3 Social Conservatism / Mutual Obligation / Social Coalition
Social conservatism, mutual obligation and the social coalition

This chapter investigates the ideological underpinnings of the Australian Government's social programs paying particular attention to income support and industrial relations agenda. It will examine the reasons social conservatism and radical economic liberalism have such appeal to the Howard Liberal National Party Government and to some in the right faction of the Labor Party. The chapter will survey the manner in which dependency and moral jeopardy debates are constructed. It is contended that dependency rhetoric is utilised not to abolish dependency but to shift it from the State to the family and the community.

The shift of responsibility for income support from the State to a private family function began in the mid 1980s and has extended the length of time individuals need to rely on close relatives. Buoyed by 'user pays' rhetoric John Dawkins, the Minister for Education under Hawke, moved to apply a Higher Education Charges Scheme (HECS) which charged students part of the costs of their tertiary education (Edwards et al. 2001 Ch. 4). It was possible for students to pay the fees at the time of study or to defer payment. Subsequently Brian Howe, the Minister for Social Security and Health in the Hawke Government, introduced a Medicare Co-charging scheme for medical services. Howe's plan was met with widespread outrage and was abandoned but the HECS debt continues to increase. The continuance of HECS and the dropping of the Medicare co-charge may, in part, be because gaining a tertiary education is regarded as a privilege for the few whereas Medicare was seen as universal and the co-charge as an imposition on the many.

The Liberal Government introduced the Common Youth Allowance which forced many young people to rely on their families for support rather than receiving income support from the State in their own right. In some cases students up to the age of thirty are regarded as family dependents. On first look it may appear that the Howard Government's socially conservative agenda is a home grown phenomena. This chapter will test that perception. In order to do that it will first be necessary to survey the prevailing ideologies which inform and structure Australian society.

There are a multitude of ways of describing ideologies; but the system employed here is a modified traditional English political science classification coupled with a description of ideologies which have grown out of and which are reinforced by Australian social practices. None of these practices is unique to Australia, however the way in which they are combined in this country results in somewhat different outcomes to that found in other nations. My analysis is carried out in the traditions of modernity eschewing postmodern analysis (Schwarzmantel 1998).

Ideologies

The basic components of an ideology are firstly that there is an element of closed thinking, of pre-explanation. "Ideologies aspire to, and pretend to, systematic completeness (Shils 1968 p. 66)". Further they evaluate social facts selectively and can be seen as a system of symbols (Johnson 1968 p. 83.). Ideologies demand a "high degree of explicitness" and a general or wide explanatory power (Shils 1968 p. 70).

Ideologies address themselves to basic explanations of social phenomena and must be capable of being held by a group of people. This distinguishes ideologies from idiosyncratic views. Finally, ideologies, appear to their proponents to have a high degree of internal congruity.
Such a definition of ideology is not universally accepted. For instance, Therborn's concept of ideology is one that does "not necessarily imply any particular content (falseness, miscognition, imaginary as opposed to real character), nor ... assume any necessary degree of elaboration and coherence (1980 p. 2)".

Ideologies invariably acquire detractors from amongst those who hold differing philosophical and political positions. Marx, seeing the system of beliefs which he had created as scientific, equated ideologies which supported the bourgeoisie with false consciousness. Merton and many other functionalist writers of the 1950s and 1960s, believing they were creating a value free sociology, saw their opponents such as C. Wright Mills as purveyors of misleading abstract ideas; the term ideology has had this pejorative meaning since the early 19th century (Gould 1964 p. 316, McCarney 1980 p. 4).

Ideological features can be found in any theory. The adoption of any particular theory stems in part from its suitability as an explanation of social facts in ways compatible with the ideological position of the writer. No longer is it academically respectable to suggest, as Merton and many other functionalist writers once did, that they were in the process of developing value free theories of social events. This has led some writers to suggest there is little point in distinguishing between theory and ideology. Regis Debray asserts that "In reality, all theoretical analysis is of its very essence polemical, a 'committed' form of critique; Marx himself constructs Capital on a critique of political economy, starting from - and against - Smith, Ricardo and Say (1975 pp. 161-162, Pinker 1982 pp. 4-11)".

I interpret ideology in a way which is consistently removed from Marx's essentially 'critical and negative' conception (Larrain 1983 chs. 1-6). Whilst I have been influenced by Gramsci, Althusser, Poulantzas and other Marxist writers, the sense in which I use the concept does not fit neatly into any particular Marxist school of thought. At the same time, I utilise ideology to convey a narrower meaning than the 'total conception of ideology' which Mannheim has outlined but one which is basically a positive formulation (Mannheim 1936 p. 49). I believe that societal units other than the ruling class generate ideologies and are in Althusser's words 'captives of those ideologies' (1979 pp. 234-236).

