IN 1977 PENGUIN BOOKS REPRINTED the fourth edition of Donald Horne’s *The Lucky Country* with a front-cover tag-line that proclaimed the book “the classic study of Australia in the sixties”.1 Twenty-one years later, in 1998, the fifth edition of the book, also published by Penguin, carried the front-cover tag-line, “the classic book that explains Australia today”.2 A number of possible explanations present themselves. Perhaps history is circular, and in the late 1990s, after a three-decade break, Australia returned to a wishful Menzies era that valorized again the parochial complacency criticised in the first 1964 edition of *The Lucky Country*. Perhaps Penguin’s editors belatedly discovered Horne’s analysis to be so prescient that it applies to postwar Australian history in general, not just the 1960s, but the 1970s, eighties and nineties. And as Horne has himself suggested, in “the 1990s we again moved into a period of anxieties and discontents”, which gives the book a particular kind of relevance now.3

*The Lucky Country* was scathing about 1960s Australian life. “The present elites in Australia”, Horne wrote,

are mostly second-rate. Many of the nation’s affairs are conducted by racketeers of the mediocre who have risen to authority in a non-competitive community where they are protected in their adaptations of other people’s ideas. At times they almost seem to form a secret society to preserve the obsolescent or the amateurish.4... Australia is a lucky country run mainly by second-rate people who share its luck. It lives on other people’s ideas, and, although its ordinary people are adaptable, most of its leaders (in all fields) so lack curiosity about the events that surround them that they are often taken by surprise.5

Clearly this is a book that was ahead of its time. The nation’s affairs continue to be run by people who show little originality in their adaptations of other people’s ideas, whether it be their slavish devotion to neoclassical economics (or ‘economic rationalism’) or to US-inspired divide-and-rule race-based politics, as seen in the racialized punishment being meted out to asylum seekers and the mostly Aboriginal victims of mandatory sentencing. According to *The Lucky Country* Australian literary and arts criticism also needs a shake-up. Faced by sudden change, a new diversity, and the demise of old certainties, critics “often give a bleak picture”, having been “confused and sometimes made angry by the sudden variety”.6 Thirty-five years later Australia remains full of such critics, banded together in defensive little knots amid the aftershocks of postcolonialism, multiculturalism, feminism, and the culture wars and theory wars of the 1980s and 1990s. It’s difficult not to be reminded of them when reading Horne’s words that “Criticism of literature and the arts is poor, and some of it extremely cliquish.”7

*The Lucky Country* is a distinctive book published at an important historical moment. It captured a mood for change that built in Australia during the final years of the Menzies
government. It advocated closer ties to Asia thirty years before most politicians, looked to America when Australia still looked to England, and lamented the White Australia policy and inferior opportunities and sometimes rights available to Aborigines and women nearly a decade before governments got seriously interested. Other books published between 1960 and the early 1970s demonstrate this same urgent sense that a shift was needed in social and administrative priorities. Robin Boyd’s *The Australian Ugliness* (1960), the Peter Coleman edited collection, *Australian Civilisation* (1962) and his *Obscenity, Blasphemy, Sedition: Censorship in Australia* (1962), Geoffrey Blainey’s *The Tyranny of Distance* (1966), Hugh Stretton’s *Ideas for Australian Cities* (1970), Humphrey McQueen’s *A New Britannia* (1970), Gemaine Greer’s *The Female Eunuch* (1971) and Kevin Gilbert’s *Living Black* (1973), all put new ideas into public circulation and new phrases into the vernacular from a wide range of political standpoints, calling for a reappraisal of attitudes and institutions on the basis that change wasn’t merely desirable but a necessity.

There is currently widespread disquiet in many sectors of Australian society. The gap between rich and poor grows. Indigenous Australians for the most part remain without proper land rights and there is no formal reconciliation or treaty between Indigenous and white Australia. Young people find it difficult to find work, or a foothold in the cultural mainstream. Politicians reach for ever more regressive measures, such as mandatory sentencing and the scapegoating of minorities, in an attempt to woo voters and paper over the cracks of growing social inequality. Mainstream political commentary is weak. Having spruiked the ‘new economy’ as a quantum paradigm shift, commentators failed to predict its demise, just as they failed to predict the demise of the Kennett and Court governments, or the re-emergence of Pauline Hanson’s One Nation party. While the new right dominates public discussion by scoring semantic points over whether the Stolen Generations were stolen or rescued, mainstream political pundits report national affairs as if politicians are soap opera characters, fixating on such things as possible leadership challenges, and there is little analysis of the real forces driving policy or contemporary cultural change. The old, patronizing languages of coterie liberalism that have vied for moral centrality in Australian public life since the Second World War have demonstrably failed, washed up on the rocks of economic rationalism, ‘wedge’ politics and the Wik Ten-Point plan. Confused by sudden diversity, having crash-landed in a postcolonial world, mainstream cultural life remains almost entirely, aggressively, white, and is deadened by complacency and stalemated agendas that often date back decades. As testimony to how backward-looking and timid Australia’s ideas culture has become, the two best-selling social issues-oriented non-fiction books of the past decade have claimed, respectively, that feminism and multiculturalism are conspiracies.

