when it came to land rights. He is unequivocal on the question of what collective land rights have achieved for Indigenous people ("the land rights revolution has failed"[106]), and is adamantly opposed to their expansion. But, unlike Howson and Evans, he accepts that native title is now law, and arguing for repeal is a waste of time: "You're not going to wipe it out, so forget about it."[107] Rather, he sees hope in young Aborigines realising that they have no future in remote areas and leaving for cities and towns, with collective land rights no longer holding any relevance to them.

An additional complicating factor for the Bennelong Society on the issue of land rights was the inclusion of Wesley Aird on the board. As a member of the Yugambeh people, Aird is a native title claimant for the Gold Coast area. When I asked him whether this caused tension with other Bennelong Society members, he acknowledged that some were not supportive of the notion of native title, but did not see it as a major issue because his group's claim is not about money or land, but recognition. He is concerned that some groups make native title claims for the wrong reasons and without evidentiary substance, and thus understands and supports those who are opposed to land rights as a source of material gain. "If a claim is made for the wrong reasons," he says, "then I think it's entirely legitimate to be sceptical or disparaging of it."[108]

Reconciliation

Another major concern of the neo-assimilationists was the long process of reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians that became something of a national priority in the early 1990s.[109] A Council for Aboriginal

[105] Peter Howson, 'Back to Coombs, or Forward?' *Quadrant*, January–February 2009, p. 61.
[106] Gary Johns, 'The land rights initiative has failed,' *Australian*, 7 February 2006.
[107] Johns, interview with author.
[108] Aird, interview with author.
[109] Gardiner-Garden, 'From Dispossession to Reconciliation,' p. 16.

Reconciliation was created with bipartisan support in 1991 and given the task of determining the nature of a formal act of reconciliation in time for the centenary of Federation in 2001. Options considered included a treaty, an apology for past injustices, and constitutional recognition of Indigenous Australians. The process coincided with a number of significant events that served to highlight the unequal status of Indigenous Australians, including Paul Keating's Redfern speech in December 1992 and the publication of the *Bringing Them Home* report in 1997.

As we have seen, this process was challenged by the work of Howson, Johns, Brunton and Windschuttle, among others. These men were uncomfortable with the historical awakening that began in the 1960s, in which white Australia slowly began to acknowledge the tragedy that had befallen Indigenous people since 1788. Instead, they wanted Australians to view their history as one of overwhelming achievement, albeit with minor unfortunate blemishes. But even more important was the prevention of any formal acts of reconciliation that could be construed as separatist, such as those being considered by the Council on Aboriginal Reconciliation. In addition to their objections on separatist grounds, their most common argument was that symbolic gestures would do nothing to solve the ongoing problems faced by Indigenous people. Johns sees reconciliation as an ideology, "which presumes that a semi-religious act of reconciliation, a term that came from the Catholic and other churches, will solve complex policy problems."[110]

This position enjoyed the official endorsement of the Howard government, which rejected the findings of the *Bringing Them Home* report and refused to apologise to the stolen generations, instead maintaining its rhetorical focus on practical reconciliation. Rosemary Neill saw this hard-hearted attitude as being responsible for a souring of the public mood against Aborigines. "Whatever the government's immediate political purpose," she wrote, "the lasting effect of its actions was to instigate a culture of denial and recrimination that would permanently disfigure the public debate over what has become the most emotive issue in indigenous affairs."[111]

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[110] Gary Johns, 'Can We Ever Reconcile Our Past?' in Tim Wilson, Carlo Carli and Paul Collits (eds), *Turning Left or Right: Values in Modern Politics*, Ballarat: Connor Court, 2013, p. 412.
[111] Neill, *White Out*, p. 123.

Indigenous culture

Nowhere was this "culture of denial and recrimination" more apparent than in the words of the Bennelong Society's two most prolific figures, Howson and Johns. In trying to demonstrate why some Indigenous communities had failed, the pair showed utter contempt for Aboriginal culture. In his final piece of published writing before his death in 2009, Howson didn't hold anything back:

> What is held up to us as 'Aboriginal culture' is, in reality, nothing more than the culture of the concentration camp where brutality and horror are the chief attributes. The dances and corroborees put on for the tourists are manifestations of an ersatz 'culture' where anything goes and any story will do.[112]

Johns went even further, essentially arguing that the problems of Indigenous Australia are due to the failings of Aborigines themselves:

> The elaborate inquiries in the 1990s into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody and the Stolen Generations and in the 2000s into Aboriginal child sexual abuse came up with the same answers, that 'aboriginal culture' must be respected and that 'aboriginal communities' must take charge of their destiny. But what if this 'solution' is the problem? What if the culture is no more than people behaving badly, a result of blighted environments, poor incentives, awful history, and an historic culture best relegated to museums and occasional ceremonies? What if these communities are hopeless, in economic terms and every other respect, and that their only rationale is that an ancient band of people once inhabited them or, more brazenly, where some remain in the hope that through land rights they may gain a windfall from a resources company.[113]

It was this sort of inflammatory language that many people found troubling and offensive, and relegated the Bennelong Society to the extreme end of the debate. Noel Pearson, who was embraced by conservatives as he embarked on a

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[112] Howson, 'Back to Coombs, or Forward?' p. 59.
[113] Johns, *Aboriginal Self-Determination*, p. 23.

campaign to end passive welfare and substance abuse, could not stomach the "irrational contempt" that poured from the mouths of what he referred to as neoconservatives. He saw it as only serving to damage the cause of reconciliation, and hoped that compassionate conservatives would not be swayed by their arguments.[114] Johns and Christopher Pearson were quick to reveal their disappointment that such an influential Indigenous leader was not eager to join their fold.[115]

Methods

Internet

In contrast to the H.R. Nicholls and Samuel Griffith Societies, both of which arrived before use of the internet became widespread, the Bennelong Society set out from the beginning to harness the power of new information technology to spread its message. In resolving to form the group, the members decided its primary responsibility would be the establishment of a website, which went live in May 2001. The website allowed the public to access all Bennelong Society material free of charge, including republished newspaper and magazine articles, conference papers and submissions to government. From 2009 the website also linked to the Database of Indigenous Violence, which "aims to record all instances of serious violence against or by indigenous Australians."[116] This rather morbid website was set up by James Franklin, a mathematician and philosopher at the University of NSW, who joined the Bennelong Society board in 2010.

Using the internet as its primary vehicle also allowed the Bennelong Society to run as a very low cost operation, meaning that recruiting members and raising money was a marginal concern. "We don't care about raising memberships, we don't care about funding, we just want a voice," Johns told me. "So we developed the least cost vehicle for the voice: website, telephone conferences once a month

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[114] Noel Pearson, 'Don't listen to those who despise us,' *Age*, 26 June 2006; 'A peculiar path that leads astray,' *Weekend Australian*, 21 October 2006.
[115] Gary Johns, 'The bad old ways' (letter to the editor), *Age*, 29 June 2006; Christopher Pearson, 'Beware of a relapse, Noel,' *Weekend Australian*, 1 July 2006.
[116] Database of Indigenous Violence, http://indigenousviolence.org/dnn/

and an annual conference."[117] At its peak the organisation had only 150 members, each of whom paid an annual fee of $50. As we will see, this inattention to retaining members and raising funds led to the organisation's gradual decline as its leaders aged and the political debate moved on.

Writing

Despite their enthusiastic embrace of information technology, the main way Bennelong Society members sought to influence public opinion was still through opinion pieces in the major daily newspapers. With the assistance of Des Moore, Peter Howson wrote many columns for the press: tabloid and broadsheet, Murdoch and Fairfax. Moore's April 2000 Institute for Private Enterprise newsletter reflected on their success, or lack thereof, in placing articles in the papers:

> The *Age* was particularly receptive as was the *Canberra Times* and placements were also secured in the *Australian Financial Review*, Brisbane *Courier-Mail* and the *West Australian*. Of the major papers, only the *Australian* was unreceptive – the *SMH* seemed content to rest on Paddy McGuinness' contributions.[118]

This appears surprising at first. The Fairfax press (which includes the *Age*, *Sydney Morning Herald*, *Canberra Times* and *Financial Review*) is usually perceived as left-leaning, while the right-leaning *Australian* could normally be expected to provide a platform for prominent conservative voices. Moore hinted that the paper's broad support for reconciliation was leading it to limit debate on difficult questions regarding Aborigines. In any event, only a year later Moore was pleased that the *Australian* seemed to have "expanded its preparedness to publish articles that reveal the truth about the horrific conditions in the more traditional and remoter communities and that even question the primitive cultures that have been promoted."[119]

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[117] Johns, interview with author.
[118] Des Moore, 'Aboriginal Reconciliation – A Solution or an Unhelpful Diversion?' *Institute for Private Enterprise Newsletter*, April 2000, http://archive.ipe.net.au/ipeframeset.htm
[119] Des Moore, 'The Stolen Generationists Take One Step Backward,' *Institute for Private Enterprise Newsletter*, March–April 2001, http://archive.ipe.net.au/ipeframeset.htm

This progress continued throughout the 2000s as the *Australian* adopted a more strident tone under editor Chris Mitchell, who was appointed in 2002. Gary Johns, who had written occasional columns since leaving politics in 1996, was given a regular place on the opinion page to outline the neo-assimilationist agenda. From 2006 onwards Wesley Aird also wrote regular columns for the *Australian* and the *Age*, allowing the Bennelong Society to partly avoid the impression that it was a group of white people dictating to Aborigines what is best for them. It is difficult to quantify how much effect all of these words had on public opinion, but members of the Bennelong Society undoubtedly succeeded in getting their ideas out into the public domain, which they felt, rightly or wrongly, was not the case during the years of "Coombsian hegemony."

Another regular outlet for the writing of the neo-assimilationists was *Quadrant* magazine. As a small circulation publication these articles obviously reached fewer people, but they did allow the authors to develop and expand their arguments in the hope that they might be taken up by politicians and policy makers. Gary Johns relayed to me how the Bennelong Society tried to influence politicians. "You literally tried to tell politicians how to think," he said, "and give them the words they can use in public that are defensible."[120] An example he gave was pushing the Liberals to talk about integration rather than assimilation, and he was satisfied to witness John Howard and Amanda Vanstone doing just that in the later years of the Howard government.

One way for members of the Bennelong Society to try to directly influence government policy was by making submissions to official inquiries and reviews. This began with Howson and Moore's submission to the Senate inquiry into the government's response to the *Bringing Them Home* report in 2000. There were also submissions by Howson to the Inquiry into the Progress Towards National Reconciliation in 2002–03, by the Bennelong Society as a whole to the independent ATSIC Review in 2003, and by Johns to the Indigenous Economic Development Strategy in 2010.

[120] Johns, interview with author.

Conferences

The Bennelong Society also used its annual conferences to try to get in the ears of politicians. Following the formative workshop in December 2000, the Bennelong Society held conferences every year from 2001 until 2008. The conferences adopted the H.R. Nicholls Society model, whereby a general theme was agreed upon and people were invited to give papers around that theme. As the Bennelong Society website is no longer active, the conference titles, venues and dates have been reproduced in Table 5.1.

Table 5.1: Bennelong Society Conferences

Title	Location	Date
From Separatism to Self Respect	Sydney	October 2001
Celebrating Integration	Brisbane	August 2002
An Indigenous Future? Challenges and Opportunities	Canberra	August 2003
Pathways and Policies for Indigenous Futures	Sydney	September 2004
Remote Aboriginal Communities: Where are the Jobs?	Melbourne	September 2005
Leaving Remote Communities	Sydney	September 2006
The Task Ahead	Melbourne	August 2007
The NT Emergency Response: Appraisal and Future	Melbourne	June 2008

Source: http://www.bennelong.com.au/conferences/conferences.php

Gary Johns happily admitted that these conferences were deliberately aimed at trying to influence politicians. They always invited the relevant ministers and shadow ministers, with Liberals usually accepting while Labor politicians rarely responded.[121] In addition to John Herron, Howard government ministers to attend Bennelong Society conferences included Philip Ruddock, Ian McLachlan, Amanda Vanstone, Tony Abbott, Kevin Andrews and Mal Brough. The Bennelong Society wanted politicians to hear from people who had experience living and working in Indigenous communities, rather than the usual academics and bureaucrats from the major cities.

[121] Johns, interview with author.

These representatives of government were also often asked to present the Bennelong Medal, awarded annually from 2002 to 2009 to those the group viewed as having made a positive contribution to the Indigenous affairs debate. There was a mix of Indigenous and non-Indigenous recipients, with particular emphasis on those who had battled against what the Bennelong Society viewed as orthodox or politically correct thinking in Indigenous affairs. All recipients of the Bennelong Medal are listed in Table 5.2.

Table 5.2: Recipients of the Bennelong Medal

Year	Recipient	Reason
2002	Boni Robertson	"for her leadership in the difficult area of family violence"
2003	Dulcie and Dorothy Wilson	"women who saw their culture being abused and decided to do something about it"
2004	Paul Albrecht	"recognition of his long and dedicated service as missionary and translator in Central Australia"
2005	Warren Mundine	"a brave advocate for change"
2006	Susan Gordon	"for her devotion and commitment to the well-being of Aboriginal Australians"
2007	Louis Nowra	"for his courage in writing about Aboriginal men's violence towards Aboriginal women"
2008	Mal Brough	"for bringing hope to the women and children living in remote Aboriginal communities"
2009	Bess Price	"for her forthright defence of the NT Intervention"

Source: http://www.bennelong.com.au/medallists.php

There is a consistent theme common to all recipients: the Bennelong Society liked to acknowledge and reward those who were prepared to expose Aborigines behaving badly. Boni Robertson, Susan Gordon and Louis Nowra took on the issue of Indigenous family violence; Dulcie and Dorothy Wilson spoke out about the alleged misuse of their culture by Indigenous women in the Hindmarsh Island bridge affair in the 1990s; Paul Albrecht was a Christian missionary who spoke openly about the problems in remote communities; Warren Mundine questioned orthodox Indigenous views about community-owned land; Mal Brough launched a government intervention into remote communities (see below), and Bess Price

caused controversy among her Indigenous peers by supporting this decision.

Interventions

ATSIC

No institution better represented all that the neo-assimilationists despised about self-determination than the elected Indigenous body, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission. Established in 1990 by the Hawke government's *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission Act*, ATSIC's objectives were:

- to ensure maximum participation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in government policy formulation and implementation
- to promote Indigenous self-management and self-sufficiency
- to further Indigenous economic, social and cultural development, and
- to ensure co-ordination of Commonwealth, state, territory and local government policy affecting Indigenous people[122]

From the outset, ATSIC was opposed by conservatives because of what they saw as its inherent separatism. "If there is one thing, above everything else, that we in this Parliament should regard as our sacred and absolute duty, it is the preservation of the unity of the Australian people," remarked opposition leader John Howard in 1989. "The ATSIC legislation strikes at the heart of the unity of the Australian people."[123] Upon coming to government in 1996 the Coalition wasted no time in confronting ATSIC by cutting $470 million from its budget. Meanwhile, John Herron was soon on a collision course with the organisation he oversaw, prompting outrage when he warned of "storm clouds on the horizon."[124] Raimond Gaita thought Herron's approach to ATSIC contained "a zeal that

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[122] *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission Act*, quoted in Angela Pratt and Scott Bennett, 'The End of ATSIC and the Future Administration of Indigenous Affairs,' *Parliamentary Library Current Issues Brief No. 4, 2004–05*, Canberra: Department of Parliamentary Services, 2004, p. 7.
[123] John Howard, 'Administration of Aboriginal affairs,' *Commonwealth Parliamentary Debates*, House of Representatives, 11 April 1989, p. 1332.
[124] John Herron, quoted in Lisa McLean and Michael Gordon, 'Herron clashes with ATSIC chief,' *Weekend Australian*, 22 June 1996.

suggested he could barely wait to attack this bastion of Aboriginal privilege."[125]

Appearing on Alan Jones's radio program in May 1997, Howard agreed with a talkback caller's complaints about waste in Aboriginal affairs. He then boasted about his own cuts to ATSIC, and his wider resistance to the "Aboriginal industry":

> I agree with that first caller. There is a lot of anger in the community. There's a feeling that millions of dollars have been wasted in the Aboriginal affairs area. I mean, just remember … that I'm the Prime Minister who took money out of the ATSIC budget. … I'm the bloke that's been under constant attack from Aboriginal leaders since the time I became Prime Minister for being insensitive to their situation. … Now, it's all very well, and I can understand why people feel like that but I want to get the record straight, any suggestion that we have perpetuated the Aboriginal industry is wrong.[126]

The Bennelong Society was also scathing of ATSIC, seeing it as wasteful, unrepresentative of Indigenous people, even corrupt. "From its inception it was based on a fundamental contradiction," wrote Peter Howson, "the idea that a body elected by Aborigines could spend, every year, hundreds of millions of taxpayers' funds, allocated to it by the Commonwealth Parliament, without being accountable to the parliament."[127] Gary Johns belittled it as a "toy parliament,"[128] while Wesley Aird declared: "if ATSIC were a listed company, I would have sold my shares years ago."[129] They were encouraged, then, when the government announced an independent review of the organisation in November 2002. The Bennelong Society made a brief submission to the review committee, arguing that ATSIC promoted division and was a well-intentioned failure.[130]

The review committee's report was handed to the government in November 2003. The following March, while the government was still considering its

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[125] Raimond Gaita, 'Not Right,' *Quadrant*, January–February 1997, p. 46.
[126] John Howard, 'Transcript of interview with Alan Jones,' *Radio 2UE*, 2 May 1997, http://pmtranscripts.pmc.gov.au/release/transcript-10326
[127] Peter Howson, 'The doctor's stiff potion is needed,' *Herald Sun*, 15 May 1998.
[128] Gary Johns, 'Look for strength in mainstream,' *Australian*, 22 November 2001.
[129] Wesley Aird, 'Exploring the Meaning of Integration,' in *Celebrating Integration*, Proceedings of the Second Conference of the Bennelong Society, Brisbane, August 2002, http://www.bennelong.com.au/conferences/conference2002/Aird2002.php
[130] Bennelong Society, 'Submission to the ATSIC Review Committee,' February 2003, http://www.bennelong.com.au/articles/pdf/atsicreview.pdf

response, opposition leader Mark Latham announced that a Labor government would abolish ATSIC and replace it with an organisation that devolved power to communities.[131] With a major political obstacle removed, John Howard promptly took his opportunity, abolishing ATSIC and replacing it with an advisory body, the National Indigenous Council. This was despite the fact that the government-appointed review panel had not specifically recommended ATSIC's abolition, but rather urgent structural change. But Howard was adamant: "We believe very strongly that the experiment in separate representation, elected representation, for indigenous people has been a failure," he said, echoing the language of the Bennelong Society's submission to the review.[132] "To the government," wrote Jane Robbins, "ATSIC was the embodiment of an undesirable form of self-determination and it was quick to take the opportunity to remove it."[133]

The fifteen-year experiment in Indigenous self-government was formally dissolved in June 2005. The Bennelong Society was naturally thrilled at the demise of this institutional emblem of self-determination, but was not about to become complacent. Writing in *Quadrant*, Howson reiterated his determination to help change the course of Indigenous policy:

> The long-delayed but most welcome decision to abolish ATSIC, and to abandon the idea of an elected body representing Aborigines, is one of major importance both historically and politically. […] But there is still much intellectual ground to be recovered before new policy directions can offer hope for the future, particularly for the 50,000 or so children and teenagers now living in the remote communities; sociopathic ruins from which they have to be rescued.[134]

This leads us directly to another of the Bennelong Society's major policy interventions.

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[131] Mark Metherell, 'Latham gazumps PM's black policy,' *Sydney Morning Herald*, 31 March 2004.
[132] Pratt and Bennett, 'The End of ATSIC,' pp. 10–11.
[133] Jane Robbins, 'The Howard Government and Indigenous Rights: An Imposed National Unity,' *Australian Journal of Political Science*, vol. 42, no. 2 (June 2007), p. 323.
[134] Peter Howson, 'Pointing the Bone: Reflections on the Passing of ATSIC,' *Quadrant*, June 2004, pp. 12–13.

Remote communities

When Indigenous disadvantage is spoken of, reference is more often than not being made to remote communities, the majority of which are located in the Northern Territory and Western Australia, and to a lesser extent Queensland and South Australia. Many of these communities have been plagued by poor standards of health, education and employment for decades. As we have seen, the neo-assimilationists laid the blame for this situation on self-determination policies that kept Aborigines trapped in communities that offered no prospects, and too often led to violence and despair.

Peter Howson devoted considerable attention to the problems in remote communities in his submission to the Senate Inquiry into the Progress Towards National Reconciliation in 2002–03. He questioned whether the government should continue to provide services for the communities, and proposed incentives and subsidies for people to leave. His submission is worth quoting at length:

> The Committee needs particularly to consider whether the Government should continue to provide extensive services, including housing, that encourage Aborigines to stay in communities where limited employment opportunities are available. The more that facilities and welfare are provided to these communities, the less inclined the residents will be to make the integrationist moves that provide the basis for an improved life style and for securing real employment. The road to reconciliation is most likely to be found through measures that encourage what is now a desperate need for increased integration.
>
> Accordingly, a better alternative might be to examine ways of helping the residents of these communities to move to areas where employment is more likely to be obtained and small businesses established. Possibilities might include the provision of larger housing and employment subsidies in more populated areas and of higher subsidies for educating children outside such areas.[135]

[135] Peter Howson, 'Submission to the Inquiry into the Progress Towards National Reconciliation,' Senate Legal and Constitutional References Committee, December 2002, http://www.bennelong.com.au/articles/pdf/Reconciliation.pdf

The Bennelong Society continued pushing this barrow for the next few years, with numerous articles and conference papers discussing the problems of remote communities and questioning their viability. In 2004 Indigenous affairs minister Amanda Vanstone opened the Bennelong Society's annual conference with a warning about the viability of remote communities:

> Many of the remote communities have limited economic potential and people are trapped there because they have no education. We must stop pretending, and we must sit down with communities and tell it like it is. The economy in many of these communities is a long way short of supporting the current population. With a rapidly growing population the prognosis is even worse.[136]

But it was Vanstone's successor, Mal Brough, who was able to put words into action on this front. In June 2007 he announced the Northern Territory National Emergency Response, the Howard government's drastic attempt to protect Aboriginal children from harm. Though widely seen as a desperate attempt by the government to halt Kevin Rudd's election year momentum, the 'Intervention' was also seen by many as a necessary response to the findings of the NT government's Inquiry into the Protection of Aboriginal Children from Sexual Abuse, published in the *Little Children are Sacred* report. But it was also strongly reflective of Bennelong Society thinking, especially the idea that Aborigines need to escape the violence perceived as prevalent in remote communities. It also raised questions about the viability of the communities themselves. John Howard described the Intervention as having "overturned 30 years of failed Indigenous policy based on the doctrine of separate development."[137]

When the Labor Party came to power in late 2007, many left-leaning Australians—Indigenous and non-Indigenous—anticipated a new beginning in Indigenous affairs following the hardline approach of the Howard years. However, apart from Kevin Rudd's apology to the stolen generations, with its repudiation of Howard's stubborn approach, there was no major shift in policy direction. Jenny

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[136] Amanda Vanstone, 'Opening Address,' in *Pathways and Policies for Indigenous Futures*, Proceedings of the Fourth Conference of the Bennelong Society, Sydney, September 2004, http://www.bennelong.com.au/conferences/conference2004/Vanstone2004.php

[137] Howard, *Lazarus Rising*, p. 639.