In this book the word 'ideology' is employed to describe a pattern of beliefs and concepts "which purport to explain complex social phenomena with a view to directing and simplifying socio-political choices (and realities) facing individuals and groups (Gould 1964 p. 315)". The term 'social theory' is used to describe the codified abstract conceptions of a causal nature which seek to explain actions by groups or societies. Embodied in this use of the term is the implication of predicability, of replication, and of on-going scientific debate. Any theory which seeks to describe human actions will be imbued with, or perhaps will arise out of, or will seek to promote ideological interpretations of 'social reality'.

Often ideologies underpinning welfare programs cannot be dealt with as discrete entities: frequently there is a blurring of ideological approaches. For instance, few distinctly conservative streams of thought structure social welfare practice in Australia. It is far more common to encounter an amalgam of conservative and liberal ideas (Howard 1999, 2000, Pinker 1998) and
at times these show signs of having been influenced by social democratic thought (Henderson 1975 Vol. 1, ch. 6, Sullivan 1998, Page 1998).

The merging of differing ideological streams can mean that social welfare practice is formed by a combination of poorly articulated, loosely defined ideological forces and this results in a lack of clarity about the belief structures which have informed that practice. A common outcome of this is a general acceptance of the existing processes rather than an awareness of, and critical approach to, the ideologies, structures and practices which have come to make up the welfare state in Australia.

**Gender, race, age, class, disability and locality**

During most of the first century following Karl Marx's death, Marxists and socialists employing a particular interpretation of historical materialism relied almost exclusively upon class cum economic explanations of the social forces affecting society.

- During the 1970s a group of anti-colonial writers of Marxist persuasion (Fanon 1971, Cabral 1973 and Debray 1975) in particular drew attention to the issue of race as an integral part of the European economy and social relations (see also Leonard 1997 pp. 20-22).
- Over a slightly longer time frame locality was identified as a point of discrimination (Frank 1964, Stretton 1978, Lawrence 1987).

A considerable body of literature argues that class and economic features only partly account for the major modifying forces in capitalist and sometimes socialist societies. Writers have pointed to sexism, racism and discrimination on the basis of ability, age and locality as crucial factors affecting the nature of advanced societies. My view is that discrimination on the basis of disability, gender, race, age, locality and class are basic, organising principles in Australia, that they interact with each other and are inherent in the ideologies which underlie welfare practice. The manner in which each of these forms of discrimination are played out depends in part upon which political ideological positions prevail in the government of the day and for this reason such political orientations will now be examined.

**Conservative Perspectives**
There are some conservatives who claim an antiquity for their ideology dating back to Plato. The birth of the modern British conservative tradition is seen, however, as being a late 17th century phenomenon. The philosopher Hume, writing in reaction to the Enlightenment, set out to turn reason on its head (Selby-Bigge 1902), arguing strongly for an organic conception of society. Burke, following in this tradition, made his most articulate conservative pronouncements in the years immediately after the French Revolution before the Reign of Terror began (O'Brien 1968). Burke's writings are clearly a reaction to the 'excesses' of the French revolution. Thus the foundations of British conservatism arose in response to, and in an attempt to negate, the philosophies of the Age of Reason rather than as a summation of the established ideas of the day.

The conservative tradition is closely associated with the ideas of Englishmen such as Burke and later Disraeli, with respect for antiquity, concern for precedent, abhorrence of planned (particularly 'utopian') social change, and concomitant reliance on 'natural' evolving of social systems (Dahlke 1964 p. 129-130). Built into conservative thought is a defence of established order, the belief in the inherent imperfection of human beings, and the necessity of privilege and leadership, all of which are founded in a fear of 'the tyranny of the majority' which in turn is associated with a belief in the primary role of property as essential to liberty and social order (Rossiter 1968 pp.290-294, de Tocqueville 1862). Burke argued that:

society and the state are not created by man's conscious reason in the form of a contract; they emerge as an organic growth. Traditions and customs are ancient and important; they embody a wisdom more profound than reason. Institutions must be adapted to new situations, but the changes must be organic and from within, not violent and from without. Religion is the necessary basis of social stability. The hierarchy of society is a natural order difficult to improve. The doctrine of progress is dangerous (cited in Martindale 1970 p. 6).

Harrington (1977) has commented that:

The preference for the unplanned, and even the irrational, as opposed to conscious government policy ... is a fundamental conservative theme, (portrayed in) the nostalgia for the vanished Gemeinschaft, the suspicion of the contemporary Gesellschaft. From Burke to Dostoyevsky to Spengler it has been at the very centre of conservative thought (p. 290).

The central features of the conservative position, in the twentieth century, are:

- support for traditional values, such as the family,
- the importance of work,
- sexual restraint,
- the sanctity of private property, and
- the belief in the inherent imperfection of human beings.

Conservatives support the continued existence of inequality and minimal welfare (of the residual kind) because of their fear that planned change will undermine the natural order. They place strong reliance on 'freedom', but it is a particular form of freedom, it is a liberty to continue as they have always done in the absence of governmental 'interference'. They are opposed to regulation of the productive processes.