Just as there was a strong need for reform in the Australia of the early 1960s, so there is a strong need now for new ideas to be put in public circulation, new expressions to enter the vernacular of debate, and for the renewal of government and public institutions.

The need for reform is arguably more pressing now than it was in the early 1960s, during the fading years of the Menzies government. The present urgency arises not simply because of the parochialism and lassitude engendered by a government willing to ‘live on its luck’, but because of a bipartisan failure. There is growing disquiet about the blanket adoption of neoclassical economic policy and free-market globalization, and their social consequences. As the public sector has shrunk and been sold off to the private sphere, many people are increasingly anxious about their prospects. This is an era that is socially poor and economically rich, where the gap between the two is the gap between record corporate profits and record flows of capital, and declining public amenity and shrivelled public discourse. Having waited two decades for the promised prosperity of the deregulated, free-market economy to flow through to their lives, many people are dismayed to discover themselves working longer hours, with less job security, higher health, education and child-care costs, reduced access to services, and few electoral alternatives, in an economy that takes as its touchstone the needs of business, not the needs of citizens.
A growing number of people are dismayed to see the increasing power that business, and unelected international bodies that represent business, enjoy on the world stage. In the Third World, corporations have gone “bottom fishing”, as economics commentator Noreena Hertz describes it, playing developing countries off against each other to induce them to offer the most lucrative conditions for investment by reducing regulation, outlawing unions and turn a blind eye to environmental degradation. Their governments have little choice but to take what they can get. In Africa the World Trade Organisation has protected the intellectual property of pharmaceutical companies by preventing the sale of cheap, generic AIDS drugs. In Argentina International Monetary Fund-imposed austerity measures resulted in a wave of suicides by retired people when pensions were cut to below poverty level. In Europe the WTO has protected the interests of giant food companies such as Monsanto by ruling that the European Union can’t ban synthetic hormones in beef, despite strong evidence they cause cancer, reduce male fertility, and result in the premature onset of puberty in children. As Hertz has said, “Globalisation may deliver liberty, but not fraternity or equality.”

To contemplate the task of renewal it is first necessary to recall the legacy of the past three decades in Australian politics.

The present malaise has its genesis in a fundamental shift that began to take place in Australian public life in the mid-1970s. For thirty years after the Second World War, Australia’s major political parties, like those in many Western countries, adopted an unwritten policy of bipartisan consensus across a range of issues. Both shared a broad commitment to ideals such as the maintenance of protectionism, the underwriting of state-owned public broadcasting, the provision of universal education and health services, and a ‘welfare state’, expedited via the principles of Keynesian economics. There was tacit agreement not to campaign on issues that might prove corrosively divisive, such as race, and support for inclusive notions of democracy and human rights on the basis that the state had a duty of care to its citizens. A growing class of intellectuals – academics, editors, broadcasters, legal professionals, writers, public servants – became the stewards of that culture, maintaining its internal mechanisms, and as public intellectuals who brokered ideas in the public domain. Horne, obviously, was one of that class.

The first discordant note from the jug-band of ex-shopkeepers, B-actors and political bovver boys who eventually gathered together to herald the end of post-war consensus, can be heard in the speeches of a now almost forgotten English Conservative politician, Enoch Powell, who dramatically raised his profile in the late-1960s with a series of addresses explicitly designed to divide the community. His topic was race. Britain, he warned, was about to be flooded by a rising tide of African and Asian immigrants. Disenfranchised white working-class voters who felt alienated by the left-leaning consensus elites flocked to Powell, and other Conservative politicians took note. A decade later, in 1978, Margaret Thatcher, then leader of the opposition, became the first Western leader of a major political party to openly challenge postwar consensus ideals when she gave a speech that echoed Powell’s with its warnings that because of Asian immigration Britain might be “swamped by people with a different culture.” A decade later hers speech would be echoed by another aspiring anti-consensus leader when John Howard gave similar warnings, in a display of that originality that Australian politicians are famous for. And that echo would repeat again, when Pauline Hanson warned of a flood of Asian immigrants in her maiden speech to parliament another decade later.

