

**The radical neo-liberal movement and its impact  
upon Australian politics**

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Since coming to public attention in the mid 1980s, new right think tanks have become a prominent feature of the Australian political landscape. In recent years however, they have taken on the new role of ideological defender of many actions of the federal Coalition government. Several valuable critiques of such activities have been made by Australian scholars. Philip Mendes and Brendan O'Connor, for example, have examined the promotion, by new right think tanks, of the notion that the state provision of welfare automatically creates a 'culture of welfare dependency' and their attacks upon welfare advocates.<sup>1</sup> The relationship between the Institute of Public Affairs (IPA) and the Howard Government's assault upon dissenting non-government organisations has been analysed by Mowbray, Thornton, Manning and Maddison, Denniss & Hamilton<sup>2</sup> while Robert Manne has identified the ways in which the polemical attacks by new right think tanks against the notion of the Stolen Generations provided intellectual justification for John Howard's own undermining of those indigenous Australians forcibly removed from their parents.<sup>3</sup> This paper seeks to build upon such critiques by examining the dynamics and impact of new right think tanks historically, with a particular focus on the period of Labor federal governance between 1983-1996. An appreciation of the dynamics and impact of new right think tanks during this period provides a context for understanding their actions since the election of the Howard Coalition government in 1996.

It is argued here that the 'new right' is best understood as an elite social movement with a specific ideological character – the radical neo-liberal movement. From its emergence in the mid-1970s, this radical neo-liberal movement attempted to shift the terrain of

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<sup>1</sup> Philip Mendes, 'Australian Neoliberal Think Tanks and the Backlash Against the Welfare State', *Journal of Australian Political Economy*, No. 51, 2003, pp. 29-56; Philip Mendes, 'The Discompassion Industry: The Campaign Against Welfare Bodies', *Overland*, 170, Autumn 2003, pp. 102-107; Brendan O'Connor, 'The Intellectual Origins of Welfare Dependency', *Australian Journal of Social Issues*, Vol. 36, No. 3, August 2001, pp. 221-236.

<sup>2</sup> Martin Mowbray, 'War on non profits', *Just Policy*, No. 30, July 2003, pp. 3-13; Tim Thornton, 'Policing the Do-gooders: The Australians Right's attack on NGOs', *Overland*, 173, Summer 2003, pp. 58-62; Paddy Manning, 'Keeping Democracy in its Place' in Margo Kingston, *Not Happy John! Defending Our Democracy*, Penguin, Camberwell, 2004, pp. 265-288; Sarah Maddison, Richard Denniss and Clive Hamilton, *Silencing Dissent: non-government organisations and Australian democracy*, Australia Institute, Discussion Paper Number 65, June 2004.

<sup>3</sup> Robert Manne, *In Denial: The Stolen Generations and the Right*, Quarterly Essay 1, Schwartz Publishing, Melbourne, 2001.

political debate in Australia, to a position more sympathetic with its ideology: that 'the market', when free from state imposed constraints, was the most efficient, and most moral, way of producing and distributing most goods and services in society – whether they be consumer items or public goods such as education and healthcare – and, further, that the Keynesian welfare state constituted an inefficient and unjust form of social regulation. Think tanks and groups such as the Institute of Public Affairs, the Centre for Independent Studies (CIS), the Centre of Policy Studies (CoPS), the Australian Institute of Public Policy (AIPP), the H. R. Nicholls Society, Centre 2000, Crossroads, the Tasman Institute, the Institute for Private Enterprise (IPE), and the Australian Adam Smith Club, provided the radical neo-liberal movement with its organisational backbone. Employing simplistic dichotomies and emotive language, the radical neo-liberals mounted a concerted attack upon the Keynesian welfare state, socialism, social justice and their defenders. As an alternative they offered a utopian model of capitalism in which the state acts as nightwatchman and individuals realise their liberty through voluntary market exchanges.

This paper will first discuss why the new right can be usefully understood as an elite social movement. It will then examine the impact of this movement upon Australian politics. Because of the limitations of size, this paper will not offer a detailed examination, rather it will sketch the main features of the movement and its impact upon Australian politics.

### **Radical neo-liberalism as an elite social movement**

What marks the group of academics, journalists, and businesspeople who congregated around the IPA, CIS, H. R. Nicholls Society and other similar organisations as new, and what defines them ideologically, is their radical critique of the welfare state, and their concrete proposals for its dismantling. Marian Sawer's description of the radical neo-liberal movement in 1982 encapsulates its core values:

they are united in the belief that state intervention to promote egalitarian social goals has been responsible for the present economic malaise, and has represented an intolerable invasion of individual rights.<sup>4</sup>

During the period under review there were those - such as Bob Hawke's economic adviser, Ross Garnaut, senior public servant, Michael Keating, and many within the leadership of the federal Labor caucus - who viewed the welfare state and Keynesian economic planning as inhibiting Australia's economic development, who sought to deregulate capitalist markets and impose market mechanisms for the delivery of some public goods – such as education and health care – and yet who still advocated a strong and positive role for the state in the management of the economy and the provision of services. While still broadly neo-liberal such policy makers and intellectuals did not abandon the central role of the state in managing the economy and were also willing to subordinate their neo-liberal ideology to political pragmatism or broader social goals – with Labor's social wage and Accord being good examples. In contrast, the groups and individuals who are the subject of this paper are defined by their absolute and unshakable belief in the ability of unfettered markets to create a harmonious, prosperous and moral society. While the former might be characterised as adhering to a version of neo-liberalism, the latter embody its more fundamentalist expression: radical neo-liberalism.

A lack of clarity has also characterised discussion of the 'new right's' organisational character. Numerous journalists have written of individuals being 'members' or holding 'membership' of the new right, as if it were a constituted organisation or a political party.<sup>5</sup> Others have defined the new right via its think tanks,<sup>6</sup> sometimes describing

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<sup>4</sup> Marian Sawyer, 'Introduction' in Marian Sawyer (ed), *Australia and the New Right*, George Allen and Unwin, North Sydney, 1982, p. viii.