Conservatives place stress on freedom from restraint, yet they see the rights of the individual as being constrained within a concept of the 'common good' as defined by the ruling class.
"Individualism is not a ticket to non-conformity. By stressing voluntary collaboration between individuals and by exalting the virtues of social institutions, individualism does not open the flood gates to libertarianism (George & Wilding 1976 p. 24)." Lukes (1973) makes the point that conservative thought in the early nineteenth century was nearly unanimous in condemning the rights of the individual: to exemplify this stream of thought he quotes Burke in his "Speech on the Economic Reform" when he said "Individuals pass like shadows; but the Commonwealth is fixed and stable (p.3)".

Welfare relief provided by government is seen to weaken individuals' attachment to traditional loyalties and allegiances. It is for this reason that conservatives want to see charity based, privatised welfare systems where the process of less eligibility is enforced in ways akin to the poor law system in 17 - 19th century England where the locus of help was the family and parish rather than the State (Barry 1998, Henriquees 1979).

Liberal ideology

The liberal tradition is closely associated with the ideas of John Locke and John Stuart Mill, and a liberal collectivist stream with Hobbes, Jeremy Bentham and other utilitarians who popularised the phrase 'the greatest good for the greatest number'. Bentham developed a complex calculus of pleasure (good) and pain (bad) with the intention of introducing enlightened social legislation in line with morality (Sills, Vol. 17 pp.226-227). Whilst there are elements of egalitarian principles present in the writings of Bentham, they are tentative steps towards equality. The liberal collectivists' link with conservative ideas about the 'common good' is a major point of disjunction with the individualist strand of liberal thought.

Hobbes conceived of the natural state of man as resulting in the 'war of all against all' in which the life of man is solitary, poor, nasty, brutish and short and as a result conceded the need through some form of social contract to limit 'natural rights' (Sills, Vol. 17 pp.230). Locke was opposed to the Hobbesian suggestion of surrendering natural rights to the sovereign; in its place he proposed that through mutually contracting to protect each other's rights, people would be freed to pursue their individual self-interest (Sills, Vol. 17 pp.231). The liberal position is notable for its reliance upon:

- individualism,
- freedom,
- self-help,
- constitutionalism,
- property,
- progress, and
- the free play of market forces.

Lukes notes that the use of the word 'individualism' arose in France and that there the concept was criticised by conservatives as well as by followers of Saint-Simon and other socialists (Lukes 1973 ch. 1).

It was in the United States that 'individualism' primarily came to celebrate capitalism and liberal democracy. It became a symbolic catchword of immense ideological significance, expressing all that has at various times been implied in the philosophy of natural rights, the belief in free enterprise, and the American dream (Lukes 1973 p. 26).
Liberals argue for freedom of action within the market place. In terms of economic policy they do not wish to be constrained by conservative concepts which would limit competition within the boundaries of some preconceived 'common good'. They reject any socialist call for competition to be confined within limits agreed to by the people's representatives.

Liberalism has become modern capitalism's official ideology yet it is also the justifying ideology of the welfare state in England, the United States (Galper 1975 pp.18-22) and, until the advent of the Howard Government, in Australia. Liberals reject the organic conception of society. The formation of a society liberals see as the outcome of competing market forces. Where conservatives want less welfare both in terms of scope and levels of assistance, liberals tend to see more of some types of welfare as beneficial (George & Wilding 1976 pp. 52-58, Galper 1975 p. 3).

Some liberals deriving support from Locke (1955) wish to see totally unrestrained market forces. Most liberals see the need for the state to intervene on the periphery of the market in the interests of the less affluent. "In place of traditional authority they have supported the authority of reason and of demonstrated, rather than revealed, truth (Smith 1968 p. 276)." To the extent that conservatives rely on the ideas of Hume and Burke, they are reflecting these authors' reaction to the Enlightenment; the liberal tradition can be seen as an extension of the Enlightenment. Liberals hold less absolute values than conservatives and their values tend to be conditional and qualified by their intellectual pragmatism. Following on from early utilitarians, many liberals assume that through the pursuit of individualism the collective well-being is increased. They see welfare services as the vehicle to meet need, to provide a redistribution of income and to humanise capital (Galper 1975 pp.22-30). George and Wilding (1976) term such liberals 'reluctant collectivists'. Robert Pinker's (1998) analysis of 18 and 19th century liberalism demonstrates the blurring of ideological boundaries between liberal (particularly the liberal collectivists) and conservative political leaders. He also points to overlapping positions taken with regard to social issues and values by some liberals, conservatives and social democrats during the early 20th century.

Social democratic and socialist perspectives

Social-democratic parties, a product of the 20th century, arose out of the growth of socialism as an emerging political force in Europe during the last quarter of the 19th century. Social-democratic parties in Britain, Germany and Australia all maintain:

- strong trade union links,
- a belief in equality,
- a commitment to government intervention,
- a dedication to representative government, and
- to the peaceful transition to socialism .