In Thatcher’s Britain decolonization and mass immigration, rampant inflation (‘stagflation’) and rapidly growing unemployment, the oil shocks of the early 1970s and the rise of Asian economies had created an atmosphere of postcolonial self-doubt and economic uncertainty. Like all new right politicians since, Thatcher campaigned on both fronts. On the one hand she mobilized a powerful nationalist discourse that included a coded anti-immigrant rhetoric designed to divide working-class Labour voters against an educated, notionally left-leaning Labour elite. On the other hand she set out to dismantle the apparatus of the postwar welfare state. Privatization, deregulation, and cuts to health, education and welfare, were part of a turn away from Keynesianism towards a new free-market philosophy that argued against state intervention and for the provision of services by the private sector.

No political shift is ever total. This one took place, and continues, as a gradual “war of position” (to use activist and intellectual Stuart Hall’s description) that has encountered pockets of support and resistance all along the way. Yet so much ground has now been lost that any argument for cultural renewal must
necessarily have at its centre a consideration of contemporary economic theories and the new political consensus that has coalesced around them.

Just as the old postwar consensus had its guiding establishment, the new free-market bipartisan consensus is guided by an elite of editors, advisers, broadcasters, columnists, lobbyists, economists, researchers and funders. One difference is that while the postwar consensus elite were generally either publicly funded or held other publicly accountable positions (in the media, for example), the new elite tend to inhabit the less publicly accountable environs of private research institutes, and prefer the subtle advantages of private funding. In America and Europe since the late-1970s governments such as the Thatcher, Reagan and current Bush administrations have relied heavily on the support of new-right think-tanks and the backing of pro-free-market media, including the Murdoch press and prestigious publications such as the Economist.

As the economist Paul Krugman has written, "The role of a few key funders, like the Coors and Olin Foundations, in building an intellectual façade for late twentieth-century conservatism is a story that someone needs to write." In Australia free-market policy emanated from Treasury, was backed by new-right think-tanks such as the Institute of Public Affairs, the Centre for Independent Studies and the Australian Institute of Public Policy, was facilitated by a range of consultants and ex-Treasury officials, and was supported in the press by economist leader-writers and influential free-market editors such as Paul Kelly in his time as editor of the Australian and Max Walsh and P.F. McGuinness in their time at helm of the Financial Review.

Down in the engine room of the new free-market consensus, the new right has worked tirelessly to change attitudes and manufacture new social meanings. As Stuart Hall explained of Thatcherism,

No social or political force can hope to create a new type of society or raise the masses to a new level of civilization without first becoming the leading cultural force and in that way providing the organizing nucleus of a wide-ranging set of new conceptions.

The mining magnate Hugh Morgan has put it less subtly: the big business funding of think-tanks was motivated by a desire to "reshape the political agenda" and "change public opinion", because politicians "only accept what is in public opinion polls, so we have to change public opinion." The new right has an uncanny knack for taking third-rate failed academics and turning them into a major cultural force. It's a slick operation. In every country where conservative governments have sponsored free-market policies, they have also sponsored a range of divisive policies centred on the politics of race, gender, class and sexuality, oriented around normative ideas of national identity and the family. Alongside these run secondary campaigns on public broadcasting and education. In every case new right think-tank-funded researchers (in Australia Barry Maley on family policy at the CIS; Andrew Norton, education, CIS; Lucy Sullivan, family and welfare, CIS; Ron Brunton, Aboriginal issues, IPA; Michael Warby, public broadcasting, ex-IPA, to name a few), have provided the ballast for the campaign, publishing work across a series of non-peer-reviewed pseudo-academic journals and websites that is then repeated as op-ed pieces in daily newspapers, or regurgitated as fact by like-minded newspaper columnists or radio talkback hosts. Piers Ackerman, Bettina Arndt, Michael Barnard, Andrew Bolt, Ron Casey, Frank Devine, Miranda Devine, Michael Duffy, Alan Jones, P.F. McGuinness, Christopher Pearson, Stan Zemanek: you know their work. Recent debates on Aboriginal land rights and reconciliation, the supposed bias of the ABC, higher education funding, the rights of asylum-seekers, and the welfare rights of single parents have all to a greater or lesser extent been pushed along by the new right. Recent publications by Robert Manne and Andrew Markus, for instance, have detailed the key role played by the new right in controversies about Mabo, Wik and the Stolen Generations of Aboriginal children.