<sup>5</sup> See for example: Mike Taylor, 'New Right poses dilemma for employers but the answer may be found in Marx', *Australian Financial Review*, 3<sup>rd</sup> September, 1986, p. 8; Mike Steketee, 'Desperation and despair in heartland of Liberals', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 22<sup>nd</sup> April, 1989, pp. 8-9; Pamela Williams, 'New Right exerts its power on Liberals', *Australian Financial Review*, 17<sup>th</sup> December, 1987, p. 10; Steve Burrell, 'The New Right threat: MP warns', *Sydney*

them as 'interest groups'.<sup>7</sup> If radical neo-liberal think tanks are interest groups, then they are unique among the category. Radical neo-liberal think tanks do not engage in traditional lobbying, nor are they interested in the pragmatic compromises characteristic of interest group intervention in the policy process. In addition, although they are distinct organisations, radical neo-liberal think tanks are linked by a common ideology, by an overlapping leadership and participant base and by their emergence in a particular historical moment, in response to specific economic and political conditions and with common goals and common enemies. Furthermore, although think tanks are an important vehicle for radical neo-liberal ideology, radical neo-liberals have also acted outside of their confines. David Kemp comes closer to the mark by describing what he calls 'radical liberalism', as 'linked in a nationwide network challenging traditional conservative centres of power'.<sup>8</sup> The notion of a 'network', however, fails to capture the dynamism and energy of the radical neo-liberals, nor does it do justice to the ways in which they contested power, engaged in hegemonic struggle and acted both within and outside the traditional policy-making structures of political parties and the bureaucracy.

It is only by describing the radical neo-liberals acting as a 'movement' that all of these features can be accommodated. The term 'radical neo-liberal movement', captures both the ideological and organisational novelty of what has commonly been referred to as the 'new right'. Under such a description, radical neo-liberals become 'participants' in the movement, or movement 'activists', rather than 'members' of the 'new right'. This is not however to deny that there have been debates, conflicts and differences of opinion within the radical neo-liberal movement. Most important among these has been that while some radical neo-liberals adopt a libertarian position on social and moral issues, most embrace social and moral conservatism – including a commitment to the

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*Morning Herald*, 7<sup>th</sup> October, 1986, p. 1; Amanda Buckley, 'Liberal rifts curb celebration', *Australian Financial Review*, 29<sup>th</sup> January, 1987, p. 7.

<sup>6</sup> For example: Bette Moore and Gary Carpenter, 'Main Players' in Ken Coghill (ed), *The New Right's Australian Fantasy*, McPhee Gribble, Fitzroy, 1987, pp. 145-160; David McKnight, 'The New Right: A Consumer's Guide', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 6<sup>th</sup> September, 1986, pp. 41, 45; Laurie Aarons, *Here Come the Ugliers: The New Right – who they are and what they think*, Red Pen Publications, Forest Lodge, 1987.

<sup>7</sup> Trevor Matthews, 'Interest Groups' in Rodney Smith, *Politics in Australia*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, Allen and Unwin, St. Leonards, 1993, pp. 241-246.

<sup>8</sup> David Kemp, 'Liberalism and Conservatism in Australia since 1944' in Brian Head and James Walter (eds), *Intellectual Movements and Australian Society*, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1988, p. 340.

traditional nuclear family and patriarchal notions of gender roles. These tensions are largely kept in check through the movement activists' shared commitment to radical neo-liberalism and the solidarity they derive from having common enemies: the Left in general and the defenders of the welfare state, arbitration and tariffs. More important has been the contradiction between such a conservative morality and the radical neo-liberal commitment to a minimal state. One of the strengths of the movement has been the extent to which such contradictions have been either masked or accommodated and reconciled within a radical neo-liberal framework.

In understanding the radical neo-liberals as a movement, there are clear associations with the 'new social movements' – such as the environment movement, the feminist movement, the peace movement and the gay rights movement – which arose in the late 1960s and which many theorists heralded as superseding labour as an emancipatory social agent. There is however a crucial difference between the radical neo-liberal movement and the new social movements. The fundamental difference between the two is that whereas the new social movements have been rooted in resistance and popular protest, the radical neo-liberal movement is a fundamentally elitist movement with a small social base and clear links with sections of the capitalist class. It is therefore as an 'elite social movement' that the radical neo-liberals are best described. Although some Australian scholars have labelled the 'new right' as a 'movement', there has not been any thoroughgoing discussion of what this might mean. Ian Marsh, for example, has written of 'the 'new Right' or neo-liberal movement in Australia' and even pointed to its 'deliberately elite-focused' nature, yet has left the implications of such an understanding tantalisingly unexplored.<sup>9</sup>

As its name implies, an elite social movement is primarily comprised of elites. That is, the participants in an elite social movement tend to be drawn from contradictory locations within class relations<sup>10</sup> or from the dominant class and thus enjoy a privileged

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<sup>9</sup> Ian Marsh, 'Interest Group Analysis' in Andrew Parkin, John Summers and Dennis Woodward (eds), *Government, Politics, Power and Policy in Australia*, 5<sup>th</sup> Edition, Longman Cheshire, Melbourne, 1994, p. 260.

<sup>10</sup> For a discussion of contradictory class locations see Erik Olin Wright, *Class Crisis and the State*, London, Verso, 1983

position in symbol manipulation, access to political decision makers and financial resources. Elite social movements are thus distinct from the 'new social movements' whose roots are in popular protest by groups and individuals from a more diverse range of class locations. As a movement, they are also distinct from interest groups. Movements do not necessarily rely upon formal categories of membership, rather, movement membership is determined by participation. Whilst formally constituted organisations and interest groups may be central to their survival, movements are more than the sum of their parts, and exist beyond the boundaries of such groups. Movements are dynamic social actors who seek not only to influence state policies, but, very often, to bring about broad based social, cultural and political change in accordance with the ideologies around which they cohere. Elite social movements then are a unique political agent, distinct from both the celebrated new social movements and from interest groups, but containing elements of both.<sup>11</sup>

### **Think tanks: the organisational backbone of the radical neo-liberal movement**

Central to the emergence and longevity of the radical neo-liberal movement has been a series of 'think tanks' and forums. Such groups constitute the 'Social Movement Organisations' (SMO's) and 'mobilising structures' of the radical neo-liberal movement. They are sites of organised and activist intellectual activity, underpinned by a commitment to radical neo-liberalism (and, in some cases, to conservatism also).