Macklin was the minister for Indigenous affairs throughout the entire Rudd/Gillard era (2007–13) and has since spoken with pride about her focus on practical measures to get children to school and adults to work.[138] Most controversially, the Intervention was continued, albeit with minor concessions to public concerns about some of its more draconian measures, such as the suspension of the *Racial Discrimination Act*. Gary Johns later applauded Macklin for standing up to the "professional welfare advocates" of the left.[139]

When I asked Johns whether he thought that the Bennelong Society had any influence on the Howard government's decision to launch the Intervention, he was uncertain. Brough had attended a couple of conferences and Johns had met him in his office to discuss Indigenous issues prior to the Intervention, where he urged him to think about the long term consequences of his policies. But he found it impossible to state with certainty whether his lobbying had a significant impact.[140] The Bennelong Society's support for the Intervention was unequivocal, however, and its 2008 conference was devoted to appraising its impact and looking ahead to the future viability of remote communities. Brough was awarded the Bennelong Medal for his efforts, with Keith Windschuttle offering him the highest praise: "in the history of Aboriginal affairs, Mal Brough has been the most effective political figure since Paul Hasluck."[141] The medal was awarded the following year to Bess Price, one of the most prominent Indigenous supporters of the Intervention.

Today

When Peter Howson died in February 2009, and with Ray Evans and Des Moore devoting considerable energy to the issue of climate change through the Lavoisier Group, Johns was left to do much of the Bennelong Society's work on his own. He

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[138] Patricia Karvelas, 'How Macklin took on Left to transform indigenous policy,' *Weekend Australian*, 23 November 2013.
[139] Gary Johns, 'I'm your pal, brother, can you spare a cafe-latte?' *Australian*, 1 April 2010.
[140] Johns, interview with author.
[141] Keith Windschuttle, 'Bennelong Medal Presentation to Mal Brough,' in *The NT Emergency Response: Appraisal and Future*, Proceedings of the Eighth Conference of the Bennelong Society, Melbourne, June 2008, http://www.bennelong.com.au/conferences/conference2008/Windschuttle medal2008.php

continued to write about Indigenous issues, and also arranged for Bess Price to give the inaugural Peter Howson Lecture in December 2009, which was later broadcast on ABC television.[142] However, no further conferences were held, and the lecture turned out to be the Bennelong Society's final public event. Johns's book *Aboriginal Self-Determination: The Whiteman's Dream* was published in 2011, which he described as a way of closing off the era.[143] The book was launched by Mal Brough, who enthusiastically endorsed it as an "extraordinary contribution to Australia and Australian literature," that "should now be read by every academic, every university student, every policy maker and every bureaucrat."[144]

Finally, in November 2011 it was announced that the Bennelong Society would fold due to lack of interest. The website was taken down in early 2012 and major articles transferred to a dedicated page on *Quadrant*'s website. Johns said that the organisation had "basically just withered away," adding that "it's not as if there isn't work to do, it's just that there's not a lot of energy in that area any more."[145] Evans, though appreciative of the considerable amount of work Johns had put in, told me that the death of Howson was the principal reason for the decline of the group.[146] Wesley Aird felt that the organisation had become a little stale, with the same board members and regular contributors saying the same things year in, year out, and hence was supportive of the decision to disband.[147]

When I posited to Johns the notion that, given the changes that had occurred in the decade that the Bennelong Society was active, it had perhaps been a victim of its own success, he was not prepared to rest on his laurels:

> We were happy that the debate had shifted, but if there had been more of us and we had more time we would have kept the Bennelong Society going. Because there's a lot more work to be done, we're a long way from home yet.

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[142] Bess Price, David Price and Gary Johns, 'Bess Nungarrayi Price on the NT Intervention' *Big Ideas*, ABC TV, 15 February 2010, http://www.abc.net.au/tv/bigideas/stories/2010/02/15/2819622.htm

[143] Johns, interview with author.

[144] Mal Brough, 'Address launching *Aboriginal Self-Determination*,' Brisbane, April 2011, http://www.abc.net.au/radionational/programs/counterpoint/aboriginal-self-determination-introduction/2952114

[145] Gary Johns, quoted in John Ferguson, 'Lack of interest kills Bennelong Society,' *Australian*, 22 November 2011.

[146] Ray Evans, interview with author, Melbourne, 5 June 2012.

[147] Aird, interview with author.

> No, it was really a matter of those players [i.e. Howson and Evans] at that time had died, got too old, had other things to do. And if someone else wants to revive Bennelong, that's up to them … but I don't have any interest in reviving it particularly.[148]

But Johns had given a hint as to what the future might hold with regard to Indigenous affairs in his letter to members announcing the disbanding of the Bennelong Society. "The debate about the recognition of Aboriginal people in the Constitution should be of major concern," he wrote.[149] As Australia moved closer to a referendum on Indigenous constitutional recognition with apparent bipartisan support, his concerns became more pressing. In June 2014 he and other former members of the Bennelong Society launched an organisation called Recognise What? and a book of the same name. Its stated objective was "to encourage debate on any proposition to be put to the Australian people, by way of referendum, on the question of recognition of Aboriginal people in the Constitution."[150] Johns described the proposals of the Expert Panel on Constitutional Recognition as "radical and foolish."[151] Though he claimed that Recognise What? "is not running a No case, rather a minimalist Yes case," Johns nevertheless called on the government to fund a No case.[152] When Greg Craven referred to him as an anti-recognition activist in December 2016, Johns replied that he is in favour of recognition, but that "a dignified mention in a preamble to the constitution, that there was an Aboriginal people on this continent at the coming of Europeans, is the maximum recognition consistent with the historic facts."[153] But by this time the recognition cause seemed to have lost momentum, as had the opposition to it. By early 2017, the Recognise What? website had disappeared from the internet.

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[148] Johns, interview with author.
[149] Gary Johns, quoted in Ferguson, 'Lack of interest kills Bennelong Society'.
[150] Recognise What? 'About,' http://recognisewhat.org.au/about/
[151] Gary Johns, 'Welcome to the debate,' Recognise What?, 26 June 2014, http://recognisewhat.org.au/2014/06/26/welcome-to-the-debate/
[152] Gary Johns, 'A No case must be funded,' Recognise What?, 28 July 2014, http://recognisewhat.org.au/2014/07/28/a-no-case-must-be-funded/
[153] Gary Johns, 'Recognise this' (letter to the editor), *Australian*, 21 December 2016.

Conclusion

The emergence of the Bennelong Society coincided with two important developments in Australian debates around Indigenous affairs. Firstly, upon being elected as prime minister in 1996, John Howard was determined to change direction from what he saw as Paul Keating's obsession with Australia's past "blemishes." In what became one of his most memorable phrases, Howard said he wanted "an Australian nation that feels comfortable and relaxed about three things: about their history, about their present and the future."[154] The other development was the rise of a new type of Indigenous leader—exemplified by such figures as Noel Pearson, Marcia Langton, Warren Mundine and Sue Gordon—who tried to shift the focus away from rights and onto responsibilities, especially with regard to issues around welfare, education and substance abuse. Having lamented the dominance of the old guard leftist Indigenous leadership for many years, conservatives were quick to embrace this intellectual shift.

Because of these separate but overlapping developments, it is difficult to come to a definitive conclusion about the influence of the Bennelong Society and its antecedents. What cannot be in doubt is that the organisation was an important element in the wider changes that took hold of the Indigenous affairs debate throughout the 1990s and 2000s. The group consistently advocated for a neo-assimilationist approach, and what were once the niche views of a small minority gradually became mainstream, both within the halls of Parliament House and among the wider community.

The Bennelong Society was probably most influential at an intellectual level. It is difficult to disagree with Des Moore, who is absolutely certain that there is now widespread acceptance that the self-determination policies associated with Nugget Coombs were a failure, and that the Bennelong Society has been instrumental in this shift.[155] At the political level things are more complex, but the Bennelong Society was nevertheless important. Its push for the complete abandonment of self-determination provided cover for Howard as he tried to

[154] John Howard, quoted in Judith Brett, 'Relaxed and Comfortable: The Liberal Party's Australia,' *Quarterly Essay*, no. 19 (2005), p. 30.
[155] Des Moore, interview with author, Melbourne, 10 August 2012.

change the policy approach, and when Labor came to power in 2007 they were unable or unwilling to turn back the tide. The Bennelong Society is no longer, but it certainly left its mark on Australian politics.

6

THE LAVOISIER GROUP AND CLIMATE CHANGE

The second half of the twentieth century saw increasing global awareness of the environmental destruction being caused by human activity. Conservationists forced governments to take notice of their concerns, and action was gradually taken to slow or reverse the damage. The Lavoisier Group was formed as a reaction to Australian government efforts to tackle what is now widely accepted as the planet's most pressing environmental problem: climate change caused by human activity.

One of the pioneering works of modern environmentalism was Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring*, which was first published in 1962 and quickly became an international phenomenon. The book was principally focused on the damaging effects of pesticides, especially on birdlife. Her identification of the health and environmental impacts of the spraying of DDT in the United States eventually led to its worldwide ban a decade later. But Carson's concerns were wider. She raised philosophical objections to the ways in which modern scientific advancements allowed humans to make dramatic and unprecedented changes to the ecological makeup of the earth. "Only within the moment of time represented by the present century," she wrote, "has one species—man—acquired significant power to alter the nature of his world."[1]

These concerns about the damage humans were doing to the earth were soon combined with alarm about over-population. Such alarm had a long history. In 1798 Thomas Malthus published *An Essay on the Principle of Population*, which warned about the consequences of exponential population growth. Though his worst predictions never came to pass, the 1950s and 1960s saw a resurgence in

[1] Rachel Carson, *Silent Spring*, London: Hamish Hamilton, 1962, p. 5.

Malthusian thinking. In May 1968 biologist Paul Ehrlich published *The Population Bomb*, a book whose alarmism did nothing to prevent it from becoming a bestseller. "The battle to feed all of humanity is over," the book began. "In the 1970s and 1980s hundreds of millions of people will starve to death in spite of any crash programs embarked upon now."[2] Ehrlich then went on to advocate various forms of population control, some more coercive than others.

Meanwhile, another biologist by the name of Garrett Hardin gave a lecture in June 1968 titled 'The Tragedy of the Commons,' in which he argued that the human race was heading towards destruction because, for the individual, the benefits of resource consumption outweigh the costs. That is, the gains are privatised while the negative effects are shared, so there is little incentive for each of us to reduce our consumption. "Ruin is the destination toward which all men rush, each pursuing his own best interest in a society that believes in the freedom of the commons," said Hardin. "Freedom in a commons brings ruins to all."[3] For Hardin the situation was so dire that the freedom to breed should be relinquished.

The increasing environmental awareness resulting from such interventions led to the emergence of several North American environmental advocacy groups, such as the Environmental Defense Fund (founded in New York in 1967), Friends of the Earth (San Francisco, 1969) and Greenpeace (Vancouver, 1971). These organisations quickly developed into global networks, providing local activists with institutional backing for their campaigns. Governments also began to take notice and felt compelled to respond. In the US, President Richard Nixon established the Environmental Protection Agency in 1970, and many other countries soon followed suit with similar government agencies or departments. At the international level, the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment in Stockholm in 1972 led to the creation of the UN Environment Programme, which coordinates environmental activities across the globe. Finally, the publication in that year of *The Limits to Growth* by the international think tank the Club of Rome reinforced for many the urgency of the environmental crisis.[4]

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[2] Paul R. Ehrlich, *The Population Bomb*, New York: Ballantine Books, 1968, p. xi.
[3] Garrett Hardin, 'The Tragedy of the Commons,' *Science*, 13 December 1968, p. 1244.
[4] Donella H. Meadows, Dennis L. Meadows, Jorgen Randers and William W. Behrens, *The Limits to Growth: A Report for the Club of Rome's Project on the Predicament of Mankind*, London: Potomac Associates, 1972.

In Australia, environmental activism took off in the 1970s. The Australian Conservation Foundation (ACF), a nation-wide conservation body, had been founded in 1965 with Chief Justice of the High Court Sir Garfield Barwick as president, but activists soon became frustrated with the conservative approach of its leadership, and splintered off into smaller groups. By 1970 an ACF directory listed more than 350 voluntary conservation organisations in Australia.[5] In 1971 the Builders Labourers Federation, led by a new cohort of officials influenced by the growing environmental movement, supported the campaign of a local residents' group by instigating 'green bans' to prevent inappropriate development in Sydney's Hunters Hill. This fusion was new and transformational, as activist-historians Drew Hutton and Libby Connors observed:

> The reverses of the late 1960s and early 1970s would, on their own, undoubtedly have pushed nature conservationists into more militant campaigning modes, but the urban environmental campaigns of the early 1970s, drawing on traditions of left-wing and working-class struggle, helped establish the picket, the blockade, the rally, and other confrontational activities as integral parts of green movement tradition and mythology. They also established the possibility of a link between the ideological and organisational forms of the Australian Left, including a number of trade unions, and the newly emerging environmental movement.[6]

In 1972 the world's first Green party, the United Tasmania Group, was formed during the ultimately unsuccessful campaign to save Lake Pedder from flooding by Tasmania's Hydro-Electric Commission. The 1970s also saw the formation of Australian branches of international organisations such as Friends of the Earth and Greenpeace. These groups were at the forefront of significant—and increasingly militant—environmental battles in the following years.

During the 1980s environmental discourse was increasingly globalised. Governments became aware that environmental threats did not respect national

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[5] William J. Lines, *Patriots: Defending Australia's Natural Heritage*, Brisbane: University of Queensland Press, 2006, p. 106.
[6] Drew Hutton and Libby Connors, *A History of the Australian Environment Movement*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999, p. 126.

boundaries, so co-ordinated approaches were required. A good example was ozone depletion, which was caused by the use of chlorofluorocarbons (CFCs) in aerosol sprays and air conditioning units. Though individual nations such as the US, Canada and Norway had made efforts to limit their use in the late 1970s, it wasn't until the 1985 Vienna Convention for the Protection of the Ozone Layer that a global response was solidified. The subsequent 1987 Montreal Protocol on Substances that Deplete the Ozone Layer provided for the phasing out of CFCs and has since been ratified by every country on earth.

Following this effective international cooperation, attention turned to an even greater threat: global warming. Scientists had theorised about the possible ramifications of the release of greenhouse gases into the atmosphere since the nineteenth century, but the threat did not capture public attention until Dr James Hansen, then head of NASA's Goddard Institute of Space Studies, testified before a US Senate committee during the baking hot American summer of 1988. As he recalled in 2009, Hansen declared "with 99 percent confidence, that it was time to stop waffling: Earth was being affected by human-made greenhouse gases, and the planet had entered a period of long-term warming."[7]

Conservative British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, whose professional background in chemistry led her to take questions of science seriously, was also alert to the danger that global warming presented. In September 1988 she gave a speech to the Royal Society in which she emphasised the importance of well-funded research in order to identify the risks of global warming and deal with them appropriately. She was confident that science and technology could adapt and provide solutions to the problem, without the need for "repression of human activity by the state," which she perceived as the preferred approach of her political opponents.[8]

Later that year the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) was established by the World Meteorological Organization and the UN Environment Programme. In the words of the UN General Assembly, the IPCC would "provide internationally co-ordinated scientific assessments of the magnitude, timing and

[7] James Hansen, *Storms of My Grandchildren: The Truth About the Coming Climate Catastrophe and Our Last Chance to Save Humanity*, New York: Bloomsbury, 2009, p. xv.
[8] Margaret Thatcher, *The Downing Street Years*, London: HarperCollins, 1993, p. 641.

potential environmental and socio-economic impact of climate change and realistic response strategies."[9] Its First Assessment Report, published in 1990, was pivotal in leading to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), the ultimate objective of which was the "stabilization of greenhouse gas concentrations in the atmosphere at a level that would prevent dangerous anthropogenic interference with the climate system."[10] This groundbreaking global agreement was negotiated and signed at the Rio de Janeiro Earth Summit in June 1992, and entered into force in 1994. These global efforts to combat climate change alarmed environmental sceptics the world over, and Australia was no exception. Their alarm would eventually lead to the formation of the Lavoisier Group, to which we will now turn.

Formation and personnel

Conservatives and the environment

For activists on the right, a fusion between the old left, represented by working class trade unions and their associated political parties, and a new, environmental left was a frightening prospect. Events in Australia throughout the 1970s and 1980s proved the importance of countering such a threat. But firstly it was critical that it be defined and understood. John Stone attempted to do just this in a pamphlet published by the IPA in 1991. Stone identified three major themes of the environmental movement:

- resistance to change and, often allied to that, suspicion of economic development (which necessarily involves change) and technology in general;
- recurring predictions of disaster which, ten or twenty years later, are seen to have been unfulfilled, but which are then either replaced by new doom-sayings or, more shamelessly in some cases, by simply making the same

[9] United Nations, 'Protection of global climate for present and future generations of mankind,' General Assembly Resolution 43/53, 6 December 1988, http://www.un.org/documents/ga/res/43/a43r053.htm

[10] United Nations, *UN Framework Convention on Climate Change*, 1992, http://unfccc.int/files/essential_background/background_publications_htmlpdf/application/pdf/conveng.pdf

old predictions anew;

- the influence of elitism—that is, the tendency for an already favoured few to protect the environmental pleasures which they personally already enjoy by demanding that we sacrifice the potential capacity for the many ever to aspire towards doing likewise.[11]

Stone also expressed his objection to the "increasing tendency for some scientists … to advance their views into the realms of social or political debate," the result of which was "to lower public trust in the objectivity of scientists, and the standing of scientists in the community, more generally."[12] Continuing a theme that has run throughout Stone's career as a political activist, he cites a speech by ACF director Phillip Toyne as proof that environmentalists are a threat to democratic processes. "It is clear," he writes, "that Mr Toyne wishes to see a wholesale process of environmental law-making, including Constitutional change designed to widen even further the powers of central government in Canberra in that regard."[13]

The IPA pamphlet also featured an essay on climate change by American environmental scientist Fred Singer. Announcing himself as "a genuine sceptic about greenhouse warming," Singer argued that there was no scientific consensus on climate change, and that sceptical views were ignored by the media in preference to the catastrophic scenarios presented by some scientists.[14] He concluded that global warming was both imaginary and hyped, and being used by those "who are desperately anxious to impose on us an international regime that would restrict the use of energy, that would tell us how to live."[15] Singer was described in 2005 by *Mother Jones* magazine as a "godfather of global warming denial,"[16] and has received funding from oil giant ExxonMobil.[17] He was also involved in campaigns to deny the impacts of tobacco smoking, acid rain and

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[11] John Stone (ed.), *The Environment in Perspective*, Melbourne: Institute of Public Affairs, 1991, p. 3.
[12] Stone, *The Environment in Perspective*, p. 21.
[13] Stone, *The Environment in Perspective*, p. 40.
[14] Fred Singer, 'Global Warming: Is There a Problem?' in Stone, *The Environment in Perspective*, p. 22.
[15] Singer, 'Global Warming: Is There a Problem?' p. 25.
[16] Chris Mooney, 'Some Like It Hot,' *Mother Jones*, May–June 2005, p. 41.
[17] James Hoggan with Richard Littlemore, *Climate Cover-Up: The Crusade to Deny Global Warming*, Vancouver: Greystone Books, 2009, p. 140.

ozone depletion.[18] As we will see, fellow climate denialists now routinely echo many of the arguments in Singer's short essay for the IPA.

Unsurprisingly, both Hugh Morgan and Ray Evans have long been enormously antagonistic towards environmentalism. As the Cold War was coming to a close, Morgan warned his colleagues in the mining industry that environmentalists were the new communists:

> A generation or two ago the great cause for the revolutionaries was socialism, or its bolshevik variant, communism. As Gorbachev and Deng Xiaoping, amongst others, have conceded, socialism is a disaster. The road to power, for ambitious revolutionaries, is no longer the socialist road. But the environmentalist road today offers great opportunities for the ambitious, power-seeking revolutionary. In particular, environmentalism offers better opportunities for undermining private property than socialism contained.[19]

One of Evans's earliest publications was a 1980 *Quadrant* essay on intellectuals' ideological opposition to industrial and technological development throughout history.[20] A lifelong Christian, he has described himself as a Genesis 1:28 man. That is, "man is top of the heap," and has dominion over the earth and all that lives upon it.[21] Evans believed that Christianity was being superseded by environmentalism as the religion of the upper classes in the west. "It is a form of religious belief," he wrote, "which fosters a sense of moral superiority in the believer, but which places no importance on telling the truth."[22]

With regard to climate change, Evans proudly told me that it took him "about five minutes to realise the whole thing was a scam," and that scientific organisations and politicians had either been duped or were in on the deception:

> I kept up with all the scientific stuff, and I met all the main players, and the

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[18] See Naomi Oreskes and Erik M. Conway, *Merchants of Doubt: How a Handful of Scientists Obscured the Truth on Issues from Tobacco Smoke to Global Warming*, New York: Bloomsbury Press, 2010.
[19] Hugh Morgan, quoted in Peter Gill, 'Mining chief Morgan fires both barrels at greenies,' *Australian Financial Review*, 5 May 1989.
[20] Ray Evans, 'Ideologies of Anti-technology,' *Quadrant*, July 1980, pp. 13–18.
[21] Ray Evans, quoted in Peter Vincent, 'The debate hots up,' *Sydney Morning Herald*, 30 October 2003.
[22] Ray Evans, 'Nine Lies About Global Warming,' Lavoisier Group, February 2006, p. 1.

> extraordinary thing was the degree to which what was obviously bullshit, complete bullshit, was swallowed—I don't know if it was swallowed, but certainly sworn to—by the CSIRO, the Bureau of Meteorology, Malcolm Turnbull.[23]

Evans believed that the IPCC Assessment Reports were based on junk science, "nonsense which the EU and its green friends in other countries have been parading as the advice of 2,500 eminent climate scientists."[24] Asked to explain why he thought such learned people and institutions would accept the reality of climate change if it was so obviously a hoax, Evans's answer was as unorthodox as ever. Having earlier told a Galatians Group conference that the modern left's emphasis on social justice had its genesis in the millenarian doctrines of the middle ages,[25] he now attributed predictions of ecological catastrophe to the same source:

> I've come to the view, and it's nothing you can prove, that what we have here is an acute case of millenarial fever. And I've been reading a book on the history of Europe from nine hundred and something to eleven hundred, that period, and I was shaken by the degree to which millenarial fever became a real social scourge.[26]

Evans held a genuine belief that people in positions of power had lost the ability to think rationally about social and environmental problems, leading to the implementation of potentially disastrous policies. He therefore committed himself with the utmost urgency to halting this trend.

Kyoto Protocol

The Kyoto Protocol was the first legally binding international agreement on climate change. Following two years of negotiations, it was adopted at the third Conference of Parties to the UNFCCC in Kyoto, Japan in December 1997. The

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[23] Ray Evans, interview with author, Melbourne, 5 June 2012.
[24] Ray Evans, 'Russia backs Australia's stand on the Kyoto Protocol,' *Online Opinion*, 4 November 2003, http://www.onlineopinion.com.au/view.asp?article=837
[25] Ray Evans, 'Social Justice and Millenarianism,' in *The Utopian Quest for Social Justice*, Proceedings of the Third Conference of the Galatians Group, Melbourne, August 1996, pp. 151–58.
[26] Evans, interview with author.

agreement committed most countries to greenhouse gas emission cuts from 1990 levels of around eight per cent by 2012. Throughout the negotiation process, however, the recently elected Howard government worked to undermine the prospects of a meaningful agreement. "If it could not prevent international agreement on mandatory reduction targets," wrote Clive Hamilton, "it was determined to gain special concessions for Australia."[27] In the latter aim it was successful, with Australia eventually permitted an increase in emissions of eight per cent, based on the argument that its heavy reliance on fossil fuels would make an emissions cut an unfair burden on Australia's economy. This concession was achieved with the help of right-wing activists and think tanks from Australia and the US.