In the broader context, the new right -- and the rest of that wheezing jug-band of journalists and politicians who have provided so much of the sound-track for the recent past -- have sought to change popular attitudes to the nature of work, the nature of social equity, the usefulness of welfare, the priorities of democracy, and even the nature of and desirability of...
politics itself. Workers have been encouraged to see themselves as sole contractors; social equity has been reframed as having to do with a level playing field where no-one is disadvantaged at the outset and where no-one therefore requires special treatment; welfare has been recast as something that does more harm than good; democracy has been remodelled to a populist, majoritarian model; and those who challenge this have been disparaged as ‘politically correct’ or hounded as self-interested (‘new class’) acolytes of parasitical groups such as a ‘welfare industry’, a ‘multicultural industry’ or an ‘Aboriginal industry’.

Along the way the new right and their allies have also corrupted and compromised major democratic institutions. They have attacked judicial independence, politicized the public service, allowed business interests to set important political agendas, sought to undermine international conventions and protocols on human rights and the environment, and undermined the human rights of individuals and sectional groups, as well as having skewed media priorities away from the general interest and towards their own, sectional purposes.

Where has the money come from? To follow the new-right audit trail is to note the preponderance of mining company support. The Institute for Public Affairs, which provided anthropological research on the validity of Aboriginal land claims to the Liberal Party during their anti-Mabo and Wik campaigns, has historically been heavily dependant on mining company funding. The board of the Victorian IFA has included James Balderstone, who also served on the BHP board; Hugh Morgan, managing director of the Western Mining Company; and Dame Leonie Kramer, another Western Mining board member.25 It presently includes a representative each from Rio Tinto, Western Mining, BHP, and Shell. Similarly, the Centre for Independent Studies was reportedly seeded by a $40,000 grant organized by Morgan, with ongoing funding provided by Western Mining, CRA, BHP, Shell, and Santos.26 The Tasman Institute, which has been credited with providing the ideological blueprint for the Kennett Government in Victoria, was sponsored by BHP, CRA, Esso, MIM, Shell, Woodside Petroleum and Western Mining.27

The new right, in short, have sought to remake society in their own image, and have spent up big to do it. Yet despite all their efforts, the new right’s achievements don’t include economic success. Not, at least, in the terms originally advertised.

The amount of ink spilt to support contemporary free-market economic theory is so excessive as to look suspicious. This is an era of incredible prosperity, write the world’s editorialists, financial columnists, press secretaries and global soothsayers. It’s difficult to deny. There has never been more money in more rapid circulation. But an era of prosperity for whom? One assumption of postwar consensus was that the accumulated wealth of society could be managed downwards. Corporate profits were routinely assumed to be of indirect benefit to all. They created jobs and government revenue via taxes. In the new labour efficient, tax minimized free market, wealth circulates in an increasingly self-contained world. Politicians, editorial writers and economic commentators might have embraced the new economic consensus, but when it comes to corporate profits and increased global wealth they prefer to talk as if we’re still in the old world, and the new wealth is available to all.

Despite the attractive images in the global soothsayers’ crystal balls, the free market has failed to redistribute wealth. Capital has tended to gather where capital already is, and there are now whole geographical areas and social sectors that are largely bypassed by capital flows. This is because the free market is primarily concerned with wealth creation rather than wealth distribution. During the 1980s era of ‘trickledown’ Reaganomics, family income declined in every sector of US society except the top 10 per cent, where it increased 19.5 per cent.28 According to another study, two-thirds of the increase in US wealth during the 1980s went to the richest 1 per cent of families.29 In Australia between 1976 and 1992 “the proportion of Australian households with an income of more than $72,000 (based on constant 1991/92 values) rose from 15 to 30 per cent [while] at the same time, the proportion of households with an income of less than $22,000 rose from 20 per cent to 30 per cent”.30 According to recent Bureau of Statistics figures, Australia is now one of the most economically unequal countries in the Western world.31

The global picture shows few signs of the promised new dawn: between 1960 and 1990 the percentage of global income going to the poorest 20 per cent of the global population was halved.32

The theory has also failed to deliver even in its own terms. It has failed to achieve ‘market equilibrium’, provide stability, or end boom-bust cycles.33 Despite decades of sometimes draconian ‘reform’, it has failed to correct labour market failure – not all who are willing to work can find a job.34 Even the
most vaunted success of neoclassical economics, inflation control, is arguably largely a result of the deep recessions of the early 1980s and early 1990s.