The radical neo-liberal movement is not reducible to its think tanks. Movement activists sometimes operate independently of the movement's mobilising structures. The importance of think tanks, however, is they provide the radical neo-liberal movement with its organisational backbone. They are forums for the articulation of radical neo-

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<sup>11</sup> For discussions of elite social movements see for example: Bob Jessop, *The Future of the Capitalist State*, Polity Press, Cambridge, 2002, p. 32; John Boies and Nelson A. Pichardo, 'The Committee on the Present Danger: A Case for the Importance of Elite Social Movement Organisations to Theories of Social Movements and the State', *Berkeley Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 38, 1993-1994, pp. 57-87; Leslie Sklair, 'Social Movements for Global Capitalism: the Transnational Capitalist Class in Action', *Review of International Political Economy*, Vol. 4, No. 3, Autumn 1997, pp. 514-538.

liberal ideas as well as centres for the dissemination of radical neo-liberal ideas to a broader audience. It was largely through the focus and organisational support afforded by these think tanks that the process described by Kemp whereby 'comparatively isolated intellectuals became linked in a nationwide network challenging traditional conservative centres of power'<sup>12</sup> was able to occur. Think tanks bring like-minded people together to undertake collective action in the service of a radical neo-liberal agenda. However, the form of collective action undertaken by the radical neo-liberal think tanks is different, in many respects, to that which might normally be associated with social movements. The form of collective action characteristically undertaken by movement think tanks is the seminar, the lecture, the edited publication, the research project, and the journal. As well as enabling the movement to intervene in public discourse, such collective action also benefits the movement by supporting and emboldening its participants. Charles Copeman, for example, reportedly claimed that the H. R. Nicholls Society meeting of 1986 provided him with the 'inspiration' to take on the unions in the Robe River dispute later in that year.<sup>13</sup>

After securing a funding base, radical neo-liberal think tanks have been able to provide the movement with continuity. This has helped to sustain the movement over time. By providing a focus for radical neo-liberal ideas and activity, think tanks have also been able to draw new activists into the movement. Conscious efforts at such are evident, for example, in the IPA's organisation of regular lunchtime meetings for young business people, at which guests were encouraged 'to take an interest and get involved in public affairs'.<sup>14</sup>

In the development of radical neo-liberal organisations in Australia, overseas think tanks have been particularly important. Radical neo-liberal organisations such as America's Heritage Foundation, Britain's Institute for Economic Affairs (IEA) and international networks such as the Mont Pelerin Society and the Atlas Foundation,

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<sup>12</sup> David Kemp, 'Liberalism and Conservatism in Australia Since 1944', p. 340.

<sup>13</sup> Copeman quoted in Paul Kelly, *The End of Certainty: Power, Politics and Business in Australia*, 2nd edition, Allen and Unwin, St Leonards, 1994, p.261.

<sup>14</sup> Anon., 'Get involved, says Hugh Morgan', *IPA Review*, August-October, 1988, Vol. 42, No. 2, p. 63.

served as examples for the Australian movement to emulate, and provided ongoing intellectual and organisational support to their Australian counter-parts. Mont Pelerin and Atlas, in particular, provided a focus for the growing international radical neo-liberal movement.<sup>15</sup> They were able to put Australian activists in contact with think tank activists in other countries, and provide first hand knowledge of how to establish successful neo-liberal think tanks in Australia. John Hyde, for example, borrowed heavily from the Atlas Foundation's *Guidelines and Recommendations for Starting an Institute*<sup>16</sup> – a handbook for setting up and maintaining a radical neo-liberal think tank – in establishing the AIPP. Indeed, Hyde describes this resource as a 'bible' among radical neo-liberal think tanks.<sup>17</sup> Furthermore, Antony Fisher, founder of both Atlas and the IEA, was brought to Australia in 1976 by a group of radical neo-liberals in an attempt to draw upon his knowledge and establish an 'IEA-style'<sup>18</sup> think tank in Australia. Longer established and better funded radical neo-liberal think tanks in the USA and Britain have also provided their Australian cousins with tactical advice<sup>19</sup> as well as a stream of high profile international speakers promoting the radical neo-liberal message. Such close ties also allow the regular review of overseas radical neo-liberal literature and the reproduction of articles and speeches by overseas radical neo-liberals in Australian think tank publications. Because of this, the ideas of Friederich Hayek, Public Choice theory, Milton Friedman and developments in neo-liberal theory and neo-liberal policy alternatives have been disseminated in Australia. This has given radical neo-liberal ideas an audience beyond the narrow forums and journals of academic economists.

## Legitimacy and independence

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<sup>15</sup> See Richard Cockett, *Thinking the Unthinkable: Think Tanks and the Economic Counter-Revolution 1931-1983*, Harper Collins, London, 1995, pp. 306-308.

<sup>16</sup> The current version of this is accessible at the Atlas Foundation's website: <http://www.atlasusa.org/toolkit/starterkit.php?refer=toolkit>, at 20<sup>th</sup> March 2004.

<sup>17</sup> John Hyde, interview with the author.

<sup>18</sup> Andrew Norton, 'The CIS at Twenty: Greg Lindsay Talks to Andrew Norton', *Policy*, Winter 1996, pp. 16-21.

<sup>19</sup> For one such example of organisational knowledge exchange see Edward Feulner, 'Ideas, Think-Tanks and Governments: Away from the Power Elite, Back to the People', *Quadrant*, November 1985, pp. 22-26.