The social-democratic position has certain aspects in common with a socialist view of the world, but it also differs in several important ways. Both positions accept the principle of equality but whereas socialists, particularly those of a Marxist persuasion, would see equality as a prime and immediate goal, social-democrats see themselves working towards its attainment at some time in the future. In Germany, Britain, and Australia the social-democrats have dissociated themselves
from Marxism arguing that through a gradual transition they will arrive at socialism. The majority of Australian Federal Labor Party parliamentary representatives belong to the right faction and only marginally, if at all, support the concept of a 'peaceful transition to socialism'.

Connell (1978 pp7-10) has described socialism as based on equality, community (or fraternity), liberty, co-operation, direct democracy and reason. By 'direct democracy' Connell means the spreading of power, a minimum of delegation and bureaucracy; he also explains that "To be reasonable does not mean to be 'moderate', to live a life of compromises. On the contrary, it demands a militant opposition to the forces of death and exploitation; and a militant compassion for their victims (1978 p10)." It is a commitment to this view which divides socialist from social-democratic parties.

George and Wilding (1976) commenting on the basic components of British Fabian beliefs point first to equality, freedom and fellowship before going on to mention "two other central but derivative values - democracy, which is the child of equality and freedom, and humanitarianism which is the offspring of equality and fellowship (p.62)". Socialists' primary value is equality; yet George and Wilding (1976 p.65) are aware that for Fabians equality "means more than equality of opportunity but less than equality of income."

Social-democrats, whilst condemning inequality based on inherited wealth, allow for unequal rewards deriving from hard work, genius, creativity and other factors of individual input. They recognise that inequality of opportunity is an automatic artefact of unequal societies yet are prepared to tolerate inequalities which must of themselves lead to advantaged backgrounds for the children of those who by their 'efforts' are 'entitled' to greater rewards. In the face of considerable literature which has shown that equality of opportunity does not result in equality of outcome, social-democrats remain uncommitted to full blown equality (Huber & Form 1973 ch. 9).

The acceptance of this form of 'equality' derives from their acknowledgment of the importance of freedom. Social-democrats view freedom not in terms of the absence of restraint on market forces but in terms of a freedom obtained through state intervention. Whereas, for socialists, freedom is a communal freedom through which individuals are freed to achieve their maximum social capacity "the meaning of socialism, both logically and sociologically, can only be understood as a contrast to individualism (Shils 1968 Vol. 14 p.506)". Conservatives resist government intervention in the market place, yet they would see their freedom to pursue their interests being constrained within the bounds of the 'common good' as defined by the ruling class. Socialists also accept restraint on their freedom; the restrictions they would accept are determined more by an acceptance of the 'general will' (Marcuse et al 1978 / 79 pp. 136-139).

The concept of the 'general will' was initially developed by Rousseau (1862), a social-democrat. Socialists extend this 'Rousseauian' notion of the 'general will' to mean something like 'in the interests of everybody' or at least in the interests of all but the bourgeoisie. Community workers constantly and unsuccessfully struggle to operationalise this concept in a meaningful way. In community work practice it comes to mean something akin to the lowest common denominator of consensus attained from amongst the ranks of those who participate (Tomlinson 1978 pp.68-105).
Social-democrats welcome the extension of the welfare system. They see it as the mechanism which ensures social stability and which delivers to the working class the social wage, as the method of coping with diswelfares (Titmus 1974 ch.6). The welfare system is seen as the vehicle for the relief of distress and poverty, which in the future has the capacity to reform the capitalist system into a humanitarian egalitarian welfare society. This is so despite the presence in this camp of writers like Titmuss who are conscious of the very limited nature of transfer of income across class boundaries via the welfare system and the major disparities in benefits flowing to superannuated and other well-off groups compared with the benefits obtained by ordinary working people through the welfare system (Titmus 1976 pp.113-123 & pp.188-189, Crossland 1956, Jamrozik 1995).

**Marxist ideologies**

The central values of Marxism are:
- equality,
- solidarity, and
- freedom.

Marxist theory developed out of Marx's attack on capitalism. It is therefore not surprising that Marxism can be explained more easily in terms of its opposition to features of the existing system rather than by listing its central ideas. Marxists are opposed to:
- private ownership,
- the unregulated play of market forces,
- individualism,
- privilege, and
- inequality;

all of which they see as forms of exploitation.

The entire notion of welfare confronts Marxists with a central contradiction. They wish to introduce a system whose prime function is to ensure that the society operates along the lines of Marx's dictum: "from each according to his (or her) ability and to each according to his (or her) needs ( Marx 1970 p. 371)". Yet orthodox Marxist theory suggests the possibilities of change are constrained by the fact that "the ruling ideas are those of the ruling class ( Marx & Engels 1971 p. 31)". In Australia, Britain and the United States the prevailing values of the ruling classes are far removed from the Marxist ideal. Marxists have generally given priority to economic determinist explanations which rely on an acceptance of class conflict as a central feature. However an increasing number of Marxist writers are pointing to race, gender, disability, locality, and age as factors at least as central as class in social welfare theory.