Structural problems are starting to emerge because, unlike governments, markets can’t plan ahead and corporations are tending not to. One outcome of the privatization of utilities has been the running down of infrastructure to the point where it is estimated Australia will have chronic energy shortages within five years. Short-term ideological imperatives are being allowed to win out over longer-term planning elsewhere too. Free-market ideology has resulted in education cuts and falling standards, yet, as the population ages and the relative size of the workforce shrinks, future productivity will need to increase if Australia is to remain ‘competitive’. Nor has the mantra that equates competition with efficiency been borne out by experience. The economist Steve Keen gives one example:

Australia’s ‘competitive’ roll-out of optical cable, in which two suppliers competed to provide physical cable links to households and firms, led to the richer and more densely populated parts of the country having two optical cables running past every house, while poorer and less densely populated parts of the country had none.

Other so-called productivity and efficiency gains promoted by free-marketeers seem little more than simple sleights of hand. One method of reducing labour market failure is to offer workers an increased variety of wage/time options for work performed, as part of ‘freeing up’ the market to make it operate more efficiently. In practice this has amounted to no more than reducing welfare eligibility entitlements to push the unemployed into casual and part-time work. Just three hours work a fortnight is enough to shift people to where they don’t count in the unemployment figures, while others have withdrawn from the labour market altogether. Increased productivity and efficiency are furphies when the costs to society that result from increased division and stratification remain uncalculated. Amid the gallons of ink spent daily on the topic of economic ‘reform’, there is little discussion of these costs.

But these points about the political and economic legacy of the past few decades are more than obvious. We knew the answer to the sums already. Most free-market economic ‘reforms’ have little basis in performance. Almost all are ideologically driven and conform to the definition of right-wing conservatism proposed by the social theorist Sara Diamond when she says that to “be right wing means to support the state in its capacity as an enforcer of order and to oppose the state as a distributor of wealth and power downward and more equitably in society”. A fundamental strategy of the new right since the 1970s has been to cede power away from labour and back to capital, and to dismantle apparatus that might distribute wealth downwards, even by stealth. Recent increases in job contracting and the use of casual labour, for example, effectively bypass equal pay and anti-discrimination legislation designed to provide employment parity for women.

The question is, what to do?

In Europe the WTO has protected the interests of giant food companies such as Monsanto by ruling that the European Union can’t ban synthetic hormones in beef, despite strong evidence they cause cancer, reduce male fertility, and result in the premature onset of puberty in children.

Horne’s tone in The Lucky Country is confident. The Australia of The Lucky Country is a nascent project, ready for a civilizing pen. Today there’s uncertainty about how to articulate a national project, or even if such a project is desirable. The most commonly canvassed types of reform aren’t inspirational, they’re instrumentalist. Political leaders aren’t visionaries, but clerks who keep an eye on the national accounts. People don’t look forward, they look back. They aren’t idealistic, they’re nostalgic. The present consensus extends so far into the apparatus of opinion- and policy-making that there seems little room for alternatives. Free-market economics and globalization have been sold as ‘inevitable’ and adopted with an air of resignation that makes talk of the future deadening.

To speak of renewal is to look forward when others seem to look back.

To hear people speak sometimes is to wonder if there’s a great mystery about social change. There’s no great mystery. Social change is what happens when people stop complaining and start organizing. The present push for reform in Australia is emerging in a surprisingly wide variety of places. It’s emerging both as a popular movement for change and as
an intellectual movement among academics and other thinkers. It's emerging across the mainstream political spectrum, in the National and Liberal party backbench and in sections of the Labor party, as well as from the side, from the Greens and the Democrats. It's emerging in a range of groups as diverse as feminists, farmers, Aborigines, small business people (alienated by the ever-growing bias of government towards big business), anti-corporate-globalization protesters, ethnic community organizations, and environmentalists. What remains is for these disparate forces to come together around a compelling, popular reformist narrative, and for a new set of ideas to enter the vernacular and form the basis for a new, broad-based consensus.