As has been thoroughly documented by sociologists Aaron McCright and Riley Dunlap, the 1990s saw conservative think tanks in the US mobilise against action on climate change.[28] Ray Evans had watched with interest, and hoped to harness similar forces in Australia. In November 1996 he attended a meeting at the headquarters of the libertarian Competitive Enterprise Institute (CEI) in Washington DC. Together with a number of representatives from American oil and energy companies, Evans strategised ways in which Kyoto could be undermined.[29] There the seeds were sown for two conferences. The first, 'The Costs of Kyoto,' was held in Washington in July 1997. The second, 'Countdown to Kyoto,' followed a month later in Canberra. Institutional support for the Australian leg came from another American think tank, Frontiers of Freedom, and Monash University's Australian APEC Study Centre, chaired by former diplomat and international trade consultant Alan Oxley. In addition to a number of prominent American climate deniers, attendees included deputy prime minister Tim Fischer and environment minister Robert Hill. John Stone acted as rapporteur.[30] A follow-up conference, 'Kyoto: The Impact on Australia,' was held in Melbourne in February 1998. Evans described these conferences as being very important in

[27] Clive Hamilton, *Running from the Storm: The Development of Climate Change Policy in Australia*, Sydney: UNSW Press, 2001, p. 53.
[28] Aaron M. McCright and Riley E. Dunlap, 'Defeating Kyoto: The Conservative Movement's Impact on U.S. Climate Change Policy,' *Social Problems*, vol. 50, no. 3 (August 2003), pp. 348–73.
[29] Clive Hamilton, *Scorcher: The Dirty Politics of Climate Change*, Melbourne: Black Inc, 2007, p. 137.
[30] Hamilton, *Running from the Storm*, p. 79.

bringing together like-minded people who hadn't had the chance to meet. "So once again you get this business of social networking," he said, "which I emphasise can't be overlooked."[31]

For Evans, Kyoto was more than just wasteful environmental policy, it was a threat to sovereignty. He took up this theme with gusto as the Kyoto debate progressed. In May 1998, just two days after Australia became a signatory to the Kyoto Protocol, Evans spoke at a CNI dinner in Melbourne. He described Kyoto as "the gravest threat to our sovereignty since the Pacific War of half a century ago."[32] He also gave an indication as to what he intended to do about preventing such a calamity, stating that "unless there is a major political offensive against the Federal Government, but more particularly against the Minister and the Department of the Environment, we shall probably ratify the Protocol in due course."[33] Evans continued with the "threat to sovereignty" theme in Samuel Griffith Society conference papers in 1999 and 2000, where he elaborated on Kyoto in even more apocalyptic terms:

> Why should the Kyoto Protocol, of itself, presage a new imperialism? What distinguishes it from every other international treaty which Australia has ratified? The difference between Kyoto and every other international treaty is this. If Kyoto is brought into effect the economic dislocation which must follow its implementation will be unprecedented in modern times. It will be equivalent to the famines of the early 19th Century in its disruptive power.[34]

Needless to say, at this point dissuading the Howard government from ratifying Kyoto went to the top of Evans's list of political priorities.

Peter Walsh (1935–2015)

It wasn't only those from the conservative side of Australian politics who viewed

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[31] Evans, interview with author.
[32] Ray Evans, 'The Politics Behind Kyoto,' *Australia and World Affairs*, no. 37 (Winter 1998), p. 26.
[33] Evans, 'The Politics Behind Kyoto,' p. 29.
[34] Ray Evans, 'The Kyoto Protocol: Fast Road to Global Governance,' in *Upholding the Australian Constitution*, vol. 12, Proceedings of the Twelfth Conference of the Samuel Griffith Society, Sydney, November 2000, pp. 71–72.

environmentalists with disdain. The most prominent figure to do so from the Labor Party was Peter Walsh. Born on a farm in the wheatbelt of central Western Australia, Walsh formed strong political views at a young age: belief in progressive taxation, "absolute horror" at capital and corporal punishment, and later, strong opposition to conscription and Australia's involvement in the Vietnam War.[35] These views helped to deliver the young Walsh into the Labor Party. But much like Gary Johns (who described Walsh as his "great hero"[36]), Walsh's decision to join the Labor Party was a product of his particular circumstances, and his subsequent political development revealed a figure far to the right of most of his party colleagues.

Elected to the Senate in 1974, Walsh served as minister for resources and energy (1983–84) and minister for finance (1984–90) in the Hawke government, before retiring from politics in 1993. A strong proponent of mining and development, Walsh believed that Labor was "infiltrated and/or unduly influenced" by green extremists in the 1980s.[37] He was aghast as his colleague Graham Richardson experienced a green conversion and convinced the government to back environmental causes in return for electoral preferences. (For his part, Richardson thought Walsh "a fundamentally cantankerous personality who was always smarting over something."[38]) Walsh was especially disgusted when Cabinet agreed to restrictions on logging in Tasmania, saying that Labor betrayed its blue collar base, "not for any valid environmental reasons, but to appease bourgeois Left and middle class trendoids in the gentrified suburbs of Sydney and Melbourne."[39]

Given these views, it came as no surprise that Walsh also doubted the science of global warming, and was prepared to believe the worst about the scientists involved. His 1995 memoir invoked the Cold War to explain their alarmist predictions:

> Although some scientists, eager for research funds, jumped on the politically correct greenhouse bandwagon, the extremists care not a fig for scientific

[35] Peter Walsh, *Confessions of a Failed Finance Minister* (rev. edn), Sydney: Random House, 1996, pp. 1–14.
[36] Gary Johns, interview with author, Brisbane, 19 July 2012.
[37] Walsh, *Confessions of a Failed Finance Minister*, p. 21.
[38] Graham Richardson, *Whatever It Takes*, Sydney: Bantam Books, 1994, p. 158.
[39] Walsh, *Confessions of a Failed Finance Minister*, p. 208.

> truth or human welfare. […] Their objectives are to 'empower' themselves and indulge their ideological hostility to industrial capitalism. Their targeted villains have always been in North America, Western Europe and Australia, not the real environmental vandals of Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union.[40]

Walsh attended the 'Countdown to Kyoto' conference in Canberra in 1997, and wrote in the *Financial Review* that evidence presented there "showed scaremongering is moving from media beat up to scientific fraud."[41] Having long taken an interest in the politics of the environment, the issue of climate change now came to occupy Walsh's mind more than any other.

Walsh's involvement with Ray Evans and Hugh Morgan stretched back to the 1980s, though they weren't exactly on the same wavelength at the beginning. As noted in chapter 5, Walsh gave qualified support for Morgan's controversial AMIC address in May 1984. In 1987, having told parliament that the H.R. Nicholls Society was "an extremist right wing organisation aimed at abolishing the rights of workers,"[42] Walsh was invited to address the Society's third conference, and gave a paper on abuses of power in contemporary Australia. He addressed the Galatians Group in 1996 and the Samuel Griffith Society in 1997 and 2000. So when a prominent figure was needed to become the president of a new organisation concerned with climate change, Walsh seemed ideal. As Evans told me, "Peter Walsh came on board and he was very, very good. He was incredible, he opened doors you couldn't imagine."[43]

Antoine-Laurent Lavoisier (1743–1794)

Evans chose to name his latest advocacy group after eighteenth century French scientist Antoine-Laurent Lavoisier, commonly referred to as the founder of modern chemistry. Born in Paris to a wealthy noble family, Lavoisier was educated in the sciences, philosophy and law at the Collège Mazarin. Elected to the French Academy of Sciences in 1768, he became a *fermier général*—a tax collector on

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[40] Walsh, *Confessions of a Failed Finance Minister*, p. 212.
[41] Peter Walsh, 'Truth about our climate,' *Australian Financial Review*, 16 September 1997.
[42] Peter Walsh, 'H.R. Nicholls Society,' *Commonwealth Parliamentary Debates*, Senate, 26 March 1987, p. 1384.
[43] Evans, interview with author.

behalf of the royal government—in order to finance his scientific research. Through his insistence on precise measurement he discovered both oxygen and hydrogen, and his research led to the demise of the phlogiston theory of combustion.

A liberal social reformer, Lavoisier participated in the Revolutionary assemblies in 1789, and later played a leading role in establishing the metric system. His earlier role as a tax collector for the *Ancien Régime* did not endear him to the revolutionaries, however. He was attacked in print by the radical journalist Jean-Paul Marat in 1791, before being denounced as a traitor and executed by guillotine during Maximilien Robespierre's Reign of Terror in 1794.[44]

For Evans, three things stood out about Lavoisier. Firstly, he attended the only school in Paris which taught sciences and mathematics as well as literature and history. "It was this originality," states the Lavoisier Group's website, "which determined Antoine Lavoisier's destiny to become the founder of modern chemistry."[45] Secondly, he took on the scientific establishment of the time and refused to accept the legitimacy of their methods and data, much like a small minority of scientists do today regarding climate change. Finally, he was attacked and executed by the left. Thus, he was not only a courageous scientific iconoclast, but also a political martyr.

This identification with martyrdom is also a characteristic of the Galileo Movement, a related climate denial group founded in 2011 by two Noosa retirees, Case Smit and John Smeed. This group takes as its role model the great Italian physicist and astronomer Galileo Galilei (1564–1642), who famously challenged the teachings of the Catholic Church by arguing that the earth revolved around the sun, and was tried for heresy by the Roman Inquisition. "Taking his name," declared Smit and Smeed, "we honour his integrity and courage in championing freedom and protecting science. He replaced religious doctrine with solid observable data."[46]

The Galileo Movement's patron is Sydney radio broadcaster Alan Jones, and

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[44] W.R. Aykroyd, *Three Philosophers: Lavoisier, Priestley and Cavendish*, London: William Heinemann, 1935, passim.
[45] Lavoisier Group, 'Antoine-Laurent Lavoisier,' http://www.lavoisier.com.au/lavoisier-biography.php
[46] Galileo Movement, 'Who We Are,' http://www.galileomovement.com.au/who_we_are.php

its former manager, Malcolm Roberts, is a conspiracy theorist who was elected to the Senate in 2016 representing Pauline Hanson's One Nation party.[47] Its list of "independent advisers" includes a number of members of the Lavoisier Group, such as William Kininmonth, Bob Carter, Ian Plimer, David Evans, Des Moore and David Archibald. Archibald has worked as a geologist in oil exploration and joined the board of the Lavoisier Group in 2007. He told its members shortly afterwards that despite the sinister conspiracy against them in this life, martyrdom awaited in the next:

> My reward for this work, as it is for every member of the Lavoisier Society [*sic*], will be in Heaven, for the Forces of Darkness control the science journals, government departments, public institutes and universities. They reward each other for concocting ever more fantastic apocalyptic visions. It is as if all the biology journals were edited by creationists.[48]

Archibald's extreme views are not limited to climate change. He was a candidate in the 2016 federal election representing the far-right, anti-Islam Australian Liberty Alliance, and in the 2017 WA election for Pauline Hanson's One Nation.

Inaugural conference

In addition to Walsh as president and Evans as secretary, the founding board of the Lavoisier Group was entirely made up of mining and energy industry figures: Ian Webber, Harold Clough, Bob Foster, Bruce Kean and Peter Murray. An inaugural conference, titled 'Kyoto and the National Interest,' was held in Melbourne in May 2000, with speakers from both sides of politics, from business, from the scientific community, and two representatives from the National Farmers' Federation. Shane Rattenbury—then working for Greenpeace, but since 2008 a Greens member of the ACT Legislative Assembly—observed the conference and reported about sixty people in attendance, describing them as "classic Melbourne Establishment, mostly

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[47] Josh Taylor, 'Malcolm Roberts: the One Nation climate denier too out there for Andrew Bolt,' *Crikey*, 4 August 2016, https://www.crikey.com.au/2016/08/04/malcolm-roberts-one-nation-climate-sceptic-much-andrew-bolt/

[48] David Archibald, 'Failure to Warm,' Occasional address to the Lavoisier Group, October 2007, http://www.lavoisier.com.au/articles/greenhouse-science/solar-cycles/ArchibaldLavoisierAGM.pdf

male and over 50."[49] Walsh set the tone of the event by handing out a page-by-page critique of a CSIRO report and questioning the organisation's claims to political independence. "The modern CSIRO," he said, "is not based on science but on politics."[50]

Hugh Morgan was enlisted to give the conference's opening address. The text of his speech strikes one as fairly tame by Morgan's standards. Declaring his full support for the objectives of the Lavoisier Group, he championed the right to challenge accepted scientific views without being accused of heresy. "It is an important part of the scientific process to continuously challenge scientific opinion as new information and new theories are put forward," he said. "Without challenge in science, doctrine prevails."[51] But as Rattenbury relates, Morgan was unable to resist the lure of controversy, invoking Nazi Germany by referring to the Australian Greenhouse Office's discussion papers on emissions trading as "*Mein Kampf* declarations."[52]

John Daly, self-taught science blogger, followed Morgan with an address titled 'Global Warming: Science Serving Politics.' This paper was said to have caused a Damascene conversion for Tony Staley, former minister in the Fraser government and Liberal Party president from 1993 to 1999. Staley was due to give the conference's keynote address the following day. "We had John Daly run through his standard presentation and Staley was just knocked over," an insider told Guy Pearse. "He'd never heard this before. And he opened his presentation the next day saying, 'Well, I mean we're all transformed now aren't we?'"[53] As a close and trusted friend of John Howard, Staley became critical to efforts to influence the government's climate policies. Alan Oxley, whom we encountered earlier as Evans's co-organiser of anti-Kyoto conferences in 1997–98, also gave a paper at the conference in which he argued that the Kyoto Protocol is a chimera, with

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[49] Shane Rattenbury, Unpublished report on the Lavoisier Group conference, Melbourne, May 2000.
[50] Peter Walsh, quoted in Rattenbury, Unpublished report on the Lavoisier Group conference.
[51] Hugh Morgan, 'Opening Address,' in *Kyoto and the National Interest*, Proceedings of the Inaugural Conference of the Lavoisier Group, Melbourne, May 2000, http://www.lavoisier.com.au/articles/climate-policy/science-and-policy/morgan2000-c1.php
[52] Hugh Morgan, quoted in Rattenbury, Unpublished report on the Lavoisier Group conference.
[53] Anonymous source, quoted in Guy Pearse, *High & Dry: John Howard, Climate Change and the Selling of Australia's Future*, Melbourne: Viking, 2007, p. 283.

fundamental flaws that make it unworkable.[54] The inaugural conference came to a close with a searching question from Peter Walsh: "Can we mobilise a countervailing pressure group to counteract the green extremists?"[55]

The Labor Party was represented at the conference not only by Walsh, but also by his son-in-law, Gary Gray, who was National Secretary of the ALP from 1993 to 2000. In 2001 he joined Woodside Petroleum as a senior executive, before entering parliament in 2007. According to Frank Devine, Gray told the conference that because global warming was becoming an article of faith for young people, "any campaign against ratification of the Kyoto protocols based on denying greenhouse was doomed to failure."[56] As we will see below, the Lavoisier Group took little heed of this advice.

Speaking in 2012, Ray Evans held hopes that Gray would "make history" and switch to the Liberal Party in order to hold his seat at the 2013 election. "Gary's a very, very smart fellow," he said. "He'd hold the seat as a Liberal candidate, he won't as a Labor candidate."[57] But this rather fantastical idea did not materialise. Even worse for Evans, Gray retracted his earlier views on climate change upon being appointed as resources and energy minister in 2013. Admitting that he had once described climate science as a "middle class conspiracy to frighten schoolchildren," Gray was now aligned with his party, which had introduced a carbon tax in 2011. Asked by the ABC's Emma Alberici whether he is a climate sceptic, Gray responded emphatically:

> No, I'm not. I was. I was. I was a vocal climate sceptic. And as national secretary of the Labor Party I said things that frankly, Emma, nowadays embarrass me when I hear it played back. […] I attended the inaugural meeting of the Lavoisier Group and I counted and still count as friends members of that organisation. I just don't agree with them anymore.[58]

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[54] Alan Oxley, 'The Kyoto Chimera,' in *Kyoto and the National Interest*, http://www.lavoisier.com.au/articles/climate-policy/science-and-policy/oxley2000-c4.php
[55] Peter Walsh, quoted in Rattenbury, Unpublished report on the Lavoisier Group conference.
[56] Frank Devine, 'Greenhouse emission protocols a lot of hot air,' *Australian*, 30 May 2000.
[57] Evans, interview with author.
[58] Gary Gray, quoted in Emma Alberici, 'Challenge for new Resources Minister,' *Lateline*, ABC TV, 25 March 2013, http://www.abc.net.au/lateline/content/2013/s3723585.htm

Scientific backing

None of the key players in the Lavoisier Group mentioned so far held any relevant scientific qualifications, though this did nothing to erode their confidence in questioning the science of climate change. Still, the appearance of scientific rigour was important, so scientists known to dissent from the consensus view were required, as they had been in the US.[59] Clive Hamilton has noted that in Australia, "there are only four such sceptics with anything resembling scientific credentials – Bob Carter, William Kininmonth, Ian Plimer and Garth Paltridge."[60] All four have been associated with the Lavoisier Group to greater and lesser degrees, and the first three deserve particular attention.

Bob Carter's scientific expertise was in geology and earth sciences, as well as palaeontology, and he held adjunct professorships at the University of Adelaide and James Cook University in Townsville. He was a scientific advisor and emeritus fellow at the IPA, and a senior fellow at the Heartland Institute in the US, a global leader in climate denial. A leak in 2012 revealed that he was receiving a monthly payment of $US1667 as part of a Heartland program to pay "high-profile individuals who regularly and publicly counter the alarmist [anthropogenic global warming] message."[61] Though Carter did not deny that global warming had occurred in the final decades of the twentieth century, he argued that it was not caused by human activity. He also argued in 2006 that there had been a pause in temperatures since 1998, and that "a sudden natural cooling is far more to be feared, and will do infinitely more social and economic damage, than the late 20th century phase of gentle warming."[62]

Carter claimed to be an apolitical scientist only concerned with evidence, but this didn't stop him stepping into the political arena. In December 2006 he made submissions to the US Senate Committee on Environment and Public Works, arguing that the debate around human-caused global warming involved

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[59] Aaron M. McCright and Riley E. Dunlap, 'Organized Climate Change Denial,' in John S. Dryzek, Richard B. Norgaard and David Schlosberg (eds), *The Oxford Handbook of Climate Change and Society*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011, p. 151.
[60] Hamilton, *Scorcher*, p. 20.
[61] Ben Cubby, 'Scientist denies he is mouthpiece of US climate-sceptic think tank,' *Sydney Morning Herald*, 16 February 2012.
[62] Robert M. Carter, 'There IS a problem with global warming… it stopped in 1998,' *Sunday Telegraph* (UK), 9 April 2006.

"McCarthyism, intimidation, press bias, censorship, policy-advice corruption and propaganda."[63] At a town hall meeting in rural Queensland in 2009 he urged his audience to take their concerns about carbon pricing to Canberra: "You have to beat down the door of every voting senator. […] The Liberal senators have to be convinced this bill's got to be defeated a second time."[64] In 2010 Carter published *Climate: The Counter Consensus*, which developed at length his argument that global warming is no longer a scientific problem. "Rather, and as the IPCC and its supporters had always intended," he wrote, "since at least the turn of the twenty-first century global warming has been primarily a social and political issue."[65] The book received a glowing review in *Quadrant* from Ray Evans. Carter died in January 2016, aged 73. Many tributes were offered from the international network of climate denial, as well as from Australian friends Ian Plimer, Clive James, Joanne Nova, John Spooner, Gary Johns, Andrew Bolt and Jennifer Marohasy.[66]

William Kininmonth was probably the scientist most closely associated with the Lavoisier Group. A retired meteorologist, he worked for the Bureau of Meteorology for 38 years and was head of its National Climate Centre from 1985 to 1998. He later established his own consultancy, the Australasian Climate Research Institute. These biographical facts lent an air of legitimacy to Kininmonth's claims to climate science expertise, but a closer look revealed his credentials to be rather thin. In January 2012 Kininmonth was one of sixteen signatories to an opinion piece in the *Wall Street Journal* arguing that global warming is no cause for panic, and he was described as the "former head of climate research at the Australian Bureau of Meteorology."[67] Climate blogger Graham Readfearn sought more information from the Bureau about the National Climate Centre's work during Kininmonth's tenure, and was advised that it "mainly centred

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[63] Robert M. Carter, 'Human-caused global warming: McCarthyism, intimidation, press bias, censorship, policy-advice corruption and propaganda,' Testimony before the Committee on Environment and Public Works, United States Senate, 6 December 2006, http://www.lavoisier.com.au/articles/climate-policy/politics/BobCarterUSSenate2006-1.pdf

[64] Bob Carter, quoted in Sarah Ferguson, 'Malcolm and the Malcontents,' *Four Corners*, ABC TV, 9 November 2009, http://www.abc.net.au/4corners/content/2009/s2737676.htm

[65] Robert M. Carter, *Climate: The Counter Consensus*, London: Stacey International, 2010, pp. 148–49.

[66] Collated at Heartland Institute, 'Robert M. Carter (1942–2016),' https://www.heartland.org/robert-m-carter

[67] Claude Allegre et al., 'No need to panic about global warming,' *Wall Street Journal*, 27 January 2012.

on climate database management and climate monitoring activities" and "had no formal role in undertaking or directing climate change research."[68]

Kininmonth was a member of Australian delegations to international climate conferences in the early 1990s, but throughout that decade became suspicious "that the science and predictions of anthropogenic global warming had extended beyond sound theory and evidence."[69] Since 2001 Kininmonth has consistently argued that climate change is a natural phenomenon not influenced by human activity. In November 2002 the Lavoisier Group published his pamphlet 'Climate Change: A Natural Hazard,' described on its website as "a veritable Exocet missile aimed at the Kyoto establishment."[70] Two years later it was expanded into a book of the same name, and in an apparent coup, launched by Kininmonth's former boss at the Bureau of Meteorology, the highly respected John Zillman. However, Zillman made it clear that he did so with reservations. While agreeing with some parts of the book, he also chided Kininmonth for going too far in his criticism of climate modelling, suggesting that he "for whatever reason, misinterprets and/or misrepresents some important aspects of the science of climate change that are now pretty well understood."[71] Zillman later told the *Age*: "I won't be expecting to be invited back as a regular."[72]

Another Lavoisier Group favourite was Ian Plimer. Like Carter, Plimer's main area of expertise was geology. He was professor of geology at the University of Melbourne when he gave a paper on the science behind Kyoto at the inaugural Lavoisier Group conference, and later became professor of mining geology at the University of Adelaide. His work in the field of mining geology has been rewarded with various mining industry directorships. Plimer came to public prominence in the 1990s as an energetic critic of creationist Christians. In 1994 he published *Telling Lies for God: Reason vs Creationism*, a 300-page scientific refutation of

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[68] Bureau of Meteorology statement, quoted in Graham Readfearn, 'Australian Meteorology Bureau corrects record on former research head William Kininmonth's actual climate change experience,' *DeSmogBlog*, 2 February 2012, http://www.desmogblog.com/australian-meteorology-bureau-corrects-record-former-research-head-william-kininmonth-s-actual-climate-change-experience

[69] William Kininmonth, *Climate Change: A Natural Hazard*, Brentwood: Multi-Science Publishing, 2004, p. iii.

[70] Lavoisier Group, 'Latest at Lavoisier,' http://www.lavoisier.com.au/papers/lav-papers.html

[71] John Zillman, 'Address launching *Climate Change: A Natural Hazard*,' Melbourne, 22 November 2004, http://www.lavoisier.com.au/articles/greenhouse-science/climate-change/zillman 2004-8.php

[72] John Zillman, quoted in Melissa Fyfe, 'Global warming: the sceptics,' *Age*, 27 November 2004.

creationist beliefs. Plimer was particularly irritated by Allen Roberts, who claimed to have found evidence of Noah's Ark in eastern Turkey. In 1997 Plimer alleged in the Federal Court that creationist material distributed by Roberts was misleading and deceptive under the *Trade Practices Act*. Billed as a belated sequel to the 1925 'Scopes Monkey Trial', where a Tennessee man was charged with teaching Charles Darwin's theory of evolution in a state high school, Plimer's case eventually failed on the grounds that Roberts's activities did not constitute trade or commerce.[73]

Having fought against religious belief in one field, Plimer turned to what he saw as another example of foolish superstition, lamenting that "global warming has become the secular religion of today."[74] Such views led to Plimer becoming one of the Lavoisier Group's most cited Australian scientists. Ray Evans also had a hand in Plimer's greatest commercial achievement, the 2009 publication of *Heaven and Earth: Global Warming, the Missing Science*, which sold more than 100,000 copies and has become a kind of bible for climate deniers. Anthony Cappello of Connor Court Publishing had been in discussions with Evans and the IPA's John Roskam about publishing something on climate change. Evans mentioned this to Plimer, who was searching for a publisher at the time, and "the rest is history," as Cappello says.[75] The book's Melbourne launch was hosted by the IPA and featured an address by Arvi Parbo, the former chairman of WMC and close associate of Morgan and Evans.