Marxists are divided in their support for the existing welfare system. Some see the present system as a result of the ruling class making minor concessions, along the lines of Bismarck's social welfare experiments, in order to forestall important demands of the working class. Others view the current welfare arrangements as the ransom the ruling class has been forced to pay in order to maintain social peace (Mandell 1975, Piven & Cloward 1971, 1979). Gough (1979 p.55) has described these two perceptions as arising from the paradox that "labour indirectly aids the long-term accumulation of capital and strengthens capitalist social relations by struggling for its
own interests within the state". The alternative to struggling within the state for a more equal
distribution of resources for working people is an option which no major political force in
Britain, Australia or the United States is currently advocating.

There are Marxists who see the concessions obtained through the working class struggle as the
price for social peace, or the price of peaceful social control, and therefore a bar to eventual
socialist victory. However other Marxists share with many conservatives the belief that, as well
as buying temporary conformity, any reform has the potential to raise further demands. Miliband
(1973 p.242) after stressing that a major role of the state is mitigation of disadvantage, goes on to
say "reform and repression are tried simultaneously. These are not alternative options but
complementary ones."

Marxists are united in their belief that the welfare system in capitalist societies is incapable of
moving society towards an equitable distribution of wealth and income and most accept that it is
not even capable of removing the gross inequities which exist because of the predisposition of
the capitalist state to constantly attempt to increase rather than reduce inequalities (Strachey
1957, Galper 1975 p.3). Whereas liberals see the welfare state as somewhat separate from the
rest of the economic system, Marxists account for restrictions on the redistributive power of the
welfare system precisely because of the integrated nature of the welfare system within
mainstream economic processes (Galper 1975 p.46).

In order to close this look at Marxist views on welfare systems it is desirable to return to the
central values of the Marxist ideology and to elaborate upon the particular meaning Marxists
give to equality, solidarity and freedom. Marxists' commitment to equality is not hedged around
with the elaborate 'pragmatism' of the social-democratic understanding of equality referred to
earlier. Galper expressed it this way:

Contrary to the present reality, the ideal situation would be one in which the individual's
maximum contribution to the society as a whole would be, simultaneously, exactly that
person's maximum contribution to his or her own self-development. In a truly humanised
society the ideal towards which we would strive would be the elimination of the duality
between actions which primarily benefit the individual actor and those which benefit
others (Galper 1975 p. 48).

Earlier in this book he had spoken of 'collective self-determination' as he attempted to
encapsulate the Marxist concepts of freedom and solidarity. These descriptions flow from Marx,
who "believed, for quite technical philosophical reasons, that when a man is truly rational and
universal he is co-operative (ABC 1973 p.10)". Such views are an anathema to many American
liberals who consistently refer to the need for individual freedom.

This (liberal view of freedom) is not construed however, as the right to dignity and self-
determination; the right to work; the right to health; the right to peace; the right to
equality; the right to develop selfhood without alienation, racism, sexism or ageism; or
the right to reform the economic private market mechanisms that have failed and that
have created the present crisis. Nor does it encompass the internationally accepted right
to an acceptable standard of living (Iatridis 1983).

This point is reinforced by Lukes who argues
that the notion of liberty or freedom is a complex or compound idea which, when
subjected to analysis, can be shown to require or presuppose a number of further, more
basic ideas, and that central to these are the notions of autonomy, privacy and self-development. Indeed, I would go further and claim that these can be seen, so to speak, as the 'three faces of freedom' - by which I mean that, while distinct from one another, all three are basic to the idea of freedom and that freedom is incomplete when any one of them is absent or diminished (Lukes 1973 p. 127).

As mentioned earlier this classification of traditional political perspective is but one of many ways a reader might conceive of codifying the 'political ideologies' in Australia (Leach 1995). Before looking at Australia’s socially conservative welfare policies, feminism and 'dependency' will be briefly considered.

**Feminist theory**

Feminists contend that gender discrimination has been basic to the assertion of social power relationships in all societies. They have argued that gender discrimination is not simply an extra aspect of power which has not been adequately dealt with by writers operating from other ideological perspectives. Instead they have asserted that gender issues are fundamental to a thorough understanding of social systems. Feminists point to the prime importance of gender in the division of labour and have argued that it has been this gender division on which other relations are built. Hence there is a need to concentrate upon the issue of gender in attempts to explain the totality of relations in society.

The importance of these insights is that the structure of western society, including arrangements made within the mode of distribution, has been identified by feminists as a manifestation of patriarchal control. Modern feminist theory developed in response to and as a rejection of prevailing patriarchy. A central theme running through feminist literature is that of the oppressive nature of patriarchy. Liberal and socialist feminists are inclined to link patriarchy with other controlling forces in a society, whereas radical feminists tend to identify patriarchy as the determining social force.