As shall be discussed later, the capitalist class was integral to the existence of the movement, and the movement also had a close association with the Liberal Party. It has therefore been incumbent upon movement organisations to establish their credentials as expert commentators on political, economic and social issues, and not to be seen as industry lobby groups, or as sub-committees of the Liberal Party. Additionally, the radical neo-liberal movement does not enjoy anything like a popular support base. Indeed, the participant base of the movement itself is quite small, and this base is predominantly comprised of 'elites' – of some capitalists, but predominantly of those occupying contradictory locations within class relations. The boards and research advisory committees of movement organisations are typically comprised of capitalists and academics (often professors). Capitalists, academics, bureaucrats, politicians and consultants comprise the bulk of those who contribute to movement publications. A look at those who consume movement publications reveals a similar pattern. In 1981, for example, *IPA Review* had a circulation of about 21,000 copies. Although this is good for an intellectual magazine, it is put into perspective by the revelation that over 10 000 of those copies were purchased by corporations or associations and over 7 500 were sent to schools. Only 1668 were listed as being purchased by 'individuals'.<sup>20</sup> Given that the movement rarely attempted the mobilisation of those sympathetic to radical neo-liberal goals or ideology, purchases of movement periodicals is a reasonable gauge of an upper limit of movement participation. Such a figure is quite small. It is even smaller when the provision of copies to schools and workplaces are factored out of the equation. Further evidence of the narrow support base of the radical neo-liberal movement can be found in the Centre for Independent Studies' own assessment of its 'audience'. In its Annual Review 1992-1993, the CIS identified five audiences for its activities:

- i) the academic community, comprised of teachers and students;
- ii) the corporate sector, public and private companies of all sizes;
- iii) the professional community, including doctors, lawyers, engineers;
- iv) political

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<sup>20</sup> Michael Bertram, *A History of the Institute of Public Affairs*, pp. 130-131.

decision-makers, politicians, their advisers and the public sector; v) the media, daily media as well as specialist publications.<sup>21</sup>

This was little different from the situation a decade earlier when the CIS celebrated its sale of books increasing by 200 per cent, but lamented that 'The main market is still university bookshops, academics, schools and government departments'.<sup>22</sup> Because of these factors, establishing its legitimacy and independence has been crucial to the radical neo-liberal movement and its mobilising structures.

Radical neo-liberal think tanks are keen to claim the status of 'independent' research institutes. All stress their non-partisan political nature, as well as taking great pains to argue that, despite the large amounts of corporate funding they receive, they are not beholden to the interests or ideologies of their patrons. There are three main ways in which this occurs. First, much like academic journals, many think tanks list 'research advisory boards' who oversee the research projects of the organisation. Often these boards comprise highly qualified academics, thus enhancing the perception that the organisation is independent rather than partisan, or ideologically motivated. Such academics are generally drawn from humanities and social science disciplines – economics and political science in particular. During the 1980s, one movement organisation, the Centre of Policy Studies, was actually a research institute of Monash University. Another benefit flowing from the high proportion of movement activists who were also academics was that the academy provided them with a stable employment base, access to funds for research and the time to produce publications for the movement. Second, many movement think tanks use non-partisan names, such as the Centre for Independent Studies, or the Australian Institute for Public Policy, thus obscuring their ideological predispositions. Obviously this does not apply to organisations such as the H. R. Nicholls or the Adam Smith Club which have openly partisan names. Third, all radical neo-liberal think tanks have a high proportion of representatives from the business community on their governing boards. This is a

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<sup>21</sup> CIS, *CIS Annual Review 1992-1993*, p. 16.

<sup>22</sup> *Newsletter (Centre for Independent Studies)*, May 1983.

double-edged sword. On the one hand, respected corporate executives possessing awards like the Order of Australia and Knighthoods may add to the legitimacy of an organisation, but on the other hand it does lend support to claims that movement think tanks represent primarily the interests of business. In an attempt to counter the latter claim, think tanks have responded by pointing to the fact that they receive subscriptions from many 'individuals' (including individual corporations) and that no single subscriber has a monopoly on funding. The IPA for example carried the following statement of funding during the 1990s:

The IPA obtains its funds from more than 4,000 private individuals, corporations and foundations. No one source accounts for more than 6.5 per cent of the total and no one industry sector provides more than 16 per cent. No donations from political parties or grants from government are accepted.<sup>23</sup>

### **Tactics of the movement**

Although many diverse tactics have been used by the radical neo-liberal movement, the think tanks in particular have had a clear strategic focus. Speaking of the CIS, Director Greg Lindsay summed up the approach of think tanks in general:

We set out to influence the general ideas environment ... We have talked to the public via the opinion-formers rather than directly to the policy makers.<sup>24</sup>

Apart from a few notable instances (such as 'Project Victoria') the movement's think tanks have not engaged in the direct lobbying of politicians or bureaucrats. They *have* occasionally targeted sympathetic politicians and bureaucrats for lobbying – John

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<sup>23</sup> IPA, 'Where the IPA Stands', *IPAReview*, Vol46, No.3, 1993, p. 56.

<sup>24</sup> 'The CIS at Twenty: Greg Lindsay Talks to Andrew Norton', pp. 16-21.

Hyde for example speaks of the AIPP's database of such people<sup>25</sup> – but they preferred to use their regular journals, publications, seminars, guest speakers and conferences to influence elite opinion, or to work within existing elite structures to shape elite frameworks.

Each movement event has provided several vehicles for the promotion of radical neo-liberal ideology – the ideas or text of a seminar will provide the basis for a think tank journal article, possibly also a more lengthy publication, as well as offering a focus for the mainstream media. It is this last aspect that is particularly important. It is primarily through the mainstream media, especially the print media, that the movement has intervened in public discursive formations. The mainstream media has been the vehicle for the movement's attempt to change the terms of debate, and undermine the assumptions of their opponents in the public arena. The principle behind this strategy is explained by John Hyde:

a cause can gain and maintain a degree of moral superiority by continually and publicly setting its policies in the context of values the public holds already – eg it is just, it is democratic, it will assist the poor, and so on. defence of the same policies in terms of efficiency or ideology will not be as readily accepted.<sup>26</sup>

An important feature of the movement is the concerted assault it has conducted upon its enemies. The main feature of this assault has been discursive. Trade unions, new social movements, social justice advocates, Labor politicians and Wet Liberals have all, at various stages in the movement's history, been labelled as part of a 'new class' of 'politically correct' elites. The movement has charged such groups as constituting 'special interests', and thus as a privileged minority who are unrepresentative of 'mainstream' Australians. The effect of such rhetoric is to demonise, delegitimise and

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<sup>25</sup> John Hyde, interview with author.