Aims

Ray Evans made the intentions of the Lavoisier Group plain in his letter of invitation to its inaugural conference in 2000, declaring that "the science behind global warming is far less certain than its protagonists claim" and "the economic damage which Australia would suffer if a carbon tax … were imposed would be

[73] Leigh Dayton, 'Ark verdict spells ruin for geologist,' *New Scientist*, 7 June 1997.
[74] Ian Plimer, *Heaven and Earth: Global Warming, the Missing Science*, Ballan: Connor Court, 2009, pp. 462–63.
[75] Anthony Cappello, email to author, 24 July 2014.

far, far greater than is currently appreciated in Canberra."[76] The immediate aims of the group were then outlined on its website shortly afterwards:

- to promote vigorous debate within Australia greenhouse science and greenhouse policy;
- to ensure that the full extent of the economic consequences, for Australia, of the regime of carbon withdrawal prescribed by the yet-to-be-ratified Kyoto Protocol, are fully understood by the Australian community;
- to explore the implications which treaties such as the Kyoto Protocol have for Australia's sovereignty, and for the GATT/WTO rules which protect Australia (and other WTO members) from the use of trade sanctions as an instrument of extraterritorial power.[77]

The only change to these points came in 2008 when they were slightly amended to reflect the diminishing significance of the Kyoto Protocol, and instead focus on the consequences of decarbonisation.[78]

For critics, however, this window-dressing did nothing to disguise the Lavoisier Group's campaign of obfuscation and deception. Clive Hamilton found the Group to be "immune to argument," and broke its approach down the following way:

- There is no evidence of global warming.
- If there is evidence of global warming, then warming is not due to human activity.
- If global warming is occurring and it is due to human activity, then it is not going to be damaging.
- If global warming is occurring, it is due to human activity and it is going to be damaging, then the costs of avoiding it will be too high, so we should do nothing.[79]

More succinctly, Guy Pearse has described the approach as "a devastatingly

[76] Ray Evans, quoted in Lenore Taylor, 'Businessmen throw stones at greenhouse,' *Australian Financial Review*, 11 April 2000.
[77] Lavoisier Group, 'Aims,' http://www.lavoisier.com.au/pages/lav-aims.html
[78] Lavoisier Group, 'Our Aims,' http://www.lavoisier.com.au/lavoisier-aims.php
[79] Hamilton, *Running from the Storm*, p. 139.

effective formula: deny and delay – and deceive along the way."[80] Let us now look at the different elements of the Lavoisier Group's approach more closely.

Deny the science

The obvious first step in preventing any action on climate change was to deny the existence of a problem in the first place. After all, why cut carbon pollution when it causes no harm? However, given that the overwhelming weight of scientific evidence refutes such a claim, to make it requires either deliberate deception or the belief in a vast international conspiracy involving scientists, politicians, bureaucrats and environmental activists. Members of the Lavoisier Group have not been strangers to either approach.

Using a dataset of 1372 climate researchers, a 2010 US National Academy of Sciences study found that:

> (*i*) 97–98% of the climate researchers most actively publishing in the field surveyed here support the tenets of [anthropogenic climate change] outlined by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, and (*ii*) the relative climate expertise and scientific prominence of the researchers unconvinced of ACC are substantially below that of the convinced researchers.[81]

Aware that these sorts of findings damaged their credibility in the debate, climate sceptics focused their efforts on emphasising the prominence of those who questioned the broad scientific consensus. In the process they helped to feed a public narrative that scientists were divided on the issue, when in reality there existed a remarkable level of agreement among experts.

This campaign strategy of denial and obfuscation was comprehensively exposed by Naomi Oreskes and Erik Conway in their 2010 book *Merchants of Doubt*. Oreskes and Conway relate how industry groups and think tanks have delayed or prevented action on issues such as tobacco smoking, acid rain, the hole in the ozone layer and global warming using the maxim "doubt is our product".

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[80] Pearse, *High & Dry*, p. 286.
[81] William R.L. Anderegg, James W. Prall, Jacob Harold and Stephen H. Schneider, 'Expert Credibility in Climate Change,' *PNAS: Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America*, vol. 107, no. 27 (6 July 2010), p. 12107.

The strategy was immediately familiar to any observer of the Lavoisier Group:

> First they claimed there was none, then they claimed it was just natural variation, and then they claimed that even if it was happening and it was our fault, it didn't matter because we could just adapt to it. In case after case, they steadfastly denied the existence of scientific agreement, even though they, themselves, were pretty much the only ones who disagreed.[82]

A variety of dubious scientific arguments were used as part of this campaign. William Kininmonth argued that recent global warming "can be attributed to natural phenomena," not human activity.[83] Bob Foster believed that there was a simple reason for climate change being overlooked by the IPCC: the sun.[84] Another common theme was to present carbon dioxide as an innocent, non-polluting victim of political debate. Blurring the distinction between the naturally occurring element essential to all life on earth and the emissions produced by the burning of fossil fuels, Ray Evans argued that carbon "has been cast as a symbol of mankind's malevolent behaviour towards the planet, and it has been demonized accordingly."[85] Hence the theme of a 2007 Lavoisier Group workshop: 'Rehabilitating Carbon Dioxide.'

A more controversial method of denying climate science was to make allegations of corruption. This preparedness to embrace conspiratorial thinking is one way in which the Lavoisier Group stands apart from the H.R. Nicholls Society, Samuel Griffith Society and Bennelong Society. Key figures such as Evans, Morgan and Walsh are on the record as having described global warming variously as a hoax, a scam or a fraud. The conclusion to Evans's 2006 pamphlet, 'Nine Facts About Climate Change,' was typical:

> The global warming scam has been, arguably, the most extraordinary example of scientific fraud in the post-War period. So many people, and institutions,

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[82] Oreskes and Conway, *Merchants of Doubt*, pp. 6–7.
[83] William Kininmonth, 'Climate Change: A Natural Hazard,' Lavoisier Group, November 2002, p. 10.
[84] Bob Foster, 'Climate change made easy: it's the sun,' Lavoisier Group, June 2003, http://www.lavoisier.com.au/articles/greenhouse-science/climate-change/foster2003-5.php
[85] Ray Evans, 'Thank God for Carbon,' Lavoisier Group, November 2008, p. 1.

> have been caught up in the web of deceit, master-minded by environmental activists working through NGOs and their manipulation of the IPCC processes, that the integrity of Western science is seriously at risk. The unravelling of this web will result in the loss of reputation for many individuals, but more importantly, in the restructuring of those scientific institutions in Australia and elsewhere which have tied their reputations to that of the IPCC.[86]

This line of thinking received a fillip in November 2009—just prior to the UN Climate Change Conference in Copenhagen, Denmark, where a successor to the Kyoto Protocol was to be developed—when the email server of the University of East Anglia's Climatic Research Unit was hacked. Sceptics claimed that the emails revealed that scientists were manipulating data in order to advance the theory of global warming. The scientists involved refuted this, and argued that emails had been selectively edited and taken out of context to distort their content.[87] Multiple investigators in the UK and US agreed, finding no evidence of fraud or misconduct, but the "climategate" scandal continues to be an article of faith for climate sceptics, confirming all that they had previously suspected about the corrupt climate establishment.

Prevent or delay action

Attempts to deny the science were often successful in clouding the climate change debate in doubt, especially for lay people, but most politicians and policy makers were still persuaded by the more authoritative work of eminent climate scientists. The next step for climate deniers, then, was to prevent or delay action by warning of the catastrophic social and economic consequences of reducing carbon emissions. Ironically, this involved countering the arguments of global warming "doomsayers" with their own hyperbolic predictions of disaster if any preventative action was to be taken.

In September 1999 it was reported that the Commonwealth Treasury had prepared a paper on a carbon tax. Evans responded by describing it as "a unilateral

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[86] Ray Evans, 'Nine Facts About Climate Change,' Lavoisier Group, November 2006, p. 24.
[87] Michael E. Mann, *The Hockey Stick and the Climate Wars: Dispatches from the Front Lines*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2012, p. 209.

act of self-mutilation."[88] The following year the Lavoisier Group warned the Joint Standing Committee on Treaties that "with the Kyoto Protocol we face the most serious challenge to our sovereignty since the Japanese Fleet entered the Coral Sea on 3 May, 1942."[89] In a 2008 essay on "the chilling costs of climate catastrophism," Evans declared that the "warmists" were presenting us with two equally absurd options: either abandon all fossil fuels as sources of energy or "return to the living standards which were characteristic of Britain and North America in the eighteenth century, before the Industrial Revolution."[90]

In 2009 the Lavoisier Group published *Back to the 19th Century*, a collection of essays by Evans, Tom Quirk and Alan Moran warning of the potential consequences of the Rudd government's Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme (CPRS). Elevating his rhetoric even further, Evans suggested that Labor's climate agenda represented an existential threat to Australian democracy:

> a collation of fantasy and deceit, coupled with an ambit claim for political power which is unprecedented in Australian history and which justifies the use of the term 'coup d'état'. The discretion which is vested in the minister is breathtaking. The use of regulation rather than legislation to impose the will of the salvationists upon the people brings back the ancient claim of kings 'The law is my mouth'.[91]

Such language was undoubtedly designed to frighten politicians and the public about the potential negative consequences of climate action. It appears desperate and even irrational, but it was at times effective. More detail about the ways in which the Lavoisier Group intervened to prevent or delay Australian government action on climate change appears in the Interventions section below.

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[88] Nick Hordern, 'Industry greets plan for carbon tax with horror,' *Australian Financial Review*, 15 September 1999.
[89] Lavoisier Group, 'Submission to the Inquiry into the Kyoto Protocol,' Joint Standing Committee on Treaties, August 2000, http://www.lavoisier.com.au/articles/climate-policy/science-and-policy/JSCOT.pdf
[90] Ray Evans, 'The Chilling Costs of Climate Catastrophism,' *Quadrant*, June 2008, p. 13.
[91] Ray Evans, 'The Social and Political Consequences of the CPRS (sic) Act 2009,' in *Back to the 19th Century: Australia Under the Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme (sic) Act 2009*, Melbourne: Lavoisier Group, September 2009, p. 3.

Methods

Web of denial

Like the single-issue advocacy groups that came before it, the Lavoisier Group used traditional methods to publish the writing of its members, such as the major daily newspapers and *Quadrant* magazine. The latter became especially important after Keith Windschuttle became its editor in 2008. Ray Evans said that Windschuttle "was very keen to get this issue [climate change] up and running, and he did with great effect."[92] A succession of climate-themed articles by Lavoisier Group figures began appearing in *Quadrant* from 2008 onwards. Evans alone had eight such articles published between 2008 and 2012. Other authors included Bob Carter, William Kininmonth, Garth Paltridge, Tom Quirk and Tim Curtin.

But as Robert Manne has noted, these traditional methods were in the 2000s trumped by the internet as "the most effective denialist media weapon."[93] Like the Bennelong Society, the Lavoisier Group was born in the internet age, and its founders saw the world wide web as a vital tool in disseminating its message. "Arguably the most important activity undertaken by the Lavoisier Group is the maintenance of our website," Peter Walsh told the group's annual general meeting in 2007. "We continue to publish important pieces which either impact upon the climate change debate or inform our membership and the wider public about the progression of that debate."[94]

The internet was even more important for the Lavoisier Group than it was for the Bennelong Society, because it allowed the organisation to plug into a "global web of climate denial."[95] Venturing into the online climate denial network, one is confronted with a bewildering number of think tanks, websites, blogs and industry front groups, all repeating the same messages. The extent of their collaboration was outlined by Guy Pearse:

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[92] Evans, interview with author.
[93] Robert Manne, 'A Dark Victory: How Vested Interests Defeated Climate Science,' *Monthly*, August 2012, p. 27.
[94] Peter Walsh, 'President's report,' Lavoisier Group, October 2007, http://www.lavoisier.com.au/articles/climate-policy/science-and-policy/walsh2007-30.php
[95] Graham Readfearn, 'Australia's place in the global web of climate denial,' *ABC News*, 29 June 2011, http://www.abc.net.au/news/2011-06-29/readfearn---australia27s-place-in-the-global-web-of-climate-de/2775298

> There has been continuous collaboration over the years between Australian and US neoliberal think-tanks, industry associations, polluters and politicians. They are in constant contact and working in tandem. The AIGN, the IPA, Lavoisier and the APEC Studies Centre have been at the heart of the action, as have various multinational corporations. The American players are in the thick of the lobbying here, and Australian interests are similarly enmeshed in the US.[96]

As we have seen, Ray Evans was already familiar with key climate deniers in the US thanks to his work with the CEI in the 1990s opposing the Kyoto Protocol. A links page was added to the Lavoisier Group website in 2001 and included a variety of sites, including the CEI, the Cato Institute, Fred Singer's Science & Environmental Policy Project, JunkScience.com and the Greening Earth Society.[97] In 2002 the Cooler Heads Coalition—a global network of climate denial organisations founded by the CEI in 1997—described the Lavoisier Group as "the principal intellectual and organizational opposition in Australia to Kyoto and was organized by our colleague, N. Ray Evans of Melbourne."[98] The Lavoisier Group joined the Cooler Heads Coalition in 2004.[99]

As the number of climate denial organisations and individuals within Australia proliferated throughout the 2000s, the internet became increasingly vital as a tool of communication and co-ordination. Central to the network of denial was the IPA. In 2005 the IPA established the Australian Environment Foundation (AEF), which described itself as "a not-for-profit, membership-based environmental organisation having no political affiliation."[100] Its questionable environmental credentials and links to industry groups were quickly exposed, however.[101] The AEF was initially chaired by climate blogger Jennifer Marohasy. Following Evans's death in 2014, Marohasy wrote that he had taught her how to

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[96] Pearse, *High & Dry*, p. 217.
[97] Lavoisier Group, 'Links to Other Sites,' http://www.lavoisier.com.au/pages/lav-links.html
[98] Paul J. Georgia, 'News from Australia,' *Cooler Heads Digest*, 22 January 2002, https://cei.org/news-letters-cooler-heads-digest/vol-vi-no-2
[99] Myron Ebell, 'Cooler Heads Coalition welcomes two new members,' *Cooler Heads Digest*, 7 December 2004, https://cei.org/news-letters-cooler-heads-digest/cooler-heads-0
[100] Australian Environment Foundation, 'About the AEF,' http://www.australianenvironment.org/about-us/
[101] Melissa Fyfe, 'New green group makes conservationists see red,' *Age*, 8 June 2005.

win an argument "by forcing your opponent to engage with you on the detail."[102] The AEF established the Australian Climate Science Coalition in 2008, whose Scientific Advisory Panel included Bob Carter, Ian Plimer, William Kininmonth and others closely associated with the Lavoisier Group.[103] The IPA's centrality to this network was confirmed by John Roskam in 2010, when he told the *Sydney Morning Herald*: "Of all the serious sceptics in Australia, we have helped and supported just about all of them in their work one way or another."[104]

Lobbying

A key method of advocacy for the Lavoisier Group was to lobby politicians, both formally and informally. This began almost immediately with a written submission to a Senate inquiry into proposed renewable energy legislation in July 2000 and, the following month, a submission to the Joint Standing Committee on Treaties' Inquiry into the Kyoto Protocol. This inquiry, which aimed to determine whether ratification of the Kyoto Protocol was in Australia's national interest, was chaired by Liberal MP Andrew Thomson. Thomson had given an impromptu address at the Lavoisier Group's inaugural conference in May in which he informed attendees about the government's plans to establish the Kyoto Inquiry.[105]

In addition to its written submissions, the Lavoisier Group was represented at the Kyoto Inquiry's public hearings by Evans, Walsh and Bob Foster. They were joined by international guests Sonja Boehmer-Christiansen and Richard Lindzen, whose travel costs were paid by the Lavoisier Group.[106] Boehmer-Christiansen has since 1998 been the editor of *Energy and Environment*, described by Michael Mann as "the home journal of climate change denial."[107] Lindzen was a professor of meteorology at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and consultant to oil and coal companies. Ross Gelbspan has written of how Lindzen infuriates his

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[102] Jennifer Marohasy, 'Vale Ray Evans and how to win an argument,' *Jennifer Marohasy* (blog), 19 June 2014, http://jennifermarohasy.com/2014/06/vale-ray-evans-win-argument/
[103] Australian Climate Science Coalition, 'About Us,' http://www.auscsc.org.au/about_us.html
[104] John Roskam, quoted in Ben Cubby and Antony Lawes, 'The benefit of the doubt,' *Sydney Morning Herald*, 8 May 2010.
[105] Rattenbury, Unpublished report on the Lavoisier Group conference.
[106] Sonja Boehmer-Christiansen, 'Witness testimony at the Inquiry into the Kyoto Protocol,' Joint Standing Committee on Treaties, Melbourne, 13 September 2000, p. 60; Richard Lindzen, 'Witness testimony at the Inquiry into the Kyoto Protocol,' Joint Standing Committee on Treaties, Canberra, 3 November 2000, p. 283.
[107] Mann, *The Hockey Stick and the Climate Wars*, p. 187

adversaries with his "excruciatingly argumentative style that at times seems relentlessly obscurantist and self-contradictory."[108] One is reminded here of Evans's advice to Jennifer Marohasy: force your opponent to engage with you on the detail.

This philosophy was also demonstrated in 2007–08 during the Garnaut Climate Change Review. In April 2007 Ross Garnaut was commissioned by Australia's Commonwealth, state and territory governments to conduct a study into the potential impacts of climate change on the Australian economy. The Lavoisier Group submitted around 170 pages of testimony to the Garnaut Review, and separate submissions were also entered by Peter Walsh, Bob Carter, David Archibald, Des Moore, Sonja Boehmer-Christiansen, Fred Singer and Tim Curtin. None of this enormous amount of material seemed to persuade Garnaut, however, who concluded that Australia should commit to carbon emissions reduction targets and implement an emissions trading scheme. The Labor government then set about doing just that.

The Lavoisier Group had much more success influencing the direction of climate policy in the Howard years. Guy Pearse has documented in great detail how John Howard and his ministers were captured by fossil fuel interests and their associates. Though the Lavoisier Group was just one of many actors in this capture, it played a central role. In Pearse's view the most important figure was Hugh Morgan, having been told by an energy industry source:

> Hugh Morgan has driven the Minerals Council, Hugh has driven the Business Council, Hugh has driven the Australian Aluminium Council, and Hugh is behind the Lavoisier Group and all the rest of it. He has used the power of Western Mining, the mining industry and the aluminium industry, and the BCA; and privately, he has direct access to the Prime Minister. But he also had direct access to the former prime minister, Paul Keating. You know, of all industry leaders, he would have been the most powerful without any shadow of a doubt.[109]

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[108] Ross Gelbspan, *The Heat is On: The Climate Crisis, the Cover-Up, the Prescription* (rev. edn), Reading, Massachusetts: Perseus Books, 1998, p. 49.
[109] Pearse, *High & Dry*, p. 267.

Not only did Morgan directly lobby the government, he used his enormous influence within the business community to push a number of companies and peak bodies to adopt sceptical positions on climate change. That way Howard could be seen to be listening to a variety of views, when in fact the big polluters had created an echo chamber of climate denial. While claiming to be an agnostic rather than a sceptic, Howard's language on climate change has often mirrored that of the denialists. "For many, it has become a substitute religion," he wrote in his memoir. "Most of the mass media has boarded the climate-change train; arguments to the contrary are dismissed as extremist. Moral bullying has been employed to silence those who question the conventional wisdom."[110]

Lavoisier Group efforts to influence the climate policies of the Labor Party were less successful, though not for a want of trying. Peter Walsh, a legendary figure to many in the ALP, was vital to these efforts. A "senior Lavoisier office-bearer" told Pearse:

> We have a good following in the Labor Party … Walshy has been a fantastic president and he's given us entree to the Labor Party because he's still got a fan club in the Labor Party and quite an effective one too … Walshy has access to anybody he wants to see apart from the Labor Left.[111]

While a few Labor figures stood out as being sympathetic to the arguments of climate sceptics—Gary Gray, Martin Ferguson and Bill Ludwig, for example—the majority accepted the advice of mainstream climate scientists. In order to achieve its aims the Lavoisier Group would need to focus its lobbying efforts on the Coalition.

Launches

The Lavoisier Group kicked off with the aforementioned 'Kyoto and the National Interest' conference in May 2000, and followed it up with another, 'Kyoto: Dead or Alive?' in September 2001. But a schedule of annual conferences was not

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[110] John Howard, *Lazarus Rising: A Personal and Political Autobiography*, Sydney: HarperCollins, 2010, pp. 553–54.
[111] Guy Pearse, 'Quarry Vision: Coal, Climate Change and the End of the Resources Boom,' *Quarterly Essay*, no. 33 (2009), p. 49.

maintained consistently, in contrast with the H.R. Nicholls, Samuel Griffith and Bennelong Societies. A 'Rehabilitating Carbon Dioxide' workshop was held in 2007, and a forum titled 'The Solar System and Earth's Climate' in 2008, but that was all. Instead, following the media attention surrounding the launch of William Kininmonth's *Climate Change: A Natural Hazard* in 2004, the Lavoisier Group attempted to promote its cause within the corridors of power via a series of publication launches featuring sympathetic politicians.

In May 2006 the Lavoisier Group sought to make a splash in Australia's political epicentre with the launch of Evans's 'Nine Lies About Global Warming' at Parliament House. Though the pamphlet was merely thirteen pages long, it was nevertheless launched by Liberal Party backbencher Russell Broadbent. Broadbent's main claim to fame in politics was as one of a handful of government MPs who challenged John Howard's hardline asylum seeker policies. But it was his involvement in a campaign against a proposed wind farm development in his electorate that attracted Evans. In offering his thanks at the launch, Evans said that Broadbent "has been attacked and ridiculed by the chattering class press, and Victorian ministers, for taking seriously the concerns and fears of his constituents."[112]

That launch barely caused a ripple in the media, however, so the Lavoisier Group returned to Canberra in February 2007 for the launch of another Evans pamphlet, 'Nine Facts About Climate Change.' This time Arvi Parbo gave the launching address at a function hosted by another Liberal backbencher, Dennis Jensen. Jensen holds a PhD in materials science from Monash University and was a research scientist and defence analyst before entering parliament. He is also an outspoken climate change denier, as he revealed in his maiden speech to the House of Representatives in 2004:

> The global warmers want us to not only bet our economy but, more likely, significantly damage our economy on a theory that will probably go the way of the flat earth theory: restricted to a few adherents who have become totally

[112] Ray Evans, 'Address launching Nine Lies About Global Warming,' Canberra, 11 May 2006, http://www.lavoisier.com.au/articles/greenhouse-science/climate-change/nineliieslaunch.pdf

divorced from reality.[113]

With politicians from both major parties in attendance—Jensen, Broadbent and Nick Minchin from the Liberals; Martin Ferguson, Craig Emerson and Dick Adams from the ALP—the media now took notice. Ferguson acknowledged the political risk of keeping such company when he remarked: "I don't know about global cooling, but I'll know about global warming in the Labor Party caucus if I don't watch my Ps and Qs this afternoon."[114]

For Evans's third climate publication the Lavoisier Group travelled to Adelaide and Perth in early 2009, where 'Thank God for Carbon' was launched by Senator Cory Bernardi and Dennis Jensen respectively. Bernardi, a controversial member of the Liberal Party's hard right, had been an open climate denier since the publication of his 2007 essay 'Cool heads needed on global warming', in which he claimed that "climate change is the latest incarnation in a 30-year-long claim that mankind is destroying the planet."[115] Evans used both events to try to exert influence on the Liberal Party. Noting that Bernardi's appearance might upset some of his more moderate colleagues, Evans hoped that "when push comes to shove, those of you who are here today, and are in a position to influence opinion within the Liberal Party, will support Cory with all your strength."[116] At the Perth launch Evans paid Jensen a heartfelt tribute "for keeping the flag of scientific integrity and commitment to reason flying high within the Federal Parliamentary Liberal Party."[117] Finally, in November 2009, amidst an almighty battle within the Coalition over emissions trading, National Party Senator Barnaby Joyce launched the Lavoisier Group's collection *Back to the 19th Century*.