Marxist, socialist, social democratic and liberal writers have attempted to incorporate some feminist insights into their analysis. These are tentative steps and have seldom been universally welcomed by feminists (Hartman 1979). The major criticism of such incorporation is that gender is a central issue not one that can be tacked on at the end. An example of this kind of inappropriate afterthought was provided in 1987 when the Hawke Labor Government abolished the B class Widows Pension which had previously been paid to older widows not caring for children. The Government distorted the feminist call to enable such women to take their place in paid employment and used it to rationalise the removal of their welfare benefit without substantially assisting them to find work.

Feminists have made a substantial contribution to the understanding of the welfare system by exposing the gender blindness inherent in the ideological perspectives of conservatism, liberalism, social democracy and Marxism. By laying bare the patriarchal assumptions integral to these ideologies they have exposed the sexist nature of societies organised around these ideological positions and have shown that beyond other forms of control exerted upon welfare
recipients patriarchy adds a further oppression on women, children and 'dependent' men through welfare service programs.

Understandably, feminists have concentrated upon the issue of the family as a centrepiece of their analysis and have added to our understanding of intra-family repression, the way in which the family is constructed and the implications this has for welfare services. A major criticism which feminists make of welfare payments is that they enforce a role definition of women which underlines and reinforces their 'dependency' (Wilson 1977, Land 1976, Barrett & McIntosh 1982, Sawyer 1982). Having forced women into this dependent role, legislators are quick to abuse them for being reliant on the state (Newman 1999). Feminists are aware that whilst most welfare programs are predicated on a concept of family welfare, many programs in fact operate in a way which leads to the break-up of family units (Moynihan 1973) and to the frequent intra-family repression of individuals.

Mink (1998) says that when she set out to review the way the welfare system had treated women in the United States of America her focus quickly changed from the "mistakes made by welfare's early twentieth-century proponents to the outrages perpetuated by its late twentieth-century foes (p.ix)." In researching the behaviour of legislators during Clinton's Presidency she found "they cared little that the new welfare provisions would pressure poor single mothers to surrender their civil rights as a condition of economic assistance (p. 2)" and that even most Democratic liberals "who fought to save welfare did so for the sake of the children, not mothers (p. 2)". She considers the broad support for disciplinary welfare is rooted in the view that lone "mothers poverty flows from moral failing … 'unwillingness to work', their failure to marry (or stay married), their irresponsible sexuality and child bearing (p. 4)". Such derogatory views also resonate from the pages of Lucy Sullivan's (2000) report published by the Sydney based right wing think tank The Centre for Independent Studies. Sullivan claims that "Poverty in Australia is not financial, but behavioural (p. 47)" and that "The true costs of obligation free dependence nevertheless emerge in the behavioural style of welfare dependency, whether we choose to call it lazy, negligent, criminal or marginalised (p. 11)".

Across the decades, a principle aim of welfare fixers has been to restore the system's moral levers….Despite their broadsides against 'dependency' welfare reformers have been less concerned that poor single mothers are economically dependent than that they have been dependent on government. They expect that mothers will be dependent but insist that they be dependent on men. Indeed, since the 1940s, reformers have been troubled less that poor single mothers are poor than that they are single (Mink 1998 p.35).

Descriptions of the attack on welfare benefits in the United States of America have considerable applicability in Australia. On the 9th November 1999 Jocelyn Newman, the then Minister of the Department of Family and Community Services, issued a discussion paper entitled *The Challenge of Welfare Dependency in the 21st Century* in which she asserts the objectives of "the modern conservative approach to welfare" is to "assist people appropriately when they are in genuine need, to provide an adequate safety net…(and) to stop people becoming dependent (p. 7)".
Instead of creatively thinking about innovative solutions, the paper sets out with the untested assertion that there is widespread 'welfare dependency' and that it is a problem which can only be solved by a combination of 'mutual obligation', making the obtaining of income support more difficult and where people are found relying on income support removing it by placing time or age limits on receipt or shifting them to less secure forms of income support.

The neoclassical liberals seem to believe that welfare problems, for example unmarried motherhood, voluntary unemployment and so on are rational responses to the incentive structures that face individuals. Social harmony will emerge spontaneously only if the appropriate market signals are operative (Barry 1998 p. 58).

The intensity of Newman's (1999) response to 'dependency' is a result of her belief that if welfare payments are provided without specific work or other reciprocal requirements then 'dependency' on welfare will extend from this generation of recipients to their offspring. Newman's perception arises as a result of the combination anecdotal 'evidence' (at every Liberal Party meeting someone knows someone who could work but prefers to receive benefits and also a sole parent who's defrauding the system) and a conservative belief in the imperfection of human beings and the liberal market 'insight' referred to by Barry above.