<sup>26</sup> John Hyde, 'Winning the Good Fight' in Chris Ulyatt (ed), *The Good Fight: Essays in Honour of Austin Stewart Holmes (1924-1986)*, Allen and Unwin, Sydney, 1989, p. 221.

undermine such groups and individuals, while at the same time drawing attention away from the elite nature of the radical neo-liberals themselves.

### **A class-related movement**

The context for the emergence and rise to prominence of the radical neo-liberal movement was the 'crisis' of Keynesian welfare capitalism that beset Australia and most other capitalist democracies from the mid 1970s onwards. Beginning in the 1970s under the Whitlam Labor government, and growing in both pace and intensity during the 1980s and 1990s, a radical restructuring of the Australian state and economy took place. The institutions of arbitration and tariff protection – the products of Australia's turn-of-the-century class compromise – which had underpinned Australia's economic development during the twentieth century, were gradually dismantled. Concurrently, the post World War Two class compromise, which had bound the leaderships of both the domestic working and capitalist classes to a form of Keynesian welfare capitalism, was abandoned. The new configuration of the state and economy that emerged out of this restructuring can be broadly categorised as a form of neo-liberal capitalism.

Neo-liberal capitalism was not, however, simply an organic outcome of the failures of Keynesian welfare capitalism. Stephen Bell writes of a 'neo-liberal coalition', and Ed Kaptein describes a 'neo-liberal power bloc', which set out to construct a new state project out of the ashes of the Keynesian welfare state.<sup>27</sup> Initially the coalition of interests aggressively pushing the neo-liberal restructuring of the Australian state centred around finance capital, export oriented sectors such as mining and farming capital, small business, with a smattering of others drawn from the ranks of the retail, manufacturing,

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<sup>27</sup> Stephen Bell, *Ungoverning the Economy: The Political Economy of Australian Economic Policy*, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1997, pp. 81, 116-117; Ed Kaptein, 'Neo-Liberalism and the Dismantling of Corporatism in Australia' in Overbeek, Henk (ed), *Restructuring Hegemony in the Global Political Economy: The Rise of Transnational Neo-liberalism in the 1980s*, Routledge, London, 1993, p. 103.

media<sup>28</sup>, construction and tourism sectors. Added to this was monopoly capital, the largest Australian based corporations, which led what Galbraith calls a 'revolt of the rich'.<sup>29</sup>

It was this neo-liberal coalition or power bloc that formed the basis for capitalist support of the radical neo-liberal movement. And it was such support that was primarily responsible for the movement's emergence from relative obscurity to a multi-million dollar, high profile political force in Australia. There have been four main aspects to this.

The central and most important relationship between the radical neo-liberal movement and the capitalist class has been that of funding.<sup>30</sup> Financial support from key sections of the capitalist class provided the radical neo-liberal movement with a secure launching pad for its assault upon the welfare state and the Left in general. It is clear that without such financial support the radical neo-liberal movement would have found it very difficult to achieve the national exposure and impact that it did during the 1980s and 1990s.

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<sup>28</sup> The support of media proprietors for the radical neo-liberal movement no doubt helps to account for the movement's largely sympathetic treatment by the Australian media. Rupert Murdoch's corporations have given direct financial support to the radical neo-liberal movement: for example, News Ltd was listed as a sponsor of The Centre for Independent Studies in 1996. Individually, the Murdochs themselves have been intimately involved in the movement — through Rupert's membership of the Tasman Institute Advisory Council, his delivery of the CIS John Bonython Lecture in 1994, and Lachlan's membership of the Board of Tasman Asia Pacific. Other media corporations have also been important sponsors of the radical neo-liberal movement. The 1996 CIS Annual Review reveals that Cumberland Newspapers, Davies Brothers, the *Hobart Mercury*, John Fairfax Group, Queensland Newspapers and *Time Australia* were, in addition to News Limited, corporate supporters of the think tank. But support from this sector is not new. The Centre's Annual John Bonython Lecture is named after the former owner of the Adelaide Advertiser, who was the inaugural chair of the CIS Board and one of the earliest financial supporters of the organisation. Peter Wright, a financial supporter of Centre 2000, owned the *Sunday Independent*, and, according to his eulogist, Sir Valston Hancock, used the newspaper 'to publicise his economic philosophy' (Valston Hancock, 'Eulogy - Peter Wright', *The Optimist*, November-December, 1985, p. 15).

<sup>29</sup> Galbraith in Stephen Bell, *Ungoverning the Economy*, p. 81.

<sup>30</sup> Investigating the relationship between the radical neo-liberal movement and the capitalist class is not unproblematic. Indeed, its relationship with capital is the issue that the movement is most sensitive and guarded about. Therefore, there is a lack of transparency in public accounts by the movement of this relationship. Detailed and systematic data regarding the relationship between the radical neo-liberal movement and the capitalist class is not publicly available. Australian radical neo-liberal think tanks and forums rarely identify their financial supporters. Where they do, the amounts contributed by each corporation, individual and sector are rarely made public. Furthermore, membership lists of the boards of radical neo-liberal think tanks and forums are not always publicly available. The proceeding analysis therefore draws together the diffuse, publicly available, information which sheds light on the relationship between the radical neo-liberal movement and the capitalist class.

The case of the Centre for Independent Studies illustrates this point nicely. In the mid to late 1970s, before it received substantial corporate support, the Centre for Independent Studies was housed in the back-yard shed of Director Greg Lindsay's suburban home.<sup>31</sup> It managed to organise a few conferences and existed primarily through the hard work of Lindsay and 'some financial support' from businessmen Neville Kennard and Ross Graham-Taylor, which allowed Lindsay to take leave without pay from his high school teaching job in 1979.<sup>32</sup> It wasn't until Hugh Morgan and others provided seed funding of about \$40,000 per year for five years that the Centre was able to establish an office in the commercial district of North Sydney and provide Lindsay with a full-time income for being Director.<sup>33</sup> This secure funding base gave the CIS the platform it needed to promote its message and increase its financial support base. Five years later, in 1984, the total income of the CIS had grown to \$225,273 – of which \$172,514 (76 per cent) consisted of 'donations'.<sup>34</sup> It is reasonable to assume that such 'donations' are derived primarily from corporate sources. By 1996, the yearly income of the CIS had increased to \$971,182 of which \$772,077 (79 per cent) was derived from 'donations'.<sup>35</sup> With only limited income derived from subscriptions, conferences and the sale of publications, corporate donations to the CIS provided the basis of its income. Thus, corporate support was crucial to the inception, growth and longevity of the Centre for Independent Studies.