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[113] Dennis Jensen, 'Maiden speech,' *Commonwealth Parliamentary Debates*, House of Representatives, 17 November 2004, p. 120.
[114] Martin Ferguson, quoted in Sarah Smiles, 'Climate change sceptics get a warm reception,' *Age*, 1 March 2007.
[115] Cory Bernardi, 'Cool heads needed on global warming,' *AdelaideNow*, 25 April 2007, http://www.adelaidenow.com.au/news/cool-heads-needed-on-global-warming/story-e6frea6u-1111113415724
[116] Ray Evans, 'Address launching Thank God for Carbon,' Adelaide, 27 January 2009, http://www.lavoisier.com.au/articles/climate-policy/science-and-policy/TGFC-LaunchREvans.php
[117] Ray Evans, 'Address launching Thank God for Carbon,' Perth, 25 March 2009, http://www.lavoisier.com.au/articles/climate-policy/science-and-policy/TGFC-REvans2009-Perth.pdf

Interventions

Kyoto ratification

As discussed earlier in this chapter, opposition to climate change action among conservatives crystallised around the question of whether Australia would ratify the Kyoto Protocol. In September 1998 it was revealed that the Australian government had decided it would not ratify unless the United States did so.[118] Given that the US Senate had in 1997 unanimously passed a resolution rejecting any climate treaty that would impose mandatory emissions reductions and/or harm the American economy, US ratification was looking increasingly unlikely, despite President Bill Clinton's support. The Howard government was in effect committing to indefinite delay. This favourable outcome provided little succour to the likes of Evans, however, who continued to devote his energies to campaigning against ratification.

Just as the Lavoisier Group was forming, divisions within the government on Kyoto ratification were deepening.[119] On one side was the environment minister, Robert Hill, whose negotiation of Australia's lenient reduction targets had been widely praised by his colleagues, but whose commitment to Kyoto made him the subject of much criticism at the Lavoisier Group's inaugural conference.[120] Leading those opposed to Hill was the minister for industry, science and resources, Nick Minchin, who has since argued that fears about global warming are part of an extreme left plot to "de-industrialise the western world."[121] He was a willing participant, then, in what Clive Hamilton described as the Lavoisier Group's "systematic campaign designed to muddy the waters on climate science and to pressure the Federal Government into a *volte-face* on its undertakings at Kyoto."[122]

According to Guy Pearse, Hill was throughout this period "progressively undermined on greenhouse policy by his colleagues, chiefly Howard, Minchin, John Anderson, Alexander Downer and Wilson Tuckey."[123] When Howard reshuffled his ministry following the 2001 election, Hill moved from environment

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[118] Lincoln Wright, 'Greenhouse: Libs' secret backdown,' *Canberra Times*, 26 September 1998.
[119] Lenore Taylor and Mark Skulley, 'Cabinet clash on greenhouse,' *Australian Financial Review*, 24 May 2000.
[120] Rattenbury, Unpublished report on the Lavoisier Group conference.
[121] Nick Minchin, quoted in Ferguson, 'Malcolm and the Malcontents'.
[122] Hamilton, *Running from the Storm*, p. 138.
[123] Pearse, *High & Dry*, p. 129.

to defence. Pearse saw this as a deliberate sidelining of Hill, but Hill told me that he decided to switch portfolio on his own initiative. "I had been the longest serving environment minister, had achieved most of my reform agenda and thought the portfolio would benefit from an infusion of new blood, and ideas," he said.[124]

Hill's replacement was veteran right-wing warrior David Kemp. Kemp was welcomed by the business community as likely to be more sympathetic to their concerns about Kyoto than Hill.[125] He was also, given his involvement with the H.R. Nicholls Society and IPA, an ostensible ally of the Lavoisier Group. Though Kemp had no formal links with the group, he and Evans discussed climate issues privately, wherein Kemp warned Evans against unrealistic demands: "Ray you are a purist, I have to live in the real world."[126] Perhaps inevitably, Kemp proved a disappointment, with Evans later writing that he had "alienated many of his old friends and supporters by adopting the rhetoric and arguments of the green ideologists who staff Environment Australia."[127]

Meanwhile, international developments were favouring the sceptics on Kyoto. Republican George W. Bush won the 2000 US presidential election over the Democratic Party's dedicated climate activist Al Gore. Within months of taking office President Bush announced that the US would not ratify the Kyoto Protocol while much of the developing world remained exempt from its requirements. The Australian government now had a powerful ally making similar arguments about the potential damage Kyoto could do, and on World Environment Day in June 2002, Howard unilaterally announced that Australia would also not ratify. Kemp was reportedly stunned.[128] Hugh Morgan, though, was quick to praise the prime minister in the *Australian*, reminding readers of the "economic dislocation, rising unemployment and political upheaval" Australia would have faced if legally bound to meet its Kyoto commitments.[129]

By late 2006, Howard was confidently quoting the words of Peter Walsh in

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[124] Robert Hill, email to author, 14 July 2016.
[125] Tony Walker, 'Government team reflects PM's social conservatism,' *Australian Financial Review*, 27 November 2001.
[126] David Kemp, quoted in Sid Marris and Roy Eccleston, 'Stoush in the greenhouse,' *Australian*, 8 March 2002.
[127] Evans, 'Russia backs Australia's stand on the Kyoto Protocol'.
[128] Pearse, *High & Dry*, p. 77.
[129] Hugh Morgan, 'Carbon blackmail doesn't lead to greener future,' *Australian*, 10 June 2002.

parliament to mock the climate policies of his Labor opponents.[130] But his confidence was misplaced. As he recounts in his memoir, he was facing a "perfect storm" of events that would dramatically recast the Australian climate debate.[131] In addition to the record-breaking drought conditions across much of eastern Australia, the Victorian bushfire season began early. Al Gore's climate change documentary *An Inconvenient Truth*—described by Evans as "bullshit from beginning to end"[132]—hit theatres and Gore arrived in Australia on a promotional tour, while in the UK the Stern Review on the Economics of Climate Change was released. Global warming was now an issue at the forefront of voters' minds.

When Kevin Rudd took over the leadership of the Labor Party in December 2006 he placed action on climate change at the centre of his agenda, in a calculated attempt to expose Howard as out of touch. Rudd's first official act as prime minister following his 2007 election victory was to ratify the Kyoto Protocol. The Lavoisier Group had not prevented ratification but it had certainly succeeded in delaying it. The irony of the entire campaign was that Australia continued to meet its Kyoto targets throughout, without any demonstrable damage to the economy. The Lavoisier Group's warnings of social and economic catastrophe were proven to be mere hyperbole. Accepting that he had been outmanoeuvred on the issue, Howard dismissed Rudd's ratification of Kyoto as "feel-good politics at its best," but warned that persuading the public to accept an emissions trading scheme would prove much more difficult.[133]

Carbon pricing

In May 2003 Peter Walsh wrote to John Howard on behalf of the Lavoisier Group, reminding him of the wisdom of his Kyoto decision, and warning him of bureaucrats' desires to implement an emissions trading scheme (ETS).[134] In July that year, with some ministers concerned that the government lacked a climate

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[130] John Howard, 'Climate change,' *Commonwealth Parliamentary Debates*, House of Representatives, 2 November 2006, p. 67.
[131] Howard, *Lazarus Rising*, p. 548.
[132] Ray Evans, quoted in Katharine Murphy and Brendan Nicholson, 'Greenhouse sceptics to congregate,' *Age*, 28 February 2007.
[133] Howard, *Lazarus Rising*, p. 555.
[134] Peter Walsh, 'An open letter to the Prime Minister,' 28 May 2003, http://www.lavoisier.com.au/articles/climate-policy/science-and-policy/openletter.pdf

policy of any consequence, a proposal for an ETS reached Cabinet. However, against the advice of senior ministers Peter Costello, David Kemp, Ian Macfarlane, Warren Truss and Brendan Nelson, Howard rejected the proposal.[135] In 2007, increasingly desperate as an election defeat looked ever more certain, Howard changed his mind and backed the idea, but it was too late to save his government. Support for an ETS remained Coalition policy until events took a dramatic turn in 2009.

Malcolm Turnbull, who became leader of the Liberal Party in September 2008, was committed to action on climate change. As environment minister in 2007 he had argued unsuccessfully in Cabinet for Kyoto ratification. Now, as leader, he was prepared to provide support for the Labor Party's Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme (CPRS). Members of the Lavoisier Group were alarmed. In December 2008 Evans wrote to Andrew Robb taking him to task for the "Liberal Party's current state of hopelessness and helplessness" under Turnbull's leadership.[136] Robb was then the shadow minister assisting Turnbull on emissions trading design, but also a climate sceptic.[137] Evans challenged him to take up the fight against emissions trading:

> If you really wanted to change opinion on this issue you'd be getting advice from leading world scientists who could come out here and explain the fraudulent nonsense which the IPCC has been peddling. You'd be getting people from the power industry to explain how decarbonisation will affect electricity supplies and electricity prices. It's marvellous how a bit of determined leadership can generate support.[138]

As we have seen, Evans continued to rally climate sceptics within the Liberal Party at the launches of 'Thank God for Carbon' in early 2009, and the Coalition became increasingly divided over the CPRS as the year progressed. When the legislation was defeated in the Senate in August, the widespread expectation was that Turnbull would negotiate amendments that would allow its passage later in the

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[135] Pearse, *High & Dry*, p. 86.
[136] Ray Evans, 'Letter to Andrew Robb, AO MP,' 3 December 2008, http://www.lavoisier.com.au/articles/climate-policy/science-and-policy/evans2009-1.php
[137] Angus Grigg, 'The player,' *Australian Financial Review Magazine*, October 2006, p. 64.
[138] Evans, 'Letter to Andrew Robb, AO MP'.

year. But events—and his party—were soon beyond his control. In Evans's recollection, the pivotal event came "when Tony Abbott, at Beaufort, in that famous meeting on the 30th of September 2009, said after a lot of sort of pushing, that it [climate science] was absolute crap, then it was away."[139] Abbott had been largely supportive of Turnbull's position, but a conversation with Minchin the day after the Beaufort event left him resolute: the CPRS had to be defeated.[140] Despite the increasing pressure on his leadership, Turnbull refused to back down, going on radio the same day to declare: "I will not lead a party that is not as committed to effective action on climate change as I am."[141]

In November the ABC's *Four Corners* program broadcast 'Malcolm and the Malcontents,' which focused on the Coalition's internal war over climate change, with sceptics such as Minchin, Cory Bernardi, Dennis Jensen and Barnaby Joyce featuring heavily. The program included footage of Bernardi's speech at the Adelaide launch of 'Thank God for Carbon,' and Joyce introducing Bob Carter at a town hall meeting in rural Queensland, revealing the extent to which climate sceptics had infiltrated Coalition ranks. Minchin—described in the program as "the godfather of the Liberals' climate sceptics"—invoked the authority of sceptical scientists such as Carter, Garth Paltridge and Ian Plimer, and encouraged his colleagues to speak out in defiance of their leader.[142] This especially riled Turnbull, who later said that "Minchin effectively declared war on the party in that *Four Corners* interview."[143]

Later in November the CPRS bill was denounced by Minchin in the Senate and, most dramatically, by Andrew Robb in the Coalition party room. Turnbull's leadership was now under siege, and when it was put to a ballot on the first day of December, he lost to Tony Abbott by one vote. Having admitted to Turnbull he had been "a bit of a weathervane" on the CPRS, Abbott was now in lockstep with the

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[139] Evans, interview with author.
[140] Tony Abbott, *Battlelines* (rev. edn), Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2013, p. 184.
[141] Malcolm Turnbull, quoted in Paddy Manning, *Born to Rule: The Unauthorised Biography of Malcolm Turnbull*, Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2015, p. 337.
[142] Ferguson, 'Malcolm and the Malcontents'.
[143] Malcolm Turnbull, quoted in Lenore Taylor and David Uren, *Shitstorm: Inside Labor's Darkest Days*, Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2010, p. 189.

climate sceptics.[144] "By then," he later recalled, "my view was that the ETS could be characterised as a giant tax: creating a huge slush fund, providing massive handouts and spawning a vast bureaucracy."[145] Evans called Abbott's victory "an important event in the Anglospherian struggle between the warmists and the sceptics, and in the long term, it means that any attempt to decarbonise Australia on the grounds that carbon dioxide is a pollutant, is bound to fail."[146]

Hugh Morgan told a meeting of the Lavoisier Group the following year that "in the fortnight before this ballot on December 1, the Coalition parliamentarians experienced a deluge of emails, faxes and letters in an unprecedented and spontaneous wave of rank and file hostility to what was happening in Canberra."[147] Evans also said that it was the work of rank and file Liberal Party members, but there can be little doubt about the Lavoisier Group's involvement in marshalling the campaign. The *Sydney Morning Herald* reported that Australia's climate denial network "was instrumental in nurturing the deluge of climate sceptic emails that helped to convince Liberal MPs to dump Malcolm Turnbull."[148] In naming Evans in its top 50 most influential people in politics in 2012, the *Australian* described his influence as having "reached a spectacular crescendo" during the Liberal leadership crisis.[149] Finally, Andrew Norton gave the Lavoisier Group a backhanded compliment when I asked him about its influence in 2012:

> The grumpy old men of the right actually ran a pretty effective campaign, which exploited existing vulnerabilities. They really did help transform the debate in that critical moment back in 2009, when they really helped stir the Liberal backbench to the point where the leadership effectively changed over the issue. So I think even though they're probably not that intellectually strong, their activism was very, very important in changing the Coalition's

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[144] Tony Abbott, quoted in Philip Chubb, *Power Failure: The Inside Story of Climate Politics Under Rudd and Gillard*, Melbourne: Black Inc, 2014, p. 78.
[145] Abbott, *Battlelines*, p. 184.
[146] Ray Evans, 'Ray Evans reviews the Denialist Victory,' *Jo Nova* (blog), 8 August 2012, http://joannenova.com.au/2012/08/ray-evans-denialist-victory-manne/
[147] Hugh Morgan, 'President's report,' Lavoisier Group, November 2010, http://www.lavoisier.com.au/articles/climate-policy/science-and-policy/morgan2010-presidents-report.php
[148] Cubby and Lawes, 'The benefit of the doubt'.
[149] Anon., 'Top 50/Politics: Ray Evans,' *Australian*, 30 January 2012, http://www.theaustralian.com.au/top50/2012/ray-evans/story-fnbtts0j-1226257342134

stance on this, and that had a huge domino effect.[150]

Today

In late 2008 Evans was boasting of the climate denial movement's gains. "The sceptics are growing in confidence and becoming emboldened," he told the *Canberra Times*. "In terms of morale, the atmosphere in the blogosphere is very cocky."[151] But following the remarkable sequence of events that culminated in Turnbull's downfall as leader of the Liberal Party, it was perhaps inevitable that the Lavoisier Group would enter a period of decline. Peter Walsh had already stood down as president in October 2009, and was replaced by Hugh Morgan. As we saw in chapter 3, ill health forced Evans to reduce his political activities from 2010 onwards. The Lavoisier Group was now essentially operating without its two most energetic and inspirational figures.

Having given up on trying to pass the CPRS in April 2010, Kevin Rudd was ousted from the prime ministership by Julia Gillard in June. A virtual tie in the August election left Gillard leading a minority government, backed by a formal alliance with the Greens. Despite this, Morgan appeared hopeful that Australia would soon be back on the right track when he surveyed the year's events in a report to the Lavoisier Group's annual general meeting in November. "A resolute Commonwealth government could ameliorate this situation greatly," he said, "provided it acted in complete defiance of the Greens and of the chattering class opinion which is still locked into Gaia worship."[152] But in July 2011 Gillard announced, with the support of the Greens, that a carbon tax would be introduced, outraging the opposition and much of the community. The legislation passed both houses of parliament in November. Tony Abbott's subsequent campaign against the carbon tax was ruthless and ultimately successful. The Coalition won a landslide election victory in September 2013 and the carbon tax was repealed the following year.

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[150] Andrew Norton, interview with author, Melbourne, 14 August 2012.
[151] Ray Evans, quoted in David Alexander, 'Who's afraid of a war on carbon?' *Canberra Times*, 13 December 2008.
[152] Morgan, 'President's report'.

But throughout this period of high drama in climate politics, the Lavoisier Group remained virtually silent, lacking the manpower to continue the fight. When Evans died in June 2014, management of the Lavoisier Group's website was transferred to the Bert Kelly Research Centre, but updates have been few and far between. Walsh also passed away in 2015 at the age of 80. In March 2016 John Stone likened the Lavoisier Group to the Bennelong Society in that it had "gone out of existence to all intents and purposes."[153] The climate denial network lives on in Australia through other groups and individuals: the IPA, the Australian Industry Greenhouse Network, the Australian Environment Foundation and various other lobby groups, blogs and websites.

In August 2016, "inspired by the Brexit decision of the British people to withdraw from the increasingly dictatorial grasp of the EU bureaucracy," an international group of climate sceptics formed the "Clexit" campaign.[154] Led by former prime minister and president of the Czech Republic Václav Klaus and eccentric British aristocrat Christopher Monckton, who are both intimately familiar with the Australian climate denial scene, Clexit aimed to prevent ratification of the UN climate treaty agreed to in Paris in December 2015. Lavoisier Group figures among its founding members include Morgan, Stone, David Archibald, Alan Moran, Ian Plimer and David Evans.[155]

Conclusion

Given the centrality of climate change to the political upheaval that Australia has experienced over the past decade, there can be no doubt that the Lavoisier Group's role has been important. But, as this chapter has shown, it has not acted alone. Its members have spread their political campaigning and lobbying among a variety of organisations, sharing the workload while maximising results. They also have not sought to advertise their influence, providing politicians with an alibi when they

[153] John Stone, email to author, 27 March 2016.
[154] Viv Forbes, 'Summary statement on the formation of Clexit,' 1 August 2016, http://clexit.net/2016/08/01/summary-statement/
[155] Clexit, 'Clexit Committee and Founding Members,' http://clexit.net/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/clexit-members.pdf

are accused of being too close to major polluters. Guy Pearse's analysis is worth quoting at length here:

> The influence of the Lavoisier Group and the other think-tanks is informal and behind the scenes. Often ministers adopt the arguments of the IPA, the CIS and the APEC SC in public statements without attribution. They enthusiastically attend the greenhouse denial and delay conferences organised by the IPA, CIS and APEC SC. Support for the Lavoisier Group is generally at arms' length due to their slightly more extreme views on the science. Even so, most politicians and functionaries attending Lavoisier events are drawn from Liberal and National party circles, their attendance is usually kept quiet. … To the think-tanks, it matters little whether they are credited for the arguments as long as their ideas are picked up. As one senior player inside the Lavoisier Group confidently stated to me, the main thing is that there 'is an understanding in cabinet that all the science is crap.'[156]

In 2012 Des Moore told me that he thought the biggest change that had come about in recent years—thanks to the efforts of the Lavoisier Group and others—was that sceptics were no longer demonised and relegated to the fringes, they were now part of the mainstream debate:

> I think the change has been that whereas three or four years ago people who were sceptical about global warming were regarded as being rather eccentric and way out on the right wing of politics … we are now recognised as having a good case. […] I think the sceptics are still in a minority but there's been a big shift of opinion and a preparedness to publish material that is of a sceptical origin.[157]

This shift became even more explicit when Malcolm Turnbull returned to the leadership of the Liberal Party—this time as prime minister—in September 2015. Despite his long-held view that action on climate change was necessary and urgent, he has been unwilling or unable to make changes to the government's climate

[156] Pearse, *High & Dry*, pp. 149–50.
[157] Des Moore, interview with author, Melbourne, 10 August 2012.

policies, which are widely viewed by scientists, environmentalists and economists as inadequate. The grip that climate sceptics now have on his party is too strong.

7

DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS

This chapter will analyse the distinctive characteristics of the four single-issue advocacy groups, as a way of understanding their position in Australian politics over the past three decades. It contains five sections. The first discusses the single-issue advocacy group as an organisational form. The second examines the pivotal partnership that Hugh Morgan and Ray Evans formed at Western Mining Corporation. The third discusses the groups' relations with governments, with particular emphasis on the Howard government. The fourth looks at how the groups used the popular media and other publications to spread their messages. The final section discusses the groups' relationships with conservative political philosophy.

Single-issue advocacy groups

As we have seen, the four groups emerged from a New Right milieu that was reasonably united in its political views. But the single-issue advocacy groups were different from the think tanks, publications and institutions that preceded them. The first and most obvious characteristic that set them apart was their focus on a single policy area. Instead of taking a generalised approach to a broad array of issues, Evans decided that what was needed, firstly in the case of industrial relations, was an organisation solely devoted to an issue that could narrow its focus in order to achieve concrete goals. As Evans told me: "The great advantage of the H.R. Nicholls Society was the very, very narrow focus. We didn't have to worry about

anything else. … So it's a great advantage to be able to focus on an issue which does require strong focus over a period of time."[1]

Within the scholarly literature and the media, the organisations being examined are often referred to as either think tanks or interest groups. While it is true that they contain characteristics of both, it is important to explain why neither categorisation is sufficient. The think tanks discussed in chapters 1 and 2—whether of the traditional, objective kind that emerged in the United States in the first half of the twentieth century, or the stridently ideological kind that followed—bear little resemblance to the organisations created by Evans and his associates. Think tanks are generally equipped with multiple staff who are paid to produce research which, it is hoped, will influence public policy. While single-issue advocacy groups also aim to influence the political process, they have no significant research capacity beyond what their small number of unpaid volunteers are capable of producing. Thus, most of their material tends to be polemical in nature, whether it is produced by members of the groups themselves, or outsiders who are sympathetic to the cause.

Single-issue advocacy groups also cannot be simply categorised as interest groups. John Warhurst defines an interest group as "an association of individuals or organisations which attempts to influence government and public policy without seriously seeking election to Parliament."[2] Also referred to as pressure groups, lobby groups and non-government organisations (NGOs), interest groups differ from think tanks in that they are usually direct representatives of a particular industry, sector or social movement. Examples from the production side of the economy include business groups such as the Business Council of Australia, the Australian Industry Group and the Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry, labour representatives such as the Australian Council of Trade Unions, and those from the agricultural sector such as the National Farmers' Federation. Interest groups also represent professions such as doctors (Australian Medical Association) and lawyers (Law Council of Australia), and various other sectors such as military

[1] Ray Evans, interview with author, Melbourne, 5 June 2012.
[2] John Warhurst, 'Interest Groups and Political Lobbying,' in Dennis Woodward, Andrew Parkin and John Summers (eds), *Government, Politics, Power and Policy in Australia* (9th edn), Sydney: Pearson Australia, 2010, p. 335.

veterans (Returned and Services League), pensioners and welfare recipients (Australian Council of Social Service), and consumers (Australian Consumers' Association, now known as Choice).

Despite denominational differences, religious groups pool their resources into organisations such as the National Council of Churches and the Australian Federation of Islamic Councils. Similarly, Australia's enormous ethnic diversity is represented by myriad ethnic community groups, which then combine their resources into state-based community councils and the national umbrella group, the Federation of Ethnic Communities' Councils of Australia. The large number of Indigenous interest groups have in the past decade combined to form the National Congress of Australia's First Peoples. Other interest groups have emerged out of the various social movements that grew to prominence in the second half of the twentieth century. Examples include environmental groups (Australian Conservation Foundation, Friends of the Earth, Greenpeace), feminist groups (National Council of Women, Women's Electoral Lobby), homosexual rights groups (Gay and Lesbian Rights Lobby), and animal protection groups (Animals Australia, Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals).