The fact that the number of people in poverty is not declining reinforces such views. There seems little recognition of the very real limitations of aggregated statistical analysis. The use of aggregated statistics of poverty can provide the number of people in poverty and if the appropriate questions are asked might give an account of how long a specific percentage of people may have experienced poverty. Aggregated statistics are just that. They lump together a group of people and allow for some general interpretation of societal phenomena. Such aggregated statistics cannot explain any specific individual's experience of poverty. An examination (Goodin Headey, Muffels & Dirven 1999) using longitudinal panel studies provides evidence about individual's experience of poverty. Their examination shows that only very few people in Netherland, the United States and Germany remain in poverty indefinitely. The Liberal Party which ideologically, and in its public pronouncements, claims to be committed to the interests of the individual theorises about poor people's propensity to become and to remain 'dependent' on the basis of aggregated statistics and anecdotal evidence rather than on the real life experiences of individuals.

Dependency & 'mutual responsibility'

It would be comforting to assume that Minister Newman or at least the Howard Cabinet thought up the idea of 'welfare dependency' and it is nothing more than an out of town try out. To do so would be a serious mistake. Dependency rhetoric has a centuries long lineage and has enjoyed a comeback with the rise of fundamentalist economics. It was part and parcel of Thatcher and Reagan's onslaught on the poor in their respective countries (Alcock 1998 pp. 210-211). In the run-up to the 1987 Federal election Brian Howe used it incessantly in his efforts to berate the unemployed for their incapacity to find work. The right wing Federal Labor back bencher Mark Latham trots out similar denunciations of the poor at every conceivable opportunity (Watts 1999, Tomlinson & Bleasdale 1999/2000 pp.6-7).

'Dependency' and ‘mutual obligation’ were central concepts applied by the National Government in New Zealand during the 1996-98 period as they unsuccessfully attempted to defuse
unemployment as an electoral issue. In Britain, Tony Blair's New Labour borrowing from Clinton's America is shifting its underlying welfare philosophy "from citizen entitlement towards citizen obligation with the state taking on an increasingly residualist role (Sullivan 1998 p. 129)". In this sense Blair's 'Third Way' is a continuation of Thatcher's welfare policies which Klein and Millar described as the "do it yourself" welfare state (cited in Page 1998, p. 307).

The words 'welfare dependency' encapsulate connotations of abuse, of failing to meet legitimate responsibilities, and something just short of cheating or defrauding the State. In periods before economic fundamentalists ran amok in Canberra (Pusey 1991, Stretton & Orchard 1994) the word 'dependency' had alternative meanings which can be found in the Macquarie Dictionary. Then clients of the Department of Social Security relied on the income support system for their livelihood, they could depend on it, they could trust it to supply them with sustenance if they met the eligibility criteria, they could be confident they would receive their entitlement. Now when the members of the Government use the word 'dependency' in relation to income support recipients they mean that the client / customer is an appurtenance "something accessory to another more important thing" presumably the productive parts of the economy.

There is little that is mutual or responsible about the Howard Government's concept of 'mutual responsibility'. Like 'dependency' it has become jargon, it is political shorthand for saying to those who are seen as politically expendable 'you won't get the income support to which you were entitled unless you give us something in return'. Australians did too little when governments started attacking working conditions and awards of the more vulnerable workers. Now the majority of workers feel insecure in their employment. Too many aged, lone parent and disability pensioners did nothing when 'work for the dole' only applied to young unemployed. That system is being extended to every social security recipient, except the aged, but even they should not get too relaxed and comfortable. The Howard Government removed or diminished the income support of 46,000 16-18 year old unemployed Australians (Horin 1998) and there was little outcry.

Norman Barry (1998) reflecting upon the modern welfare state's attempts to cope with moral hazard asserts the clear connection between the past and the present when he says "Workfare schemes...are implicitly drawing on the theory of human nature that inspired the designers of the 1834 Poor Law (p. 64). Henriques (1979), writing about the Elizabethan poor law administration discusses 'secular puritanism' and notes

The association of words which implied that the destitute, especially those who could be called 'able bodied', were destitute by their own fault quietened the conscience of those who suffered from or feared the growing cost of poor relief...the whole moral justification of the deterrent workhouse was that it would drive those able to work into finding employment (p. 23).

Henriques suggests that in the run up to the introduction of the 1834 Poor Law "harsh attitudes were commonest amongst the lesser ratepayers...This 'petty bourgeoisie' had the strongest temptation to repudiate those whom the cost of helping was high (p. 24)". Both these examples have considerable application to contemporary Australian social policy. Beyond links to the poor law assumptions about the need for less eligibility there are clear connections with public choice theory in the way the Australian Governments constructs their income support policies insisting
that behaviour "is best understood by assuming its motivation is single-purposed, acquisitive and unchanging (Stretton & Orchard 1994 p. 18)".

Family values
Conservatives claim to support family values but their rendition of what values in relation to families they support is a very selective version of life within families. One can identify:

- privacy (freedom from),
- the obligation to obtain paid work (self sufficiency of the head of family),
- male headed, two parent (patriarchy),
- God, traditional values and sexual restraint (conservative patriarchy), and
- the inherent imperfection of human beings (conservative).

The New Right's support for 'family values' revolves around aspects of intra family responsibility on the family head to provide for the family and a reciprocal obligation on other family members to carry out caring tasks in return. Interestingly the New Right argues that their family values prescription should be extended to encompass the entire society.