Similar circumstances prevailed at the other major radical neo-liberal organisations. The Australian Institute for Public Policy (AIPP) derived \$65,116 (62 per cent) of its \$105,025 income from supporters in 1985.<sup>36</sup> In 1989 the dependence on supporters had increased with the organisation's financial report revealing \$191,365 (66 per cent) of its \$286,876

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<sup>31</sup> Andrew Norton, 'The CIS at Twenty: Greg Lindsay Talks to Andrew Norton', pp. 16-21.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 16-21

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 16-21 and Paul Kelly, *The End of Certainty*, p. 47.

<sup>34</sup> CIS, *CIS Annual Review 1984*, CIS, St Leonards, 1984, p. 12.

<sup>35</sup> CIS, *CIS Annual Review 1996*, CIS, St Leonards, 1996, p. 18.

<sup>36</sup> AIPP, *Clear Thinking*, No. 19, January 1987. Although listed as 'Subscriptions', it is clear that this figure represents supporters who subscribed to the organisation rather than those who subscribed to the AIPP's newsletter or other publications and services which are listed under 'Member Subscriptions'. 'Subscriptions', therefore, in this case are akin to 'donations' and are likely to be derived primarily from capitalist sources.

income derived from such sources.<sup>37</sup> By the following year however, the Institute had managed to increase its income while decreasing its reliance upon supporters: \$158,477 (51 per cent) of its \$310,889 income came from its corporate supporters.<sup>38</sup> Figures for IPA revenue for 1988 indicate that around \$800,000 (81 per cent) of its \$978,774 income came from corporate donations.<sup>39</sup>

The second aspect of capital's support for the radical neo-liberal movement has been that of the brokerage of funding from other capitalists for the movement. Typically, those who brokered funding for the movement were both capitalists and movement activists. They served as a bridge between the movement and the capitalist class. As businessmen they were more likely to be able to convince capitalists of the benefits of funding organisations that didn't offer them immediate financial benefits than were the academics who formed the majority of movement activists.

There were numerous ways in which this brokerage function was performed. One was through the system of trustees attached to a number of the radical neo-liberal think tanks. The Centre for Independent Studies, for example, has long had a Board of Trustees consisting of prominent capitalists from the major Australian States who served as a bridge between the think tank and the financial resources of the capitalist class. Another was through actively promoting the radical neo-liberal movement, and the benefits of funding it, within the capitalist class. With reference to Hugh Morgan, perhaps the most important capitalist broker of funding for the movement, the CIS describes this process as 'convincing the business community that *ideas* as well as factories and equipment must be supported'.<sup>40</sup> This brokerage function ranged from the ability to contact fellow capitalists and secure commitments of funding – as was the case with Hugh Morgan's brokerage of funding for the Centre for Independent Studies – to speaking at forums designed to encourage future sponsorship of and participation in the movement, such as the IPA's lunch for young business people at which Hugh Morgan

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<sup>37</sup> AIPP, *Clear Thinking*, No. 37, January 1990.

<sup>38</sup> AIPP, *Clear Thinking*, No. 43, December, 1990.

<sup>39</sup> Michael Bertram, *A History of the Institute of Public Affairs*, MA Thesis, August 1989, NBAC, N136/111, p.117.

<sup>40</sup> Anon., 'CIS Enjoys Tenth Anniversary Tributes', *CIS Policy Report*, Vol. 2, No. 4, August, 1986, CIS News p. i.

'stressed the need for young men and women to take an active interest in public affairs'.<sup>41</sup>

Using their position as owners and controllers of the means of production and the privileged position that this affords, capitalists were also able to provide a number of valuable non-financial or in-kind resources to the radical neo-liberal movement. This is the third aspect of capitalist support for the movement. The control of labour was used to donate staff time to the movement for specific projects. For example, Shell Australia had its staff members do proofing and typing for the book *Australia at the Crossroads*,<sup>42</sup> whilst part of the joint Tasman/IPA Project Victoria was completed with the research support of staff seconded from Westpac.<sup>43</sup> Control of labour also allowed capitalists to purchase bulk orders of movement publications for distribution to their employees. Examples of this were the advance ordering of National Priorities Project publications by member groups<sup>44</sup> as well as the distribution in 1977 by Ansett Airlines and ICI to their employees of 21,000 copies of the IPA's *Free Enterprise* via their own in-house journals.<sup>45</sup>

The class position of capitalists allowed them to offer their authority and prestige to the movement, which, in turn, enabled the movement to reach a wider audience – both within and outside of the capitalist class. One way this occurred was by capitalists launching movement publications. In 1991, for example, Dick Smith launched the IPA's *Reconciling Economics with the Environment*; a book that advocated environmental protection through market mechanisms and claimed there existed no contradiction between unregulated capitalism and environmental protection.<sup>46</sup> Dick Smith, a well known entrepreneur who ran his own nature journal, *Australian Geographic*, offered credibility to the publication.

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<sup>41</sup> 'Get Involved Says Hugh Morgan', *IPA Review*, Vol. 42, No. 2, August-October, 1988, p. 63.

<sup>42</sup> Kasper et. al., *Australia at the Crossroads: Our Choices to the Year 2000*, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Sydney, p. xi.

<sup>43</sup> Anon., 'Project Victoria - The Imperative for Reform', *Tasman Report*, No. 6, March, 1992, p. 7.

<sup>44</sup> Robert Campbell, *National Priorities Project Expenditure Review Marketing Plan*, NBAC N143/289-290.