All of these groups can be seen to represent the interests of a particular industry, sector, community or social movement, whereas the defining attribute of all four single-issue groups is the way in which they bring a purely ideological approach to distinct policy areas. Though they may draw some support from the wider community (particularly from the business community, in the cases of the H.R. Nicholls Society and Lavoisier Group), they cannot be said to represent anyone but the ideologues that make up their small memberships. Single-issue groups with significant political impact have been rare in Australia, which is what makes the four that are the subject of this thesis so distinctive. One exception is the anti-abortion group Right to Life Australia, which practices what it calls "punishment politics," in which pro-choice politicians in marginal seats are targeted with negative campaigns. Josh Gordon of the *Age* believes this strategy "partly explains why Australian politicians seem so keen to pander to fringe groups on the hard right."[3] However, the four advocacy groups examined here have shown

[3] Josh Gordon, 'Coalition flirtation with right could go wrong,' *Age*, 19 July 2014.

little interest in electoral politics.

It should be noted that, unlike in Australia, single-issue advocacy groups in the US have harnessed their political success and grown into much larger movements. The National Rifle Association of America (NRA), which was founded in 1871, operated for a century as a recreational association for hunters and sporting shooters. But in the 1970s the NRA dramatically shifted its focus towards fighting gun control legislation, and is now seen as "the most powerful single-issue lobbying group in Washington."[4] Another example is Americans for Tax Reform, an anti-tax organisation founded by Grover Norquist in 1985. Its flagship project is the Taxpayer Protection Pledge, "a written promise by legislators and candidates for office that commits them to oppose any effort to increase income taxes on individuals and businesses."[5] By 2011 an overwhelming majority of Republican members of Congress had signed the pledge, leading the *New York Times* to finger it as "the single biggest reason the federal government is now on the edge of default."[6] The successes of the NRA and Americans for Tax Reform in spite of considerable public opposition confirms the view of John Warhurst, that "pressure-group politics reward intensity and energy rather than majority opinion."[7]

Returning to the four Australian single-issue advocacy groups, a striking element of the groups was their gender imbalance. Though this may not seem particularly surprising, an analysis of the material on their websites confirms the remarkable extent to which the organisations were completely dominated by men. Of 187 speakers at H.R. Nicholls Society conferences between 1986 and 2015, thirteen were women (7 per cent). The Samuel Griffith Society had a similar imbalance, with fifteen women out of 202 speakers between 1992 and 2016 (7 per cent). The Bennelong Society performed the best of the four, with eighteen women out of 85 contributors between 2000 and 2011 (21 per cent). The Lavoisier Group returned to par, with six women out of 86 contributors between 2000 and 2015 (7 per cent).

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[4] Scott Melzer, *Gun Crusaders: The NRA's Culture War*, New York: New York University Press, 2009, p. 16.
[5] Americans for Tax Reform, 'About,' http://www.atr.org/about
[6] Anon., 'Signing away the right to govern,' *New York Times*, 19 July 2011.
[7] John Warhurst, 'Interest Groups and Political Lobbying,' p. 349.

When Ray Evans was asked about the lack of women among the "pin-striped suits and greying heads" at the launch of *Arbitration in Contempt* in 1986, his glib explanation was that "we did not think that people could afford to pay $200 so we did not invite wives."[8] Though all four organisations were guilty of sidelining the views of women, the Lavoisier Group seemed to attract the most comment on the issue. Paul Pollard of the left-wing think tank the Australia Institute observed its conference in September 2001 and concluded:

> The typical Lavoisier Group supporter is over 60 and male, lives in Melbourne, was a scientist or engineer who worked for a large mining company, and has conservative views. The ABC is 'in the enemy camp', announcements that a politically incorrect view is about to be put are greeted with guffaws, and to a man the human race is 'man'.[9]

Melissa Fyfe of the *Age* attended a Lavoisier Group book launch in 2004 and found that among an audience of fifty people there was *one* woman.[10] These observations have been shown to be more than just anecdotal. Scholars in the US studied ten years' worth of public opinion data and confirmed that "conservative white males are more likely than are other adults to espouse climate change denial."[11]

The question of racism is a more difficult one to make definitive judgements about. With his 1984 AMIC address, Hugh Morgan revived (if it was ever dead) a long tradition of denigration of Indigenous people and culture within elite Australian society. With the support of Evans, he continued his race-based fear campaign during the Mabo debate in the early 1990s. But as we will see below, Morgan was confronted with some serious business difficulties around this time, and was forced to tone down his public remarks. Members of the Samuel Griffith Society and Bennelong Society were only too happy to take up the campaign of denigration of Aboriginal culture through the 1990s and 2000s.

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[8] Ray Evans, quoted in Matthew Moore, 'Not quite top set at Nicholls gathering,' *Sydney Morning Herald*, 1 October 1986.
[9] Paul Pollard, quoted in Clive Hamilton, *Scorcher: The Dirty Politics of Climate Change*, Melbourne: Black Inc, 2007, p. 143.
[10] Melissa Fyfe, 'Global warming: the sceptics,' *Age*, 27 November 2004.
[11] Aaron M. McCright and Riley E. Dunlap, 'Cool Dudes: The Denial of Climate Change Among Conservative White Males in the United States,' *Global Environmental Change*, vol. 21, no. 4 (October 2011), pp. 1171.

As the public face of the Samuel Griffith Society, John Stone's views on Indigenous issues always drew plenty of attention. Stone had form on race, having controversially called for a reduction in the level of Asian immigration in 1988, a position that saw Gerard Henderson resign from the H.R. Nicholls Society.[12] Following the September 11 terror attacks in 2001, Muslims became the central focus of Stone's racial fears. It is in this context that we must consider his views on Indigenous people. For while he was usually careful to focus on the legal implications of the Mabo judgment, his negative opinion of Aboriginal culture was plain to see. Later, his language became less guarded and more contemptuous. "The less said about the violence-racked, female-oppressive, sexually predatory cultures of the Australian Aboriginal the better," he wrote in 2010.[13]

This poisonous view of Indigenous culture was de rigueur at the Bennelong Society. But not only did Bennelong members deny being racist, they viewed racism as virtually non-existent in Australia. At the Bennelong Society's formative workshop in December 2000, just one participant accepted the view that past government policies were "postulated on the basis of the inferiority of indigenous people."[14] Meanwhile, Peter Howson described Aboriginal life prior to European contact in the terms of Thomas Hobbes's *Leviathan*—"solitary, poore, nasty, brutish, and short"[15]—and Gary Johns condemned Indigenous culture as "best relegated to museums and occasional ceremonies."[16] As Stephen Gray wrote in a review of Johns's book *Aboriginal Self-Determination*, this attitude "runs in a direct line from 19th-century views of the 'aimless, root-eating, alligator-egg-sucking existence' of traditional Aborigines doomed to die out."[17] If these attitudes do not constitute racism, it is difficult to know what does.

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[12] Andrew Clark, 'In their own image,' *Australian Financial Review Magazine*, March 2001, p. 39.
[13] John Stone, 'Another divisive referendum out of tune with national thinking,' *Australian*, 22 November 2010.
[14] Geoffrey Partington, 'The Origins of the Bennelong Society,' Bennelong Society, May 2001, p. 6.
[15] Peter Howson, quoted in Stuart Rintoul, 'Beyond Sorry,' in Nick Cater (ed.), *The Howard Factor: A Decade that Changed the Nation*, Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2006, p. 125.
[16] Gary Johns, *Aboriginal Self-Determination: The Whiteman's Dream*, Ballan: Connor Court, 2011, p. 23.
[17] Stephen Gray, 'A culture condemned,' *Weekend Australian*, 30 April 2011.

The pivotal partnership

It is unlikely that any of the four single-issue advocacy groups would have existed without the extraordinary partnership of Hugh Morgan and Ray Evans. As we saw in chapter 3, Evans wrote to Arvi Parbo in 1981 requesting a job at Western Mining. The core of his pitch was that he could be an effective culture warrior for the company. "The culture wars I now believe to be embedded deep in Western Civilisation," wrote Evans. "The culture wars are fought out in every institution. We see them in the churches, within political parties, in the media, in the universities and in corporations."[18] Parbo passed the letter onto Morgan, who met with Evans and "was impressed with his literary skills, unswerving political instincts and historical knowledge."[19] Morgan offered Evans a job, beginning what Evans described as a "20-year seminar" at WMC.[20]

Evans brought to WMC a remarkably distinctive approach to historical, cultural and political debates. He was a devotee of countless unfashionable causes (for example, he preferred the imperial to the metric system, and maintained a belief that New Zealand might still become the seventh state of the Australian Commonwealth), and to most the odds stacked against him usually seemed insurmountable. But when his advocacy did achieve results, he was left conflicted. "Because he was such a tireless advocate for unfashionable causes some of them began to generate support, perhaps even become popular," said Peter Costello. "I suspect that secretly he did not approve of his success. 'Worse is better,' he was fond of saying."[21] This observation illustrates Evans's view that the culture wars are eternal, and one should never accept compromises or partial victories. His friend Patrick Morgan reflected on this aspect of his personality after his death: "Many people thought him an extremist, but in fact he had the intellectual capacity to take his views to their logical conclusion. In this sense he was a purist, and an

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[18] Ray Evans, quoted in Hugh Morgan, 'Ray's Career as an Advocate,' Eulogy at the funeral of Ray Evans, Melbourne, 27 June 2014, http://hrnicholls.com.au/rays-career-as-an-advocate-2/

[19] Hugh Morgan, 'Remarks at the dinner marking Ray Evans's retirement from the H.R. Nicholls Society,' Melbourne, 7 October 2010, http://archive.hrnicholls.com.au/copeman/copeman2010/morgan-speech.php

[20] Ray Evans, quoted in Michael Bachelard, 'Exit, stage Right,' *Weekend Australian*, 10 August 2002.

[21] Peter Costello, quoted in Bob Day, 'Ray's Career as an Advocate,' Eulogy at the funeral of Ray Evans, Melbourne, 27 June 2014, http://hrnicholls.com.au/rays-career-as-an-advocate/

idealist. This made him on any particular issue basically unsatisfiable."[22]

Ray Evans and Hugh Morgan were keen students of the political and cultural successes of the left, and tried to adapt left-wing methods to their own ends. "If you think you have been outmarshalled," said Morgan, "the first thing is to go and study the opponent who has been so successful."[23] With Parbo's backing, they transformed the culture of WMC, as Tim Duncan captured in his 1985 profile of the company and its key personnel:

> Hugh Morgan's industry colleagues say that there is no corporate figure like him. But they also say that no other executive director has a chairman such as Sir Arvi Parbo and, in any case, there is nothing quite like their Western Mining Corporation. One could be forgiven for wondering whether Western Mining is a mining company, a speech factory, a first-class public entertainment service – or, simply, a political party that got lost in the desert, began to dig for gold to pass the time and found uranium and God in that order.[24]

Unusually for a business leader, speech-making became a regular part of Morgan's role throughout the 1980s and early 1990s. And these were no ordinary speeches. They were filled with references to Evans's intellectual obsessions: the Old Testament, William Shakespeare, Edmund Burke, Samuel Johnson, and much more besides. According to Duncan, much of this content was new to Morgan, "thus facilitating what Morgan himself accepts has been a rapid but essential humanities education."[25] His critics were sceptical, however, and the limits of this shotgun education were sometimes exposed. Gideon Haigh's 1993 profile of Morgan related an anecdote from an anonymous "Melbourne conservative writer" in which Morgan made frequent references to German philosophy. "Hugh was talking about Nietzsche, but he kept pronouncing it as Nitz-ski," the source, now

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[22] Patrick Morgan, 'The Life and Career of Ray Evans,' *Quadrant*, September 2014, p. 79.
[23] Hugh Morgan, quoted in Tim Duncan, 'Western Mining's messiahs of the New Right,' *Bulletin*, 2 July 1985, p. 69.
[24] Duncan, 'Western Mining's messiahs of the New Right,' p. 67.
[25] Duncan, 'Western Mining's messiahs of the New Right,' p. 68.

revealed to be Robert Manne, told Haigh.[26] Former NSW Supreme Court judge Hal Wootten was quoted in the same article describing Morgan's learnedness as a "pseudo-intellectual pose."[27]

But the most distinctive characteristic of Morgan's speeches was their deliberate courting of controversy. Morgan embraced this aspect of his public role, seeing himself as a kind of free speech martyr. "If I have to be a sacrificial lamb in the interests of debate, I don't care," he told the *Sydney Morning Herald*.[28] Duncan described Morgan and Evans's work as "a public affairs icebreaker for industry in general and the mining industry in particular."[29] But within WMC, there was concern about the reputational damage being done to the company. Morgan recalled that "staff did express concern and on occasion made deputation to Ray expressing great worry for the company and would he please mend his ways." But Evans knew he had a powerful protector in Morgan. "Ray suggested they come and see me if they had a problem. I never heard directly from them but the corridors spoke loudly of apprehension."[30]

In turn, Morgan had his own powerful protector in Parbo, whose friendship and loyalty he would be forced to call on when he became embroiled in two corporate scandals at the height of his participation in the Mabo debate. In July 1993 WMC was found by the NSW Supreme Court to have trespassed on land rich in copper and gold deposits, the exploration rights for which were held by the much smaller company Savage Resources. WMC was forced to relinquish its claim on the deposits and pay Savage's legal costs. An internal review later held Morgan largely responsible, excluding him from the company's executive share plan for two years and ordering him to "minimise his involvement in outside activities."[31] Worse was to come. In January 1994 a Canadian court rejected WMC's appeal against an earlier judgment that it had engaged in a civil conspiracy against Canadian mining company Seabright Resources. WMC had taken Seabright over in

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[26] Robert Manne, quoted in Gideon Haigh, 'Prophet of gloom,' *Weekend Australian*, 31 July 1993. Manne has confirmed to me that he was Haigh's source.
[27] Hal Wootten, quoted in Haigh, 'Prophet of gloom'.
[28] Hugh Morgan, quoted in Paul Sheehan, 'The Right strikes back,' *Sydney Morning Herald*, 2 March 1985.
[29] Duncan, 'Western Mining's messiahs of the New Right,' p. 70.
[30] Morgan, 'Ray's Career as an Advocate'.
[31] Bruce Hextall, 'Morgan takes rap for Ernest Henry debacle,' *Sydney Morning Herald*, 1 September 1993.

1988 but its assets turned out to be virtually worthless. Instead of accepting the loss and moving on, Morgan initiated court proceedings, arguing that WMC had been misled by Seabright. The court savaged WMC's abuse of process and in a blistering editorial the *Financial Review* called on Morgan to resign.[32]

But Morgan managed to survive what was undoubtedly the nadir of his career. Most commentators attributed his good fortune to the influence of Parbo. Born in Estonia in 1926, Parbo arrived in Australia in 1949 after spending time in refugee camps during the Second World War. Bill Morgan—Hugh's father—gave a penniless Parbo a job at WMC in 1956, "a break for which the hard-working young Arvi would remain eternally grateful."[33] When Hugh Morgan joined WMC in 1976 Parbo took the young man under his wing. Given this long and close relationship, it is easy to see why Parbo may have been reluctant to dismiss Morgan, despite the internal and external pressure to do so. "Parbo is said to even remain supportive," it was reported in early 1994, "of Morgan's right to public commentary on issues such as Aboriginal land rights and the environment even when other directors have voiced their concerns."[34]

Parbo's retirement from the WMC chairmanship in 1999 meant that Morgan and Evans were no longer protected. Shortly after Robert Manne had described him as "the *éminence noire* of the ideological right in Australia,"[35] Evans left the company. "What have I done since (joining)? I've been a soldier in the culture wars," he said in his August 2001 farewell remarks.[36] Then, after years of battling internal opponents, Morgan announced his retirement in March 2002. The twin retirements signalled the end of a remarkable two decades for the company. Morgan returned to the political fray when he was elected president of the Business Council of Australia in 2003. In seeking the role Morgan had tried to reassure business leaders that he would refrain from inciting controversy, but his uncompromising maiden speech led some to conclude that Evans was still writing

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[32] Anon., 'Morgan must go from WMC,' *Australian Financial Review*, 21 January 1994.
[33] John Garnaut and Jane Counsel, 'Different shades of Hugh,' *Sydney Morning Herald*, 17 August 2002.
[34] Elizabeth Knight, 'Morgan: why I shouldn't be sacked,' *Sydney Morning Herald*, 5 February 1994.
[35] Robert Manne, 'In Denial: The Stolen Generations and the Right,' *Quarterly Essay*, no. 1 (2001), p. 52.
[36] Ray Evans, quoted in Morgan, 'Ray's Career as an Advocate'.

his scripts. Evans was asked whether this was the case, and his reply—"I shouldn't comment on that, I don't think"—was as good an admission as any.[37] Though no longer formal business associates, their close relationship continued until Evans's death in June 2014.

The extent of Evans's influence on the Australian right was illustrated by the outpouring of tributes from his friends and allies following his death. John Stone wrote that he was "much more than a public intellectual. He was first and foremost a man – possessed of all those manly virtues of which one of his heroes, Margaret Thatcher, spoke."[38] Andrew Bolt admired Evans "for his wisdom, sound instincts, courage, indomitable cheerfulness and deep cultural and historical knowledge."[39] Roger Franklin, online editor of *Quadrant*, described him as "a gentlemen of the old school, someone who stood by his principles without stooping to personal abuse and vilification, as do so many of his enemies and critics on the left."[40] The IPA's James Paterson wrote that "Australia has lost one of its greatest champions for freedom,"[41] and his boss, John Roskam, lauded Evans as more politically influential than the overwhelming majority of state and federal MPs. "In some way or another," he wrote, "Evans was involved in, and helped shape, the course of every major policy debate in Australia of the last 30 years."[42] Gerard Henderson agreed, describing him as "one of the most influential Australians of his time" and "an example of the fact that you do not have to be a big name to have a big influence."[43]

Evans's passing was noted in the Australian parliament by Victorian Liberal Senator Scott Ryan, who spoke of the inspiration he gave to others to fight for their beliefs. "His passion, intellect and organisational capacity," said Ryan, "would

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[37] Ray Evans, quoted in Richard Gluyas, Michael Bachelard and Sid Marris, 'BCA goes into battle with a great Hugh and cry,' *Australian*, 9 December 2003.
[38] John Stone, 'A tribute to Ray Evans,' H.R. Nicholls Society, 18 June 2014, http://hrnicholls.com.au/a-tribute-to-ray-evans/
[39] Andrew Bolt, 'Ray Evans, pilgrim,' *Herald Sun*, 18 June 2014, http://www.heraldsun.com.au/blogs/andrew-bolt/ray-evans-pilgrim/news-story/3e376c4461e2058966586c82b99caef3
[40] Roger Franklin, 'Vale Ray Evans, gentleman and sceptic,' *Quadrant*, 18 June 2014, https://quadrant.org.au/opinion/qed/2014/06/vale-ray-evans-gentleman-sceptic/
[41] James Paterson, 'Vale Ray Evans,' Institute of Public Affairs, 19 June 2014, http://hey.ipa.org.au/2014/06/vale-ray-evans/
[42] John Roskam, 'A quiet shaper of the right's ideas,' *Australian Financial Review*, 20 June 2014.
[43] Gerard Henderson, 'Ray Evans – R.I.P.' *Media Watch Dog*, 20 June 2014, http://thesydneyinstitute.com.au/blog/2014/06/20/issue-230/

ensure he was the driving force behind a range of groups, all comprised of volunteers who came together for no reason other than belief in a cause."[44] Bob Day and Hugh Morgan gave heartfelt eulogies at his funeral, reflecting on Evans's political influence as well as their close friendships with him. "Wearing his trademark HRN tie, Ray was an enormous presence at literally hundreds of important and what seemed at the time not so important events which have helped shape our country into the nation it is today," said Day. "He was my teacher, my mentor, my friend and my hero."[45] Morgan celebrated "a friendship and professional association of which I could not have imagined would be of such impact on my life. […] Ray's influence upon events particularly in the outcome of the culture wars will continue to have a lasting impact upon Australian society. His career as an advocate is without peer in our generation."[46]

Government relations

John Warhurst has distinguished between two types of political lobbying. *Political/outside work* "involves putting pressure on governments through influencing and mobilising public opinion," often via the mass media. *Persuasive/inside work* "involves putting arguments to politicians and public servants," often via formal committee hearing and public submissions.[47] The four-single issue advocacy groups used both, but the latter was especially important. The organisations were made up of business and political elites, and this background was reflected in their ideological preoccupations, notwithstanding David Kemp's frankly bizarre claim that through the H.R. Nicholls Society "the silent majority of Australians have heard their authentic interests being promoted and some of their deepest beliefs expressed."[48] Naturally, their lobbying efforts

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[44] Scott Ryan, 'Mr Ray Evans,' *Commonwealth Parliamentary Debates*, Senate, 23 June 2014, p. 3660.
[45] Day, 'Ray's Career as an Advocate'.
[46] Morgan, 'Ray's Career as an Advocate'.
[47] John Warhurst, 'Interest Groups and Political Lobbying,' pp. 341–42.
[48] David Kemp, 'Occasional Address,' in *Tenth Anniversary Conference*, Proceedings of the Seventeenth Conference of the H.R. Nicholls Society, Melbourne, May 1996, http://archive.hrnicholls.com.au/archives/vol17/vol17-8.php

were concentrated on governing elites.

The New Right emerged in Australia in part as a response to the perceived failings of the Fraser government. Following Malcolm Fraser's defeat in the 1983 federal election, New Right activists set about remaking the Liberal Party in their own dry image. As Paul Kelly noted, this factional and ideological turmoil damaged the party in the short-term, but helped to provide direction for the next Coalition government:

> Many of the New Right figureheads were or became Liberals—Hugh Morgan, Peter Costello, Charles Copeman, Ian McLachlan. But the New Right was never hostage to the tactical requirements of the Liberal Party. Herein lies the key to the ambivalent impact which the New Right had on Australian politics during the mid-1980s. Its influence damaged the Opposition in electoral terms, but the New Right's pyrotechnics were successful in moving the debate in favour of labour market deregulation. Its success was reflected in the fact that in 1990 there was no New Right; the 1985 extremists had become the 1990 Liberal Party mainstreamers.[49]

The H.R. Nicholls Society and other institutions of the New Right gained considerable traction and attention throughout the 1980s, but their hostility towards the governing Labor Party from 1983 to 1996 meant that they had little influence on government policy. This changed with the election of the Howard government in 1996, after which Morgan, Evans and their associates began to have real political impact.