There can be no easy return to the easy assumptions of postwar consensus culture, despite their sometimes popular and sometimes nostalgic appeal. The free-market revolution has run alongside another marked shift that has been no less revolutionary. Since the late 1940s immigration has been a major contributor to Australian population growth. Between 1947 and 1997 the proportion of the population born overseas increased from 10 per cent to 23 per cent. A further 27 per cent had at least one overseas-born parent. Half the population, in other words, has some sort of postwar immigrant background. Over the same period the ethnic background of immigrants has changed markedly. In 1947 81 per cent of the immigrant intake came from the main English-speaking countries. By 1997 this had halved to 39 per cent. In the early 1970s there was a marked increase of immigrants who were visibly 'other', who came mainly from South East Asia.

Both postwar consensus and free-market consensus culture are responses to the problem of managing diversity. Postwar consensus culture operated as a top-down monoculture that attempted to manage diversity through assimilation, creating 'slots' for different sectional groups in a centrally managed economy. There is a snapshot of the weaknesses of this culture — its assumptions about who fits where in the social hierarchy — in the current nostalgia among what remains of the postwar-style liberal cultural elite for the loss of the so-called public intellectual. Over the past decade or so many figures have emerged who might qualify for the title of public intellectual, but the fact that many are black tends to exclude them from the liberal elite view. They appear, still, on the horizons of middlebrow liberal debate, as victims in need of white charity.

Free-market consensus culture attempts to manage social diversity by reducing the range of social and cultural differences to a single principle of market exchange. Potentially fractious encounters with the 'other' become simply an opportunity for global trade, and those cultural differences that exist within a given market are flattened by the primacy of a shared economic imperative, figured as the country's need to become 'globally competitive'. Those who refuse to subjugate their cultural identity to market primacy find themselves cast as social aberrations and an unreasonable obstacle to the trading rights of others — the recent aggressive attacks on Aboriginal groups, for example, can be seen as a response to their refusal to fit into the free market system as simple agents of exchange, and their determination to claim rights and identities elsewhere.

As the sociologist Michael Pusey accurately predicted in 1993, "[s]ocial integration will be the central problem that will stand over politics in this decade just as surely as 'efficiency' had done in the last". A new consensus, unlike the previous two, will need to allow for the diversity and autonomy of its various member groups. Such a consensus won't involve merely tinkering at the edges of the present system, through, say, the adoption of some kind of 'third way' — as Graham Sewell wrote in a recent _overland_, the Third Way is more like a Middle Way "where the brutalities of economic rationalism are moderated by the hand-wringing platitudes of bourgeois liberalism". It will work at the level of ideas, and involve a sustained reckoning about the possible shape of a representative, postmodern democracy.

The first part of this reckoning will involve a sustained re-engagement with two central democratic institutions — government and the mainstream media. In the first instance this will require a sustained conversation about how a postmodern democracy might look. Is it possible to imagine a democratic model that can accommodate expressions of fundamental social and cultural difference (without fetishizing them), while articulating the shared objectives that different groups have in common? To achieve such a democracy will involve a thoroughgoing interrogation of the whiteness of Australian culture. Where, for example, are the Vietnamese newspaper columnists? Why do almost all the non-white television anchors appear on SBS? Why are Aboriginal intellectuals rarely asked about anything other than 'Aboriginal issues'?

Do national governments still have a use? Given
that global communications networks, global flows of capital and such diverse things as international human rights covenants and WTO trade rulings have ended national borders, it’s easy to suspect not. Some of the most crucial forms of politics have always been unofficial – labour organizing, street meetings, and so on – and since governments have increasingly abdicated responsibility on vital issues by failing to sand up to large corporations, grass roots activism has become even more important. In Europe consumers, not governments, for instance, have led the successful campaigns against GM foods through supermarket boycotts.

Yet, as Noreena Hertz points out, this type of activism has disadvantages. Shareholder activism and the direct lobbying of corporations ultimately puts faith in the market, not in politics. Supermarket and shareholder activism favours the middle classes, who have money to invest and who can afford alternative, often more expensive, brands, and can lead to a tyranny of those who can protest most effectively. Allowing corporations to set the limits of social acceptability is dangerous because

social investment and social justice will never become their core activity [and] their contribution to society’s needs cannot be thought of as a reasonable proxy for state responsibility... Downgrading the role of the state in favour of corporate activism threatens to make societal improvements dependent on the creation of profit.49

In an era of globalization government remains remarkably centralized (as most lobbyists and activists know). Nations are still dominant international ‘actors’, and set the vast majority of the policy that affects people’s everyday lives. Keeping the ideals of democratic process alive is crucial. The process of building a new consensus will mean getting serious about putting political ideas to government, having marshalled a growing body of dissent behind them. The process of renewal will need strong advocates in the mainstream political parties, anc in the mainstream media. In the first edition of The Lucky Country Home wrote: “What has happened in Australian publishing is that while the newspapers stood still, the field for experiment moved into new publications.”44