<sup>45</sup> Michael Bertram, *A History of the Institute of Public Affairs*, p. 130.

<sup>46</sup> Anon., 'New Approaches to the Environment', *IPA Review*, Vol. 44, No. 4, 1991, p. 63.

The final aspect of capitalist support for the movement has been that of board membership. Leading capitalists have often formed a majority on the councils and governing boards of radical neo-liberal think tanks and other movement organisations. The Chairperson of movement organisations has almost always come from the capitalist class. Capitalist membership of movement organisation boards and councils provided the movement with a number of assets. First, it lent legitimacy to the organisations. Having prominent members of the business community on the board helped to increase the credibility of the organisation in the eyes of the media, within the capitalist class and, to a limited extent, amongst the broader public. No doubt for some the endorsement by capitalists of the organisation's aims, symbolised by sitting on a Board, helped to offset the perception that the organisation was simply an academic curiosity. More importantly, however, the fact that capitalists sat on the Boards of such organisations would have helped to assure other capitalists that the organisations were being soundly managed by members of their own class rather than by amateurs.

Corporate funding and support were crucial to the establishment, development and longevity of the radical neo-liberal movement. It was largely through corporate support that the radical neo-liberal movement was able to establish a presence on the Australian political landscape that belied its relatively small social base. By funding the movement, capitalists ensured that radical neo-liberal ideas would circulate from sources other than themselves. This was a way of combating those opposed to the state project of neo-liberalism without capitalists themselves having to 'get their hands dirty', or directly confront their opponents such as unions and environmentalists. Capitalist support for the radical neo-liberal movement was thus part of the broader struggle to secure neo-liberal hegemony in Australia. It constituted a backdoor attempt by capitalists to disorganise the opposition to neo-liberalism and to institute a new hegemonic common sense.

### **Impact of the radical neo-liberal movement**

Although there is not the scope here to offer a detailed analysis of the movement's impact on Australian politics, four main aspects can be identified.

First, the movement played a crucial role in disorganising the opposition to neo-liberalism and in breaking the old alliances underpinning the hegemony of welfare capitalism and the 'Australian Settlement'. The radical neo-liberal movement is composed of ideological warriors who have been relentless in their assault upon the Left, upon notions of social justice and upon those groups tied to the institutions of arbitration and protection. Through forums, movement publications and a largely sympathetic media, movement activists mobilised terms such as 'political correctness', 'special interests', the 'new class', the 'guilt industry' and the 'industrial relations club' to demonise as elitist and self-interested potential opponents of the state project of neo-liberalism. Such language has demonised the movement's enemies by framing them as self-interested and elitist. Success in this venture can be measured by the degree to which such terms and frames have entered mainstream media discourse.<sup>47</sup> Not only have those on the left of the political spectrum been on the receiving end of radical neo-liberal attacks. Those capitalists, primarily from within the manufacturing sector, still wedded to the institutions of arbitration and tariff protections suffered a sustained assault from the radical neo-liberal movement. Movement activists thus became players in conflicts within the capitalist class itself.

Second, the radical neo-liberal movement provided a language and conceptual arsenal from which those attempting to secure the hegemony of neo-liberalism have drawn. The movement provided the forces of neo-liberal hegemony with critiques of welfare capitalism as well as comprehensive alternatives which purported to be both more efficient and more moral. Not only have movement activists demonised the Left, social justice advocates and those tied to the older order of welfare capitalism, but others have enthusiastically mobilised this language for the same purpose. With its fundamentalist,

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<sup>47</sup> See for example Markus's findings regarding the use of the term 'political correctness' in Andrew Markus, *Race: John Howard and the Remaking of Australia*, Allen and Unwin, Crows Nest, 2001, p. 98

'messianic' ideology, the movement offered a justificatory framework for neo-liberalism, portraying what is essentially the sectional interest of particular sections of capital as a universal interest.

Third, the radical neo-liberal movement was instrumental in shifting the goalposts of elite political debate in Australia further to the Right. As a group of fundamentalists convinced of the absolute correctness of their own ideology, radical neo-liberal activists had little concern for the compromises and pragmatic considerations that characterise the political policy-making process. Rather, the public discourse of the movement has been characterised by its radical and dogmatic character. Relatively good access to, and generally sympathetic treatment by, the mainstream commercial news media gave such radical neo-liberal discourse a public platform and lent it a certain legitimacy.<sup>48</sup> Such radical discourse helped to draw the centre of debate to a position more favourable to neo-liberalism.

There is little evidence that the movement was able to exert a significant direct influence upon public policy until 1996. Due to Labor's integral relationship with the trade union movement a sympathetic and close relationship between the radical neo-liberal movement and senior Labor figures was limited to a few individuals. Between 1983-1996 however, the movement was a catalyst for Labor's embrace of neo-liberalism federally. On the one hand, the radical neo-liberal movement was constructed as a threat by the Party's dominant Right faction in order to neutralise opposition to its program of neo-liberal restructuring. Prime Minister Hawke, for example, labelled the H R Nicholls Society 'troglodytes and lunatics'.<sup>49</sup> John Dawkins described the 'new right' as 'treasonous'.<sup>50</sup> By promoting the radical neo-liberal movement as a very real threat, the right-wing and moderate Labor leadership had extra evidence with which to persuade the Left-Labor factions to acquiesce to a less radical, but nonetheless neo-

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<sup>48</sup> For an extended analysis of this see Damien Cahill, *The Radical Neo-liberal Movement as a Hegemonic Force in Australia, 1976-1996*, PhD Thesis, University of Wollongong, 2004.

<sup>49</sup> Mike Taylor and Jenni Hewett, 'Hawke Wades Into Peko Row', *The Australian Financial Review*, 29 August, 1986, p. 1.

<sup>50</sup> Gregory Hywood and Mike Taylor, 'ALP Unites Against Fragmented New Right', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 2<sup>nd</sup> September, 1986, p. 4.

liberal, policy agenda. ALP National President and Special Minister for State, Mick Young, employed such a tactic in 1986 when he implored the party to put aside its differences and unite against the common enemy in the form of the 'new right'.<sup>51</sup> On the other, the movement's alliance with key fractions of capital represented a perceived threat to Labor which could only be headed off through the adoption of policies which incorporated some of the values being espoused by the radical neo-liberals.