Hugh Morgan has enjoyed a long and close relationship with the Liberal Party as a whole, and with John Howard on a personal level. Since the late 1980s he has been a leading fundraiser for the party through the Cormack Foundation. As CEO of Western Mining he approved $650,000 in donations to the Liberal Party and $85,000 to the National Party during Howard's prime ministership, in addition to his own personal contributions of more than $50,000.[50] Morgan believed that a speech he gave in January 1984, strongly critical of Bob Hawke, led to his position

[49] Paul Kelly, *The End of Certainty: The Story of the 1980s*, Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1992, p. 253.
[50] Australian Electoral Commission, 'Annual Returns Locator Service,' http://periodicdisclosures.aec.gov.au/

on the board of the Reserve Bank not being renewed later that year.[51] But when ACTU secretary Bill Kelty resigned his seat after Howard's victory, Morgan was appointed again. He remained on the Reserve Bank board throughout most of the Howard years, finally vacating his seat in July 2007. During this period Morgan was said to be a "frequent guest" of Howard, to whom he enjoyed "unparalleled access."[52]

In 2002 Morgan was awarded the Companion of the Order of Australia (AC) "for service to business and trade development, to the mining industry in Australia and internationally, particularly through leadership in the formation and evolution of sustainable development policy, and to the community through cultural and educational research activities." Morgan was also the recipient of the Centenary Medal, which was established by Howard in 2001 as part of the centenary of Federation celebrations. Ray Evans was also a recipient, as were a number of their advocacy group associates, including Peter Howson, Gary Johns, Ron Brunton, David Trebeck, Greg Craven, Peter Walsh, Arvi Parbo and Ian Plimer.[53]

An important element of Howard's political success was his rhetorical commitment to "getting the balance right," on both a macro and micro level. He had come to power promising to govern "for all of us," in contrast with Labor, which he derided as concentrating on sectional interests at the expense of the mainstream.[54] "Governments exist to represent the values and aspirations of the mainstream of the Australian community," he told an audience of Liberal students shortly after becoming prime minister.[55] In a 2006 speech he argued that the secret to Australia's success was "our sense of balance."[56] On policy issues this meant listening to all interested parties, then navigating a way through that allowed him to

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[51] Morgan, 'Remarks at the dinner marking Ray Evans's retirement'.
[52] Garnaut and Counsel, 'Different shades of Hugh'; Guy Pearse, *High & Dry: John Howard, Climate Change and the Selling of Australia's Future*, Melbourne: Viking, 2007, p. 268.
[53] Australian Honours Database, https://www.itsanhonour.gov.au/honours/honour_roll/search.cfm?show=simple. The remarkable number of climate deniers awarded honours by the Howard government was first noted in Pearse, *High & Dry*, p. 227.
[54] Judith Brett, *Australian Liberals and the Moral Middle Class: From Alfred Deakin to John Howard*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003, p. 187.
[55] John Howard, 'Address to the Australian Liberal Students Federation,' Sydney, 8 July 1996, http://pmtranscripts.pmc.gov.au/release/transcript-10043
[56] John Howard, 'A Sense of Balance: The Australian Achievement in 2006,' Address to the National Press Club, Canberra, 25 January 2006, http://pmtranscripts.pmc.gov.au/release/transcript-22110

appear as if he was governing from the centre. Because the four single-issue advocacy groups were commonly perceived to be outside the political mainstream, Howard was careful to avoid the perception that they wielded significant influence, despite his obvious sympathies with many of their objectives. Thus, he sometimes failed to deliver the sorts of outcomes that they could wholeheartedly support.[57]

The H.R. Nicholls Society's response to the Howard government's first attempt at industrial relations reform set the tone for the relationship for the next decade. The government sold its *Workplace Relations Act* as a reasonable compromise between employer flexibility and employee protections, that brought "more balance to our industrial relations system."[58] But the hardliners of the H.R. Nicholls Society were not interested in compromise. They felt betrayed because the legislation did not go far enough, and attacked the government ferociously. It is difficult to imagine Howard being too worried about this criticism. With attacks from the left (trade unions and the ALP) a given, additional attacks from the right conveniently matched his vision of governing from the centre.

Howard came dangerously close to undoing this self-image in 1998, when the government—led by industrial relations minister Peter Reith—sided with radical anti-union forces in the waterfront dispute. The battle divided Australia, but most seemed relieved when the dispute was settled, and the Howard government managed to avoid having conspiracy charges brought against it. John Stone thought the dispute "was as significant as Thatcher's 1984 confrontation with Britain's coal miners. Here, as in Britain, the union's defeat has resulted in a huge increase in productivity."[59]

Howard's strategy of balance finally fell apart with Work Choices, when he was seen as moving too far to the radical right, though he disputed this characterisation.[60] "Howard has made much of the need for balance, of finding and holding the moderate, consensual middle," wrote Judith Brett. "But with

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[57] See Andrew Thackrah, *'The World is Ruled by Little Else': Australian Neo-Liberal Think Tanks During the Howard Years*, PhD Thesis, University of Western Australia, 2012, pp. 171–91.
[58] John Howard, *Lazarus Rising: A Personal and Political Autobiography*, Sydney: HarperCollins, 2010, p. 565.
[59] John Stone, 'Our Greatest Prime Minister?' in Keith Windschuttle, David Martin Jones and Ray Evans (eds), *The Howard Era*, Sydney: Quadrant Books, 2009, p. 26.
[60] Brad Norington, 'Unfinished Business,' in Cater, *The Howard Factor*, p. 97.

WorkChoices he handed the middle ground to Labor."[61] This time, friendly fire from the H.R. Nicholls Society provided no succour. Ray Evans did not accept the narrative that the radicalism of its industrial relations reform cost the Coalition the 2007 election, but he nevertheless concluded in 2010 that the Liberal Party had internalised that narrative, and was "now imprisoned by John Howard's cancerous legacy of WorkChoices."[62]

Of the four advocacy groups, the Samuel Griffith Society probably had most cause for disappointment with the Howard government, despite Howard's efforts to derail the republic and roll back native title legislation. Howard's centralisation of power was the Society's number one complaint, and Howard did very little to placate his critics on this front. There was also the issue of Howard's long and complicated relationship with John Stone. The two first worked together when Howard was Malcolm Fraser's treasurer and Stone was secretary to the Treasury. Recalling this period, Howard described Stone as "the brightest public servant with whom I ever dealt,"[63] but the pair fell out over the 1982 budget.[64] Stone later became involved in the Joh for Canberra campaign, which many blamed for Howard's election defeat in 1987. Nevertheless, he subsequently served as Howard's shadow minister for finance, at least until his rather ironic sacking in September 1988. Stone backed Howard's controversial remarks on the need to slow Asian immigration, but then went further just as Howard was trying to calm things down. "Howard," wrote Paul Kelly, "having tolerated Stone's transgressions on indirect taxation and immigration for 14 months, felt compelled to act."[65] Stone was philosophical: "I bore Howard himself no ill will for this. As I said in a press conference the next day, he had probably done me a favour."[66]

Given all this history, it is fair to say that when Stone later became a regular critic of Howard's centralisation of power and lack of regard for the Constitution, he was not a disinterested observer. However, Stone has always maintained that he

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[61] Judith Brett, 'Exit Right: The Unravelling of John Howard,' *Quarterly Essay*, no. 28 (2007), p. 76.
[62] Ray Evans, 'The Rulers and Guardians of Industrial Relations,' *Quadrant*, September 2010, p. 29.
[63] Howard, *Lazarus Rising*, p. 102.
[64] Wayne Errington and Peter van Onselen, *John Winston Howard: The Biography*, Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2007, p. 94.
[65] Kelly, *The End of Certainty*, p. 428.
[66] Stone, 'Our Greatest Prime Minister?' p. 11.

holds no grudge against Howard. When Howard gave a speech defending his government's record on federalism in 2005, Stone responded with 'Howard's great betrayal,' a blistering critique published in the *Australian*. But even in this moment of apparent rage he went out of his way to declare his general approval of the prime minister. "I am no zealous Howard hater," he wrote. "Indeed, I have been among his most loyal supporters."[67] In his final assessment of Howard's prime ministership, Stone counted his attitude towards the federal foundations of the Constitution as one of his most significant failings, but still concluded that "despite the many valid criticisms that can be made of him, nevertheless John Howard has a strong claim to having been Australia's greatest prime minister."[68]

On Indigenous issues, the views of the Howard government and the Bennelong Society were very closely aligned. Not a word of the following excerpt from Howard's autobiography would be out of place in Bennelong Society literature:

> I did not have a politically correct approach to Aboriginal issues. I did not believe in separate development for the Indigenous people of Australia. It remains my opinion that the best way of helping Indigenous Australians is to include them within the mainstream of the Australian community and endeavour, as far as possible, to ensure that they share the bounty of our prosperous nation.[69]

Howard's emphasis on balance and serving the mainstream was again important when it came to Aboriginal affairs, a point on which both his critics and supporters agreed. "In grappling with the past, present and future," wrote Indigenous leader Mick Dodson in 2004, "Howard has often used Geoffrey Blainey's image of a 'pendulum' that has swung out of balance and now favours the interests of Indigenous Australians and other minority groups over the core interests and values of the mainstream."[70]

The Bennelong Society emerged out of an organised campaign to deny the

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[67] John Stone, 'Howard's great betrayal,' *Australian*, 18 April 2005.
[68] Stone, 'Our Greatest Prime Minister?' p. 7.
[69] Howard, *Lazarus Rising*, p. 271.
[70] Mick Dodson, 'Indigenous Australians,' in Robert Manne (ed.), *The Howard Years*, Melbourne: Black Inc, 2004, p. 120.

stolen generations, an endeavour which received significant support from Howard and his first Indigenous affairs minister, John Herron. Howard was adamantly opposed to a depiction of Australian history as "little more than a disgraceful record of imperialism, exploitation and racism."[71] Infamously, he refused to offer a government apology to the stolen generations, and his belligerence on this issue dogged his entire prime ministership, but he could always rely on the Bennelong Society's full support.

The close alignment of approaches was noted by Gary Johns in his final assessment of the Howard government's record on Indigenous affairs. Johns recalled that the Bennelong Society's second conference in August 2002, when Herron was its president, was titled 'Celebrating Integration.' Shortly afterwards, Herron resigned from the Senate, and in his final parliamentary address spoke proudly of the changes he had helped to bring about. "Separatism," he said, "as promoted by those who wish to live off the cause rather than for it, has no place in a modern, democratic, vibrant multicultural Australia … We are now celebrating integration."[72] Or, in the words of Mick Dodson, "classic assimilation."[73]

In the Howard government the Lavoisier Group could hardly have found a more willing partner in the battle against action on climate change. Upon being elected, Howard immediately changed Australia's policy direction, weakening and undermining the Kyoto Protocol at every stage, before eventually refusing to ratify the agreement. "In acting with the Bush administration to block progress toward a global agreement, the stance of the Howard government is criminally irresponsible," wrote scientist and conservationist Ian Lowe in 2004.[74] As we saw in chapter 6, Guy Pearse has documented in painstaking detail the extent to which the government worked hand in hand with climate deniers in industry, think tanks and the bureaucracy to delay or prevent climate change mitigation policies.

And yet, ever the purist, Ray Evans was not satisfied. He viewed the environmentalist movement as an existential threat to the West and would not countenance even a slightly more nuanced view. "Instead of maintaining a constant

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[71] Howard, *Lazarus Rising*, p. 277.
[72] John Herron, quoted in Gary Johns, 'Steering Aboriginal Policy onto a Better Path,' in Windschuttle, Jones and Evans, *The Howard Era*, p. 375.
[73] Dodson, 'Indigenous Australians,' p. 121.
[74] Ian Lowe, 'The Environment,' in Manne, *The Howard Years*, p. 263.

opposition to the environmentalists, within and without the Liberal Party," he wrote, "Howard sought to appease them when he thought it was necessary."[75] Against all evidence, Evans argued in 2009 that Howard gave in not to climate deniers such as himself, but to climate activists on the left, and diminished his legacy in the process:

> The great gains made by the Greens and their supporters throughout the country between 1996 and 2007, to the point where Australia is now on the brink of enacting legislation, based on "perverted science", which will seriously impoverish the nation, is the great stain on John Howard's record. If the legislation is passed and Australia consequently enters into a period of sustained economic decline, he will be seen as the political leader who could have turned the tide, but completely failed to do so.[76]

It is important to note that this was written when Malcolm Turnbull was leader of the Liberal Party in opposition, a time of despair for Evans. He was later pleased that the party turned back towards climate denial under Tony Abbott, but remained vigilant to his last breath, always alert to the environmentalist threat.

Sympathetic publications

The support of various media outlets was an important aspect of the successes of the four advocacy groups. In the 1980s, three publications were particularly important in boosting the New Right insurgency: News Limited's national newspaper the *Australian*, and magazines the *Bulletin* and *Quadrant*. Fairfax newspapers the *Australian Financial Review*, the *Age* and the *Sydney Morning Herald* also provided coverage of the emerging movement, though it was generally more critical. As New Right ideas became more mainstream in the 1990s, to the point where the term became practically obsolete, News Limited's capital city tabloids carried the views of right-wing activists to a much wider audience.

[75] Ray Evans, 'John Howard and the Environmentalists,' in Windschuttle, Jones and Evans, *The Howard Era*, p. 498.
[76] Evans, 'John Howard and the Environmentalists,' p. 515.

Conservative ideas were also being developed and shared within a much smaller circle through the think tank magazines *IPA Review* and *Policy*. Finally, Connor Court Publishing arrived in 2005 and became a willing publisher of right-wing books, many of which might not have been released otherwise.

Rupert Murdoch established the *Australian* as the country's only national broadsheet in 1964. At this time Murdoch's political views were broadly left-wing, and the *Australian* gave editorial support to the election of the Whitlam government in 1972. But within a few years Murdoch's relationship with Whitlam had soured, and he used his flagship paper to campaign savagely against the government, which was infamously dismissed in November 1975. Murdoch's biographer Martin Wolff described the entire Whitlam period as "his first clear act of using his papers to gain influence—to project and to seize power."[77] Campaigning journalism would become a staple of the *Australian*, not least on neoliberal economics, industrial relations, Indigenous affairs and climate change, where its views were closely aligned with the advocacy groups of the right. The exception was its campaign for an Australian republic, where it was at odds with the Samuel Griffith Society.

The Fraser years saw the *Australian* adopt an increasingly strident economic position under the editorship of Les Hollings. Leading Liberal Party dries were promoted and, according to David McKnight, "the national daily took on an evangelical role in the wider public debate on behalf of ideas which until the late 1970s had been largely confined to neo-classically trained economists."[78] The paper did not let up following the election of the Hawke Labor government in 1983, when there was "a greater use of its news pages to support activities of the emerging think tanks and key ideologues, as well as the recruitment of a stable of columnists and journalists who projected the neo-liberal agenda."[79] The forceful tone on economics continued under the brief editorship of Frank Devine. Maxwell Newton's 'Advance Australia Fascist' column in November 1989 saw the Arbitration Commission bring legal action, which News Limited defended all the

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[77] Martin Wolff, *The Man Who Owns the News: Inside the Secret World of Rupert Murdoch*, Sydney: Vintage Books, 2008, p. 266.
[78] David McKnight, '"A World Hungry for a New Philosophy": Rupert Murdoch and the Rise of Neo-Liberalism,' *Journalism Studies*, vol. 4, no. 3 (2003), p. 352.
[79] McKnight, '"A World Hungry for a New Philosophy",' p. 355.

way to the High Court on the grounds of free speech.[80]

The *Australian* provided extensive coverage of the emergence of the neo-assimilationists in the 1990s. This was especially the case in 1996, when Geoffrey Partington's book *Hasluck versus Coombs* was published, and in 1999–2000, when *Quadrant*'s seminars were crystallising right-wing opinion on Indigenous issues. The campaign against the *Bringing Them Home* report received extensive coverage, as did Keith Windschuttle's historical revisionism on frontier violence. These campaigns also spread to the News Limited tabloids, where Piers Akerman and Michael Duffy in Sydney's *Daily Telegraph* and Andrew Bolt in Melbourne's *Herald Sun* took to the cultural battlefield with glee.[81] In the 2000s, with Chris Mitchell in the editor's chair, the *Australian* continued to be a key outlet for the neo-assimilationists, including Peter Howson, Gary Johns, Wesley Aird, Christopher Pearson and Frank Devine. When Keith Windschuttle published the first volume of *The Fabrication of Aboriginal History* in 2002, the *Australian*'s blanket coverage turned it into a "major national event."[82] In 2008 the Bennelong Society's website carried an acknowledgement of the *Australian*'s assistance with that year's annual conference.

Under Chris Mitchell the *Australian* also enthusiastically backed the climate deniers associated with the Lavoisier Group and various other organisations. In what Robert Manne described as a "truly frightful hotchpotch of ideological prejudice and intellectual muddle,"[83] the non-scientific views of culture warriors such as Christopher Pearson, Frank Devine, Gary Johns, Alan Moran and Greg Sheridan were reinforced with the views of contrarian scientists such as Ian Plimer, William Kininmonth, Bob Carter, Garth Paltridge and Jennifer Marohasy. "The paper has opposed the Kyoto Protocol, emissions trading, renewable energy mandates, and a host of other measures that might reduce emissions in Australia," wrote Guy Pearse.[84] In 2011 the government's outgoing climate change adviser,

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[80] Denis Cryle, *Murdoch's Flagship: The First Twenty-Five Years of the* Australian *Newspaper*, Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2008, pp. 52–54.
[81] Robert Manne, 'In Denial: The Stolen Generations and the Right,' *Quarterly Essay*, no. 1 (2001), p. 67.
[82] Robert Manne, 'Bad News: Murdoch's *Australian* and the Shaping of the Nation,' *Quarterly Essay*, no. 43 (2011), p. 9.
[83] Manne, 'Bad News,' p. 40.
[84] Pearse, *High & Dry*, p. 284.

Ross Garnaut, singled out the *Australian*'s climate coverage as among "the crudest and most distorted discussion of a major public policy issue" he had seen.[85]

The weekly *Bulletin* magazine was an enthusiastic publicist for the New Right in the 1980s. Founded in 1880, the *Bulletin* was largely literary (and overtly racist) until Frank Packer's Australian Consolidated Press took it over in 1960, after which it changed format into a news magazine. In 1984 and 1985 the *Bulletin* ran three cover stories on the New Right which brought considerable attention to the burgeoning phenomenon.[86] All were written by sympathetic journalist Tim Duncan, who also contributed to the *IPA Review* and later worked as an adviser to Victorian Liberal opposition leader Alan Brown. However, even in the 1980s the *Bulletin*'s circulation was in decline, and it relied on Kerry Packer's largesse to survive throughout the 1990s and 2000s. When Packer died in December 2005 the writing was on the wall, and the final edition was published in January 2008.[87]

As discussed in chapter 2, *Quadrant* is a pivotal institution of the Australian right, despite its small circulation. In the 1980s it became a frequent publisher of New Right activists, many of whom went on to play central roles in the establishment of the H.R. Nicholls Society. Those who were published regularly included Ray Evans, Hugh Morgan, John Stone, Peter Costello, Lauchlan Chipman and Gerard Henderson. Evans later joined *Quadrant*'s board, and when the Australia Council for the Arts reduced its taxpayer-funded grant to the magazine in the early 1990s, Western Mining chipped in to help keep it afloat.[88] However, when a number of New Right figures fell out with editor Robert Manne in 1992, the magazine no longer acted as a vessel for their ideas.

Paddy McGuinness replaced Manne in 1998 and dramatically changed *Quadrant*'s editorial direction. His manifesto for the future of *Quadrant* unequivocally set the tone, declaring that "the aim will be to encourage free debate of a kind which has become unfashionable in Australia at present."[89] First and

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[85] Ross Garnaut, quoted in Sally Neighbour, 'The United States of Chris Mitchell: The Power of a Murdoch Man,' *Monthly*, August 2011, p. 27.
[86] Tim Duncan, 'New Right crusaders challenge the Labor line,' *Bulletin*, 2 October 1984, pp. 28–33; 'Western Mining's messiahs of the New Right,' *Bulletin*, 2 July 1985, pp. 66–70; 'New Right: where it stands and what it means,' *Bulletin*, 10 December 1985, pp. 38–42.
[87] Gideon Haigh, 'Packed It In: The Demise of the *Bulletin*,' *Monthly*, March 2008, p. 32.
[88] Damien Murphy, 'Loose cannon of the Right,' *Bulletin*, 2 November 1993, p. 43.
[89] P.P. McGuinness, 'The Future for *Quadrant*,' *Quadrant*, January–February 1998, p. 11.

foremost among his priorities was the magazine's approach to Indigenous affairs, where he gave great prominence to the work of Ron Brunton, Peter Howson, Gary Johns, Keith Windschuttle and Geoffrey Partington. *Quadrant* also organised the seminars in 1999 and 2000 that led to the formation of the Bennelong Society. Manne wrote in 2001 that under McGuinness, "*Quadrant* became devoted to ever wilder and more extreme attacks on every cause and belief of the contemporary Aboriginal political leadership and its support base."[90] The attacks on Indigenous people continued under *Quadrant*'s next editor, Keith Windschuttle, who took over in 2008. But as seen in chapter 6, Windschuttle was also eager to debate the science and politics of climate change in the magazine's pages. Ray Evans returned as a regular contributor, and other climate deniers were welcomed into the *Quadrant* family.

Long before he brought a hardline approach to Indigenous issues to *Quadrant*, Paddy McGuinness was preaching neoliberal economics at the *Financial Review*, where he was economics editor (1974–80), editor (1980–82) and editor in chief (1982–87). David Kemp described his output there as being "especially influential on the policy debate" on both sides of politics.[91] The *Financial Review* also provided one of the few mainstream outlets for the Samuel Griffith Society's constitutional conservatism when it carried a regular column by John Stone from 1990 to 1998. After leaving politics in 1993, Peter Walsh also wrote a weekly column for the *Financial Review*, in which he frequently sounded off about the threat posed by the environmental movement.

Fairfax's broadsheets, the *Age* and *Sydney Morning Herald*, were not as consistent publishers of right-wing activists (though McGuinness and Henderson both had regular columns in the *Herald* for long periods), but space was occasionally found on their opinion pages for the likes of Ray Evans and Peter Howson. Despite this, Evans's view was that Fairfax (and the ABC) were "run by the left, for the left." But he was heartened by the continued presence of the "opposition press," by which he meant the *Australian* and other News Limited

[90] Manne, 'In Denial,' p. 58.
[91] David Kemp, 'Liberalism and Conservatism in Australia Since 1944,' in Brian Head and James Walter (eds), *Intellectual Movements and Australian Society*, Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1988, p. 351.

publications. “As long as you’ve got an opportunity to get different points of view out, different arguments up, it’s a healthy situation,” he said. “If there were no News Limited we would be in real strife.”[92]

Another important outlet in the 1980s was the *IPA Review*, which published “most of those who were identified in one way or another with the New Right.”[93] Regular economics pundits included John Stone, Peter Costello, Michael Porter and Des Moore. Later, it published Colin Howard and Greg Craven on the Constitution, Hugh Morgan, Ron Brunton and Gary Johns on Aboriginal affairs, and Ian Plimer, Bob Carter and Jennifer Marohasy on climate change. A number of these writers were also published in the Centre for Independent Studies’ *Policy* magazine, albeit less frequently. In 2012 it published a special issue on the state of Australian federalism, which featured the views of Craven and other committed federalists. Both the *IPA Review* and *Policy* have very small readerships, but they remain important publications within the intellectual right.

In 2005 Connor Court Publishing was founded in the small Victorian town of Ballan. Its founder, Anthony Cappello, a product of B.A. Santamaria’s National Civic Council, had worked mainly in Catholic publishing, but was looking to expand beyond religious titles. He used contacts such as John Roskam of the IPA to develop relationships with conservatives and before long became the “house publisher” of the Australian right.[94] Notable Connor Court titles include Ian Plimer’s *Heaven and Earth*, Gary Johns’s *Aboriginal Self-Determination*, Hal Colebatch’s *The Modest Member*, and the collection *Turning Left or Right*, which included contributions from Plimer, Johns, Evans, Bob Day and Julian Leeser. Prior to his death Evans was working on a book about the overthrow of Malcolm Turnbull, which Connor Court intended to publish. Evans left the incomplete manuscript with Cappello, who hoped to find someone to fill in the gaps, but it remains unpublished.[95]

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[92] Evans, interview with author.
[93] Kemp, ‘Liberalism and Conservatism in Australia,’ p. 348.
[94] Dominic Kelly, ‘Publishing rights,’ *Saturday Paper*, 23 August 2014.
[95] Anthony Cappello, email to author, 25 July 2014.