The situation is similar now. In an increasingly two-tier society, official opinion and an identifiable, growing slab of public opinion have parted company. Today’s newspapers no longer broker new ideas, nor do the mainstream electronic media – only people who work for them think that they do. Debate takes place elsewhere, in list-serv email groups, in journals such as overland, Arena, and Meanjin (all of which have to some degree reinvented themselves in response to the present crisis), on websites such as the Third-World Network and Indymedia, in academic forums in the humanities, at new small presses such as Common Ground, and in alternative newspapers such as the Koori Mail and the Paper. Meanwhile, the mainstream media talks corridor politics and leaked memos.

Yet the task of renewal will necessarily involve the mainstream media. None of the existing alternative forums is influential in mainstream political discussion. As yet there is no website capable of setting a national agenda. None reaches a sizeable proportion of the Australian public in the way that a newspaper or Alan Jones’s radio talkback show reaches hundreds of thousands of people daily.

The alternative media are often class-bound. Over half Australia’s households have no internet connection, and amidst the web-hype it’s easy to forget that over half the world’s population has never used a phone. Whereas alternative media attract sectional, often tertiary-educated groups and tend to lack geographical location, newspapers and the electronic media, like party politics, work mostly according to a logic of place and attract users across the spectrum of society. The alternative media are crucial, but the ideas developed there will have been of little use if they don’t reach a wide, cross-sectional audience. There are lessons to be learnt here from the new right, on how to establish clear houses that promote ideas into mainstream media looking for cheap, compelling, off-the-rack copy. Thousands of people have attended Save the ABC rallies, attracting relatively little media coverage. Fewer than forty people, including speakers, attended a recent IPA-promoted anti-ABC conference, but the event generated coverage in almost every major Australian newspaper, in-

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cluding the reprinting of many of the speakers' papers as opinion pieces. This might be a triumph of conservative politics in an era of conservative media, but it's also a triumph of organization.

The second part of this reckoning is even less glamorous. One reason the present movement against free-market philosophies has failed to make much headway is that its various stands have failed to unite around a credible alternative economic model. This isn't to suggest that the operations of markets

If the operations of the free market are inevitable, why do they need so many foot-soldiers? Why do they need the armies of compliant journalists; the proselytising politicians; the legions of think-tanks; the sending of think-tank advisers to small countries to manage their economies and impose regimes of privatization on them . . .

should determine the basis for social life, but is merely to acknowledge the practicality that no change will take place without the promotion of a popular, workable alternative model for economic globalization. Without such a model the present push for reform will stagnate as mere dissent. A new economic model would need to promise prosperity and equity across the range of social difference and groups of different meaning, and at the same time allow sectional groups autonomy and the power to participate on their own terms, reinstating human agency at the centre of the economic picture without at the same time reinstating traditional hierarchies.

This new economics would provide a practical basis for business and acknowledge that some ideas derived from free-market economics have proved both useful and genuinely popular, though it would necessarily repudiate the refusal of neoclassical economics to adapt to finite resources. Such a model would need to critique 'magic box' theories of globalization, defining the things that make the present model so objectionable - its basis in corporatism and anti-democratic new-right philosophy, its clumsy attempts to manage diversity and clandestine Western suprematism, and the power it grants unelected bodies to impose draconian, heavily ideological solutions - while offering a viable alternative model underpinned by more clearly democratic management priorities. The conversation surrounding such a model would need to argue the difference between iniquitous models of globalization, and the usefulness of such things as global communications networks and properly negotiated global conventions on such things as human rights and the environment.

The danger is that both postwar forms of Australian consensus have pandered to populist movements with a strong racist component - the first dating back to Deakinist protectionism and the White Australia policy with its fears of an Asian invasion, the second in response to a change in immigration mix in the mid-1970s, with its fears of an Asian invasion - and that without credible economic alternatives the present mood for change will transmogrify, as it already has in places, into proposals for an even more exclusionary and punitive social contract based in a fear of diversity.