Within the federal bureaucracy, there is also little evidence of direct influence. Despite numerous radical neo-liberal activists being drawn from the ranks of the federal bureaucracy, the movement has been largely ineffective at using or influencing the bureaucracy to shape Australian public policy in accordance with radical neo-liberal ideology. This is not to say that the federal bureaucracy was not, by and large, during the 1980s and 1990s, set on a neo-liberal policy course. As Michael Pusey has demonstrated, this clearly was the case.<sup>52</sup> However, although movement activists were instrumental in shifting sections of the federal bureaucracy (most notably Treasury) from a predominantly Keynesian inspired policy framework to a predominantly neo-liberal inspired framework, they were unable to make their own, more radical version of neo-liberalism, the dominant policy framework. Two examples of this are provided by high profile radical neo-liberals John Stone and Des Moore. Both held senior positions within the Treasury, yet neither were able to transform the bureaucracy in their own image. Both resigned, it would seem, at least in part due to frustration at their inability to have their ideological agendas implemented. That the movement's ideology was radical and uncompromising meant that it was unsuited to the realities of policy pragmatism. It also meant that the radical neo-liberals were far removed from a federal Labor government that needed to include concessions, in the form of the 'social wage', if it were to maintain its neo-liberal restructuring of the Australian state.

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<sup>51</sup> Mike Taylor, 'New Push for Labour Deregulation', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 1<sup>st</sup> September, 1986, p. 1.

<sup>52</sup> Michael Pusey, *Economic Rationalism in Canberra: A Nation Building State Changes Its Mind*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1991.

Fourth, the movement was at the forefront of the Liberal Party's embrace of neo-liberalism. Of all the political parties in Australia, the radical neo-liberal movement has been closest to the Liberals. Given the integral links between the radical neo-liberal movement and particular fractions of capital it is little wonder that the Liberal Party has been one terrain for movement activism. Furthermore, the Institute of Public Affairs, which was to become a key movement organisation, was crucial in the formation of the Liberal Party in the 1940s and in the articulation of early Liberal Party policy – although, at the time, the IPA and the Liberal Party were very much part of the Keynesian consensus.

In order to bring about their desired changes the radical neo-liberals worked aggressively, both within and outside of the Liberal Party. Numerous movement activists occupied leading positions within the Liberal Party. Publicly, movement activists attacked the 'Wets' in the Party and called on Liberals to embrace a radical neo-liberal policy agenda. On occasion these calls were backed up with threats of electoral pressure. For example, in 1986 Andrew Hay publicly warned that the Coalition had 12 months to shift to the Right or the new right would form a new party.<sup>53</sup> Within the Liberal Party, radical neo-liberal activists worked and fought through the Party structures to reorient Liberal Party policy. The establishment of the Dries and the Society for Modest Members were both led by movement activists such as John Hyde and Jim Carlton.<sup>54</sup> For the Liberals, the radical neo-liberal movement provided a discursive underpinning for the electoral strategy, gradually articulated during its years in Opposition, which led to its victory in 1996. The radical neo-liberals equipped the federal Liberal Party with a framework – both conceptual and moral – for the commodification of public goods, and, through new class discourse, a discursive arsenal for focussing working class anxieties about neo-liberal restructuring onto the Liberals' opponents: the Left, trade unions and the new social movements.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> Mike Taylor, 'Libs Free, Independent of New Right, Says Howard', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 8<sup>th</sup> September 1986, p. 3.

<sup>54</sup> Paul Kelly, *The End of Certainty*, p. 39; Marion Maddox, *For God and Country: Religious Dynamics in Australian Federal Politics*, Department of the Parliamentary Library, Canberra, 2001, p. 143.

<sup>55</sup> For an extended discussion of this see Damien Cahill, 'New Class Discourse and the Construction of Left-wing Elites' in Marian Sawer and Barry Hindess (eds), *Us and Them: Anti-elitism in Australia*, API Network, Perth, 2004.

The radical neo-liberal movement was able to make these important interventions in the hegemonic battles over neo-liberalism despite its relatively small size. As has been demonstrated, the audience for radical neo-liberal publications could be measured only in the thousands. Furthermore, the movement's activist base was concentrated among capitalists and those occupying contradictory locations within class relations, most notably academics, journalists and bureaucrats. That it was able to have an impact that overcame its small and limited social base was due primarily to the advantage conferred upon it through its links with particular fractions of the capitalist class, and its expressions of the interests of these fractions. While the movement's various strategies and the development of its think tanks allowed it to capitalise upon this advantage, it is the movement's relationship with class power rather than its specific organisational form that was most responsible for its impact.

## **Conclusion**

The Australian new right is most usefully understood as an elite social movement – the radical neo-liberal movement. Like other movements, the main impact of the radical neo-liberals was not direct policy influence, but broader discursive shifts. Between 1983 and 1996, during the last period of Labor federal government, the radical neo-liberal movement played an important role in demonising and disorganising opponents of neo-liberalism; it provided a language and conceptual arsenal from which those attempting to secure the hegemony of neo-liberalism were able to draw; it was instrumental in shifting political debate further to the Right and it was a key player in policy battles within the Liberal Party. A series of think tanks and forums provided the movement with its organisational backbone, however it was the support it received from sections of capital which was crucial in allowing the movement to grow into an important political force in Australia.

Since 1996, a government much more sympathetic to the radical neo-liberal agenda has sat in federal parliament. Indeed, a number of Cabinet ministers during this period – most notably Peter Costello, David Kemp and Rod Kemp – were once key activists within the radical neo-liberal movement. Clearly this will have conditioned the way in which the radical neo-liberal movement operates. It is unlikely, however, to have fundamentally altered the central dynamics of the movement as identified in this paper. A useful agenda for future research, therefore, is to employ the insights from this paper regarding the dynamics and impacts of the radical neo-liberal movement in an analysis of the movement during the Howard years.

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