Reactionary conservatism

There is no doubt that the advocacy groups examined in this thesis are of the political right, but can they be accurately described as conservative? Before considering this question, it is necessary to discuss some of the basic tenets of conservatism. It is generally agreed that the birth of conservatism as a concrete political idea can be traced to Edmund Burke, and especially his *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790). Philosophers and political theorists have been debating and refining his ideas ever since, yet Burke's core principles remain at the heart of modern conservatism. Burke was a resolute defender of the social, political and religious institutions that have developed organically, for they contain inherent wisdom that will be beneficial for current and future generations. Conservatives are thus hostile to any political project that aims to overthrow established institutions in the pursuit of abstract ideals, whatever their supposed good intentions. However, it is important to note that although conservatives are resistant to unnecessary change, they do not oppose change at all costs. Indeed, Burke explicitly acknowledged that "a state without the means of some change is without the means of its conservation."[96]

In the 1950s American political theorist Russell Kirk identified what he saw as the six canons of conservative thought: belief in divine intent; affection for traditional life; acceptance of society's natural orders and classes; conviction that private property and freedom are inseparable; belief that humans are governed more by emotion than reason; and wariness of enforced change and innovation.[97] While he accepted that deviations from these principles would naturally occur, Kirk believed that they provided a broad outline of the "conservative mind," and had clear implications for the types of political structures conservatives would be likely to favour. Later, British philosopher Roger Scruton wrote that conservatives "look with scepticism upon the myths of equality and social justice; they regard universal political agitation with distaste, and the clamour for 'progress' seems to

[96] Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, [1790] 1993, p. 21.
[97] Russell Kirk, *The Conservative Mind: From Burke to Eliot* (5th edn), Chicago: Henry Regnery Company, 1972, pp. 7–8.

them no more than a passing fad."[98]

Hugh Collins argued in 1985 that in its utilitarianism, legalism and positivism, Australian society draws its distinctive character from the political philosophy of Jeremy Bentham. That is, those who created Australia's political institutions were concerned with the greatest good for the greatest number, with legal protections that work to ensure this, and with practical considerations over moral or philosophical abstractions. This tradition was anathema to the single-issue advocacy groups of the right. "Australia is a large grievance to latter-day disciples of laissez-faire economics and inhospitable to radical conservatives," wrote Collins. "For so long has its economy been a mixed system, so intricately interdependent are state socialism and private capitalism in its affairs, that the free-marketeers have to take their stand outside the nation's historical experience and on the margin of its political decision."[99] The radical right sought to challenge this assertion.

The single-issue advocacy groups reflect the distinctive character of Australian conservatism in different ways. The H.R. Nicholls Society emerged from the neoliberal and libertarian movements of the 1970s. These movements represented a major threat to commonly held assumptions about Australia. In the words of Lindy Edwards:

> The rise of neo-liberalism was perhaps the most revolutionary of the political movements in Australia's history. It ran against the grain of our national identity and political culture, and demanded that Australia utterly remake itself. A country that had defined itself by its democratic egalitarian roots was asked to step away from government. It was asked to put its faith in free markets and competition.[100]

Australia's distinctive industrial relations system was an important aspect of this self-definition. The H.R. Nicholls Society decided enough was enough and adopted

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[98] Roger Scruton, *The Meaning of Conservatism* (3rd edn), South Bend: St. Augustine's Press, 2002, pp. 15–16.
[99] Hugh Collins, 'Political Ideology in Australia: The Distinctiveness of a Benthamite Society,' *Daedalus*, vol. 114, no. 1 (Winter 1985), p. 158.
[100] Lindy Edwards, *The Passion of Politics: The Role of Ideology and Political Theory in Australia*, Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 2013, p. 158.

a radical confrontational approach, both to trade unions and the industrial relations system as a whole. This was a significant shift from Australian conservatives' traditional approach to industrial relations, which had been to accept centralised wage fixation and the conciliation and arbitration system, including the central role of trade unions in the process, as set in stone.

As we saw in chapter 3, some business leaders reacted with horror to the radicalism of the H.R. Nicholls Society. But even so, the group still fits in with the general antipathy towards the trade union movement that Norman Abjorensen has identified as one of the key characteristics of the Australian liberal-conservative tradition.[101] The aims of the group, while obviously challenging to the industrial relations status quo, look rather benign today. What they were advocating was, in essence, standard pro-business industrial relations reform: labour market deregulation and restrictions on the power of trade unions. In the context of a ruling Labor Party which had created an Accord with the trade union movement, and Australia's long tradition of worker and union friendly industrial relations laws, the H.R. Nicholls Society was seen as radical. With hindsight we can see that this was not a fundamental shift, but rather the same old battle between capital and labour, with added emphasis on taking the fight up to the union movement and the ALP. The H.R. Nicholls Society's approach was a radical response to Australia's distinctive industrial environment, but its politics can still accurately be described as conservative.

The Samuel Griffith Society is, without doubt, the most traditionally conservative of the four groups. As Abjorensen has noted, opposition to constitutional change is another key characteristic of the liberal-conservative tradition in Australia.[102] Members of the Samuel Griffith Society saw the Constitution as "the greatest public work of Australian conservatives," but by the 1980s were alarmed at the fact it was not appreciated as such by politicians, academics and the public at large.[103] The group always maintained a deep distrust

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[101] Norman Abjorensen, *John Howard and the Conservative Tradition*, Melbourne: Australian Scholarly Publishing, 2008, p. 31.
[102] Abjorensen, *John Howard and the Conservative Tradition*, p. 31.
[103] Greg Craven, 'The New Centralism and the Collapse of the Conservative Constitution,' Department of the Senate Occasional Lecture, Canberra, 14 October 2005, http://www.aph.gov.au/binaries/senate/pubs/occa_lect/transcripts/141005.pdf

of any attempts to reshape Australian political institutions to meet modern day demands, especially when these attempts came from the left.

The Samuel Griffith Society is also highly suspicious of the tendency of governments of all persuasions to gradually acquire more power and move away from the federalist intentions of the drafters of the Constitution. While the Labor Party is seen as being most untrustworthy in this regard, the Society was also very critical of the Howard government's centralisation and dismissal of states' rights. Defenders of states' rights—in Australia and the US—have often been criticised as having ulterior motives, but they are undoubtedly an important element of the conservative tradition in both nations.

The Samuel Griffith Society recognises that from time to time it may be necessary to make changes to the Constitution but sees its primary role as ensuring that such proposals are intensely scrutinised. It is in this sense that the organisation can be described as the most 'Burkean' of the four, because it echoes Burke's emphasis on slow and gradual reform and wariness of those who would try to artificially construct an ideal society. This point has been taken up by Greg Craven:

> It has been constructive in a number of ways, so that it does actually present I think, not always and not on every issue, but it does tend to promote a deeper conservative understanding and contribution to quite complicated issues. So, for example, it's very interesting that a person like Julian Leeser can understand very clearly that the conservative position on Indigenous recognition is not trying to defeat Indigenous recognition across the board. And I think to that extent there's part of Samuel Griffith, that you would never say about Bennelong or H.R. Nicholls, that it's Burkean.[104]

As noted in chapter 5, the stated aims of the Bennelong Society gave the impression that the group was merely concerned with improving the welfare of Indigenous Australians, and held no ideological position as to how this could best be achieved. But this was nonsense, as a brief perusal of the group's literature showed. Another of Abjorensen's characteristics of the Australian liberal-conservative tradition is a belief in "individual freedom and self-reliance."

[104] Greg Craven, phone interview with author, 27 October 2015.

Australian conservatives reject "collectivism in any form" and "any idealised view of social justice as a redistributive force in society."[105] These principles are reflected in the Bennelong Society's approach to Indigenous affairs, in which the solutions to the problems faced by Indigenous people are to be found in their assimilation with the mainstream economy and society.

Hal Wootten was alert to this approach in 2004, when he described the "narrative of the triumph of capitalist individualism" over self-determination that helped to bring about the demise of ATSIC. This narrative, he wrote, "posits that Aboriginals must simply forget about culture and identity, which are irrelevant in the modern globalised world, and become individual market-driven consumers and entrepreneurs, like all other sensible people."[106] Waleed Aly would later expand on the difficulty conservatives have in dealing with group identities and rights, especially with regard to the unique place of Australia's first peoples:

> ATSIC, native title, any kind of treaty and indeed almost the entire politics of symbolic reconciliation are very difficult to accommodate in a liberal conservative worldview. Each requires the recognition of Aborigines as a distinct group within the citizenry. How, for instance, can a nation have a treaty with its own citizens? How can it recognise a form of title that, as a matter of law, is open only to some citizens and not all?[107]

Thus, for the Bennelong Society, the 1970s revolution in Indigenous affairs was a challenge to fundamental liberal-conservative principles, such as individual freedom and equality before the law.

In its sugar-coating of the assimilation era, the Bennelong Society was also nostalgic for an imagined golden age, which revealed its paternalist attitudes towards Indigenous Australians. Though it would not be fair to label it as a white-only organisation, the overwhelming majority of its contributors were non-Indigenous. This gave an overriding impression of a white organisation insisting it knew what was best for Aboriginal people, again exhibiting conservatives'

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[105] Abjorensen, *John Howard and the Conservative Tradition*, p. 31.
[106] Hal Wootten, 'Self-Determination After ATSIC,' *Dialogue*, vol. 23, no. 2 (2004), pp. 18–19.
[107] Waleed Aly, 'What's Right? The Future of Conservatism in Australia,' *Quarterly Essay*, no. 37 (2010), p. 23.

discomfort with the concept of Indigenous self-determination.

With its radically oppositional approach to mainstream climate science, the Lavoisier Group is undoubtedly the least conservative of the four groups. While traditional Australian conservatism has long been suspicious of environmentalism and its association with the political left, the Lavoisier Group and its allies in the climate denial movement went beyond suspicion into outright conspiracy theories and nightmare fantasies. Their publications are not the works of calm, considered conservatives, but the extreme rantings of obsessive ideologues. Despite this, the Lavoisier Group and its allies were very successful in convincing ostensibly conservative politicians that climate change is a hoax or scam perpetrated by sinister elements within the bureaucracy and academia. For example, in 2014 the Abbott government discussed investigating the Bureau of Meteorology, amid claims published in the *Australian* that it was manipulating data in order to exaggerate the threat of global warming.[108]

An important factor in the Lavoisier Group's extreme, reactionary approach was its connection to the global network of climate denial. It formed links with like-minded think tanks, websites and blogs, where conspiratorial thinking was no barrier to social and political acceptance. It was happy to associate with such characters as Christopher Monckton, an eccentric Englishman who falsely claims to be a member of the House of Lords, and who in 2011 caused a furore after likening Australian economist and climate advocate Ross Garnaut to a Nazi.[109] Ray Evans abandoned any notions of conservative common sense when he described what he perceived as the intentions of the 2009 Copenhagen conference: "this new world order, Imperium Viridian, would supplant the nation-state as the basis of the world's polity."[110] This was not serious debate but a resort into fantasy. In a 2012 paper Elaine McKewon identified a number of fantasy themes employed by climate deniers: climate scientists as rent-seeking frauds, climate scientists as dissent-stifling elite, climate science/environmentalism as religion, climate science as left-

[108] Jake Sturmer, 'Tony Abbott's department discussed investigation into Bureau of Meteorology over global warming exaggeration claims, FOI documents reveal,' *ABC News*, 24 September 2015, http://www.abc.net.au/news/2015-09-24/government-discussed-bom-investigation-over-climate-change/6799628

[109] Tom Arup, 'Sceptic Lord under fire, but speech to go ahead,' *Age*, 24 June 2011.

[110] Ray Evans, 'Copenhagen: End Game for Green Imperialism,' *Quadrant*, March 2010, p. 57.

wing conspiracy, climate change mitigation as money-spinning scam.[111] All were common in Lavoisier Group literature.

In recent years there have been attempts by American and British political figures to reclaim concern for the planet as a conservative ideal, invoking some of the great heroes of conservatism in support of their positions. In 2014 the University of Chicago hosted a forum titled 'What Would Milton Friedman Do About Climate Change?' Former Republican congressman Bob Inglis kicked things off by playing a 1979 clip in which Friedman endorsed the idea of a tax on pollution in order to limit its negative effects. What, then, was the obvious answer to the forum's central question? Put a tax on carbon.[112] John Gummer, a minister in the Thatcher government and now chairman of the UK Committee on Climate Change, argues that "conservatives cannot properly be climate deniers. At the heart of their political stance is a desire to hand on something better to the future than they have received from the past."[113] Inglis and Gummer have both visited Australia to attempt to convince conservatives here that climate action is not only urgent, but the responsible thing to do. Finally, faced with the election of climate denier Donald Trump to the US presidency, Republican elder statesmen George Shultz and James Baker recalled Ronald Reagan's role in negotiating the Montreal Protocol in urging a climate solution "based on a sound economic analysis that embodies the conservative principles of free markets and limited government."[114]

While all four groups contained elements of the Australian liberal and conservative traditions to greater and lesser degrees, their combined philosophy is more accurately described as reactionary conservatism. In each case, the groups are defined by their opposition. The H.R. Nicholls fought the "industrial relations club" and trade unions. The Samuel Griffith Society fought political centralists and activist judges. The Bennelong Society fought the "Aboriginal industry" and

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[111] Elaine McKewon, 'Talking Points Ammo: The Use of Neoliberal Think Tank Fantasy Themes to Delegitimise Scientific Knowledge of Climate Change in Australian Newspapers,' *Journalism Studies*, vol. 13, no. 2 (2012), pp. 284–85.

[112] Jeff McMahon, 'What would Milton Friedman do about climate change? Tax carbon,' *Forbes*, 12 October 2014, https://www.forbes.com/sites/jeffmcmahon/2014/10/12/what-would-milton-friedman-do-about-climate-change-tax-carbon/

[113] John Gummer, 'As Thatcher understood, true Tories cannot be climate change deniers,' *Guardian*, 19 January 2017, https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2017/jan/19/thatcher-understood-conservatives-not-true-climate-change-deniers

[114] George P. Shultz and James A. Baker, 'A conservative answer to climate change,' *Wall Street Journal*, 8 February 2017.

proponents of Indigenous self-determination. The Lavoisier Group fought environmentalists and advocates of climate action. They all share a perception that the left is in control, even during periods of conservative rule. This perception is commonly held by conservatives around the globe. "The conservative not only opposes the left," wrote Corey Robin, "he also believes that the left has been in the driver's seat since, depending on who's counting, the French Revolution or the Reformation."[115]

Australia's distinctive history with regard to industrial relations, the Constitution and Indigenous affairs brought the distinctive reactions represented by the H.R. Nicholls, Samuel Griffith and Bennelong Societies. These groups saw little need to look abroad for inspiration and guidance, because they saw Australia's experiences as being unique. In this sense, they remained firmly within the Australian conservative tradition, despite their moments of radicalism. The Lavoisier Group, on the other hand, dealt with the global issue of climate change. Drawing on its connections to like-minded groups in the US and UK, it went down a more radical path, one that rejected respectful approaches to political conflict in favour of the demonisation of opponents and the promulgation of conspiracy theories. While this approach was successful in delegitimising the scientific consensus on climate change, it looks increasingly detached from mainstream conservatism.

In a 2012 article, American political scientist Mark Lilla identified the 1990s voices of "high-brow reaction" as precedents for the more recent extreme radicalisation of the American right:

> Apocalypticism trickled down, not up, and is now what binds Republican Party elites to their hard-core base. They all agree that the country must be "taken back" from the usurpers by any means necessary, and are willing to support any candidate, no matter how unworldly or unqualified or fanatical, who shares their picture of the crisis of our time.[116]

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[115] Corey Robin, *The Reactionary Mind: Conservatism from Edmund Burke to Sarah Palin*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011, p. 25.
[116] Mark Lilla, 'Republicans for revolution,' *New York Review of Books*, 12 January 2012, p. 16.

A similar process has been witnessed in Australia. The single-issue advocacy groups were Australia's voices of high-brow reaction, and their once radical views are now de rigueur on the right. From the highest levels of government to the Liberal Party rank and file, from the *Australian*'s opinion page to the letters to its editor and anonymous online comments, reactionary conservatism reigns.

CONCLUSION

This thesis began by tracing the history of think tanks from their largely non-partisan origins in the United States in the early twentieth century, through their evolution into explicitly ideological and partisan organisations from the 1970s onwards. An explosion in think tank numbers in the US grew out of the twin and sometimes overlapping intellectual phenomena that came to be known as movement conservatism and neoliberalism. Similar developments took place in the United Kingdom, and the election victories of Margaret Thatcher in the UK in 1979 and Ronald Reagan in the US in 1980 were viewed by some as the triumph of neoliberalism.

Australia was not unaffected by these events, and saw a similar radicalisation of its conservative think tank scene. New Right organisations such as the Centre for Independent Studies, Centre of Policy Studies, Australian Institute of Public Policy and a number of smaller groups emerged in the late 1970s and early 1980s, while older institutions such as the Institute of Public Affairs and *Quadrant* magazine were forced to reinvigorate their ideas and personnel in order to remain relevant. Out of this environment sprung the H.R. Nicholls Society, the first of the four single-issue advocacy groups that are the focus of this thesis. The success of this group saw the same collection of right-wing activists create other organisations using the H.R. Nicholls Society template.

With the single-issue advocacy group of the right, Ray Evans and his associates pioneered a new type of organisational form in Australian politics. Lacking the resources and research capabilities of the likes of the IPA or CIS, they could not be accurately classified as think tanks. They were also not interest groups

in the same sense as, for example, their allies at the Australian Mining Industry Council and National Farmers' Federation, or their enemies at such organisations as the Australian Council of Trade Unions and Friends of the Earth. The single-issue advocacy groups did more than simply represent the particular interests of an industry or social movement. They provided networks for like-minded ideologues to share their passionate views about specific issues, and subsequently to transform their views into substantive political action. Though they often flew under the general public's radar, the work of these groups was not some kind of sinister right-wing conspiracy. Their opinions and objectives were plain for all to see.

Though the groups were strikingly similar to each other in their structure and personnel, each had its own distinctive attributes and modes of operation. The H.R. Nicholls Society sought to use its business and political contacts to pressure Liberal Party MPs into adopting ever-more hardline industrial relations policies, both in opposition and in government. Despite this privileged access to power, H.R. Nicholls members took delight in their public image as political troublemakers, operating on the fringes of polite society. When High Court Justice Michael Kirby referred to them as "industrial ayatollahs" in 2004, Evans responded with mockery. "I presume that with these words virtually every member of the H.R. Nicholls Society stands condemned by his honour," he joked to fellow members.[1] Des Moore's next conference paper was titled 'Why the Ayatollahs Are Coming,' and featured a caricature of himself dressed as a sword-wielding ayatollah, drawn by *Herald Sun* cartoonist Mark Knight.[2]

The Samuel Griffith Society was the most stolid and traditional of the four groups. With its distinguished membership, organisational formality and impeccably presented published proceedings, it resembled a cross between a learned debating society and a national academy. But it is important not to let this impression mask the occasionally radical nature of its content, especially with regard to native title law and what was perceived as the pernicious influence of activist judges. The Bennelong Society's radicalism, on the other hand, was not in

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[1] Quoted in Andrew Cornell, 'Why Ray Evans is always right,' *Weekend Australian Financial Review*, 8 January 2005.

[2] Des Moore, 'Why the Ayatollahs Are Coming,' in *Carpe Diem*, Proceedings of the Twenty-Sixth Conference of the H.R. Nicholls Society, Melbourne, March 2005, http://archive.hrnicholls.com.au/archives/vol26/moore.pdf

any way hidden. The forthright opinions of its members about every aspect of Aboriginal politics and culture was plain for all to see in the countless articles they had published in the popular press, as well as on its website. Like all of the groups, the Bennelong Society was contemptuous of political correctness, and saw no reason to make its contributions less offensive to Indigenous people.

The Lavoisier Group was the only one of the four to truly embrace the possibilities of the world wide web. While the other organisations used their websites merely as convenient online archives for their articles and papers, the Lavoisier Group linked up with like-minded think tanks, advocacy groups, websites and blogs all over the globe. In doing this they were able to not only spread their work to the rest of the world, but also gather information and strategies from the global climate denial echo chamber. The intense international networking of the Lavoisier Group and other Australian climate deniers has helped to give Australia the dubious distinction of having the highest rate of climate scepticism in the world, according to a University of Tasmania study.[3]

While all of the groups were commonly described as conservative, and though they exhibited attributes of traditional Australian conservatism, this thesis has argued that such a classification is not sufficient. Their objectives and philosophical approaches were simply too radical for the term conservative to be entirely accurate. Their innately contrarian nature, in which they were largely defined by what they opposed, has led me to characterise their collective ideological position as reactionary conservatism.

This thesis has shown a number of examples where single-issue advocacy groups of the right were able to intervene in public policy debates and demonstrate significant political influence, especially during the Howard years. Members of the H.R. Nicholls Society were central players in the 1998 waterfront dispute, and the organisation was a prominent voice as the Howard government attempted radical industrial relations reform with its Work Choices legislation. The establishment of the Samuel Griffith Society coincided with the High Court's Mabo judgment and a serious push for an Australian republic, and naturally the organisation made significant contributions to these two important and divisive constitutional debates.

[3] Bruce Tranter and Kate Booth, 'Scepticism in a Changing Climate: A Cross-National Study,' *Global Environmental Change*, vol. 33 (July 2015), pp. 154–64.

The Bennelong Society's neo-assimilationist approach to Indigenous affairs found particular favour with the Howard government, and provided support for its controversial decisions regarding ATSIC and remote Indigenous communities. Partnered with a variety of organisations and individuals, the Lavoisier Group's "deny and delay" lobbying efforts have helped to shape the climate policies of the Liberal-National coalition for the past twenty years.

Finally, what about their broader influence on the political culture? Have they contributed to a general rightward shift in Australian politics, evident even following Howard's defeat in 2007? It should be noted here that demonstrating direct cause and effect on these kinds of questions is impossible, but this does not mean that asking the question is fruitless. Before offering an answer, let me first provide two quotations. The first comes from Mark Davis, a left-wing scholar at the University of Melbourne, in his 2008 book *The Land of Plenty*:

> Whatever we are now, the New Right made us. Without F.A. Hayek or Milton Friedman or Hugh Morgan or John Stone or Bert Kelly or Keith Joseph or George Wallace or P.P. McGuinness, or Ray Evans and the activists of the H.R. Nicholls Society and the Crossroads Group, or the IPA or the CIS, or the writers of *Quadrant*, Australia wouldn't be what it is today.[4]

The next quotation is from conservative veteran Peter Coleman, former Liberal MP and editor of *Quadrant*, and father-in-law to Peter Costello, writing in the *Australian* in 2009:

> There would probably have been no privatisation, deregulation or tax reform if it had been left to politicians. It was the think-tanks ranging from the Centre for Independent Studies and the Institute of Public Affairs to the Institute for Private Enterprise and the Sydney Institute, or pressure groups such as the H.R. Nicholls Society, magazines such as *Quadrant* and publishers such as Connor Court that laid the foundation for the reforms in industrial relations, financial regulation, taxation and indigenous policy. What would have been the state of the debate on global warming and the ETS without the think-tanks

[4] Mark Davis, *The Land of Plenty: Australia in the 2000s*, Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2008, p. 40.

and a few independent journalists?[5]

What we have here are two commentators from opposite ends of the political spectrum essentially agreeing that contemporary Australia has been shaped by the right-wing think tanks, publications and advocacy groups that have been the subject of this thesis. Statements like these are not uncommon in political commentary. But are they correct?

My initial reaction to such assertions is to say that they are exaggerations. Though political analysts should always keep a watchful eye on the impact of different types of political actors, it is important to avoid overstating their influence. To claim that the New Right "made us" is to ignore inconvenient facts. What they perceive as Australia's left-leaning political culture remains an enormous sore point for right-wing activists. Nowhere is this more pronounced than in their attitude to Australia's industrial relations system, where they continue to bemoan the legacy of H.B. Higgins and the Harvester judgment.

Nevertheless, what were once viewed as the crazed rantings of an extreme right-wing fringe—"political troglodytes and economic lunatics," in Bob Hawke's memorable phrase—are now very much a part of mainstream Australian politics. Gradually yet unmistakably, our political culture has shifted to the right, and this thesis has demonstrated that four very small, very cheap to run, and above all very passionate single-issue advocacy groups have contributed to that shift.

[5] Peter Coleman, 'Where the conservatives went wrong,' *Weekend Australian*, 12 December 2009.

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