To campaign for widespread reform is to acknowledge that the most vital culture of democracy that has been under attack is the culture of political agency itself. Totemic free-market consensus texts such as Frances Fukayama's The End of History and the Last Man have promoted the idea that politics is simply over. Just as political parties are no longer bastions of idealism, but tout themselves merely as the better 'managers', so expressions of political will - such as recent anti-globalization protests - have been reported as aberrations and throwbacks to an earlier, now obsolete, age of protest. Yet the behaviour of the free-marketeers themselves suggests otherwise. The first thing we know about the present model for globalization as a result of the incessant repetition of what really amounts to nothing more than a rumour, is that it is inevitable. Inevitable for whom? The logic of inevitability is itself of a piece with the underlying neo-Darwinist free-market philosophies that cede all power to the survival of the fittest in the marketplace, understating the possibility of human agency.

Yet to hear such talk is to wonder, who writes the cheques? And why is such talk even necessary? If the operations of the free market are inevitable, why do they need so many foot-soldiers? Why do they need
the armies of compliant journalists; the proselytising politicians; the legions of think-tanks; the sending of think-tank advisers to small countries to manage their economies and impose regimes of privatization on them; the long phone conversations between Rupert Murdoch and his editors; the ever-increasing round of annual conferences; the endless lobbying and funding of free-market think-tanks and research institutes by corporations such as General Electric, Hewlett-Packard, Texas Instruments, Citicorp, Chase Manhattan, Shell Oil and Western Mining; the creation of endless pseudo-academic journals pushing dodgy research outside the networks of peer-reviewed academic journals; the creation of numerous research fellowships in corporate-funded research institutes; the opinion-massaging editorialists; the creation of international sanctioning bodies; the making of large corporate donations to those bodies; and the rendering of the aims of those bodies into coercive international laws?

None of these things is about a natural process of inevitability. All of these things are about human agency. They are testament, in fact, to the power of human agency, and to the possibility that people can intervene in the operations of markets.

This has been a long political cycle, economically rich yet socially poor, centred on a politics of divisiveness and naturalised inequality, in a tyranny of the economically productive over those deemed unproductive. We are yet to reach the end of that cycle, but we won’t reach it by failing to act, or by letting ourselves be convinced that the future is not in our hands. Reinventing political agency is everything in the present struggle. It is both a basis for everything that needs to be done, and a reminder that there are ways out of that increasingly dark tunnel Australians entered in the mid-1970s.

ENDNOTES

8. Despite its presence, The Lucky Country nevertheless underestimates the prior capacity of Australian society to criticise and reinvent itself. According to The Lucky

Country (in a remark that appears across the span of editions), there has been a “determined lack of serious consideration of human destiny” in Australia, and a lack of “prolonged consideration of the Australian condition” (1966, p.233; 1988, p.225). As such the book sells short a long, almost continuous tradition of Australian social reflection and reform, of which it is itself part. Joseph Furphy’s Such is Life (1903) is arguably near the beginning of such a tradition. Sir Keith Hancock’s Australia (1930), Arthur Phillips’ The Cultural Cringe (1950), and Vance Palmer’s The Legend of the Nineties (1954), all point to a strong consideration of ‘human destiny’ and ‘the Australian condition’ that was taking place in the period before the publication of The Lucky Country. As Nettie Palmer asked in her 1942 essay, ‘Australia – an International Unit’, “what is the human value of this last continent?” (in Jenny Lee, Philip Mead and Gerald Murmane (eds), The Temperament of Generations: Fifty Years of Writing in Meanjin, MUP, 1990, p.14.) With one eye on Australia’s easy-going failure to consider its destiny and one eye on the Cold War, The Lucky Country instead promotes a modern American-style cosmopolitanism, idealizing a Kennedy cabinet where half the members read the anti-Communist liberal journal, Encounter. (1966, p.237) Having neglected a tradition of (often left-leaning) past reformers, the book anticipates the formation of a new community of modern intellectuals of the sort that assembled in the 1960s in the US and Europe, promoted by the anti-Communist, CIA-sponsored, Congress for Cultural Freedom, which funded both Encounter and Quadrant, which Horne co-edited between 1963 and 1966. Horne was also a member of the executive of the Australian Association for Cultural Freedom between 1962 and 1966.


15. Hertz.

16. Private Conservative party polling had showed that 48 per cent of the electorate had heard Powell’s ‘Rivers of Blood’ speech and 67 per cent thought it ‘made sense’,

17. Smith, p.179.


34. Barrett, p.132.


40. Markus, p.11.


43. Hertz.


45. As Michael Pusey has commented, for all its Darwinism, neoclassical economics is characterized by “an almost absolute refusal to adapt demands to the increasingly finite resources of the (physical) environment”. Pusey, 1991, p.21.


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