My ideal family's most outstanding features are caring, sharing, equality and acceptance of difference. Were this society to wholeheartedly embrace those family values then we may go some way towards building

a land that's fit for heroes
and me any you as well (Eric Bogle).

Social Responsibility

The 'mutual obligation' component of the Howard Government's 'work for the dole' scheme coupled with its extension into an expanded participation for most recipients, despite elements of these programs being residues from the 1930s 'susso programs' for the unemployed during the Depression, is not an entirely home grown phenomena. An almost identical scheme was set up by the National Government in New Zealand in the last couple of years of the twentieth Century. The New Zealand Code of Social Responsibility cut benefits to lone parents for 'inadequate parenting' (however defined), failing to put the family's budget into the hands of a financial counsellor, or refusing workfare jobs (Common Ground 1997 p. 3). Mink (1998) reflecting upon the United States experience says

The Personal Responsibility Act removes poor single mothers from the welfare state to a police state...(denies) income security,...(subjects them ) to stringent and intrusive moralistic regulation in exchange for meager and temporary assistance...only if they reveal their most intimate relations and only if they agree to associate with the men whom government designates as their children's fathers (p. 133).

Parts of the Wisconsin welfare cutbacks and wider United States workfare program have been adapted and applied in Australia. Whilst Australia has not quite plumbed the depths of the United States treatment of lone parents there are similarities in relation to requirements to name the non-custodial parent and take maintenance action before income support is provided which return the Australian system to the 1960s and which are not very different from the restrictive disciplining policies of the United States (Edwards et al. 2001 Ch. 3).
Social conservatism and the social coalition

In 1999 Prime Minister Howard asserted that:

Economic policy liberalisation and a modern conservatism in social policy share important common values and objectives…Both recognise the role of markets and of government…Both reject the controls of the corporate state over people's lives…Both promote opportunity, incentive and responsibility over dependence and welfarism…Both support the full realisation of individual potential as well as the reality of social obligation (pp. 3-4).

Later in this speech Howard goes on to explain that 'modern conservatism' supports the family and "upholding an obligation to other members of the community" but that it also supports independence, self reliance and maximising individual potential (p. 6). Alongside social conservatism Howard places a neo-liberal economic agenda supporting the "great share owning democracy", deregulating industrial conditions by "freeing up workplace relations from the dead hand of inflexible centralised controls", benchmarking, and greater international competitiveness in order to "reap the maximum benefit from the opportunities presented by economic globalisation (pp. 5 -10)".

Clearly this speech contains an amalgam of both classic liberal and conservative ideological positions with its concentrations upon both individualism and social duty, yet a social duty confined not by the 'common good' but by market values. His speech also contains a commitment to maintain the social safety net "for those in genuine need" (p. 7).

Philippe Van Parijs (1992[b]) contends that there is no easy way of fighting the tendency towards a society divided between the employed and the unemployed

But the replacement of the safety net, in which the weakest and the unlucky get trapped, by a firm unconditional floor, on which they can firmly stand- in other words, the replacement of a conditional minimum income scheme by a genuine basic income- is increasingly viewed as an indispensable ingredient in any such strategy (p.7)

Early in 2000 Howard set out his blueprint for a 'decent society' in which he claimed that his Government whilst committed to maintaining a social security safety net did not see the solution to pressing social problems as being "solely in the hands of the Government… (nor) that simply spending more taxpayers money is the answer (p. 12)". He proposed the formation of a 'social coalition' by which he meant "a partnership of individuals, families, business, government, welfare and charitable organisations, each contributing their unique resources and expertise to tackle disadvantage at its source (p. 12)." Howard went on to exhort commercial philanthropy suggesting not that business give more but that more businesses give. He further noted that:

Most of all, the social coalition is firmly rooted in notions of mutual obligation…as much for business as it is for individuals. The same principle that asks a young unemployed person to give something back through work for the dole also prompts enlightened businesses to give back to the community (p. 12).

A more reliable way of having business provide the financial wherewithal to assist in meeting the cost of welfare services would be through the tax system; either by increasing compliance pressure or by raising the rate. However this conservative Prime Minister chose the path of
business voluntarily giving whilst compelling the unemployed to meet their 'mutual obligation'.
Australian business receives in excess of $14 billion a year assistance from government to enable
it to increase exports, quality, research and development and is seldom required to repay such

The desire to remove the State (as far as possible) from a direct role in welfare provision through
encouraging business philanthropy and by contracting out services to church and community
agencies is driven by an acceptance of public choice theory's suggestion that voluntary altruism
is preferable to State bureaucracy with its emphasis on categories and rights (Barry 1998 pp. 56-
57).

In fact, the translation of welfare demands into rights is perhaps the phenomenon that has
provoked the most hostility from New Right thinkers. Whilst neoclassical liberals have
railed against the costs social rights have imposed on market economies, … conservatives
have been as much concerned with the kind of welfare culture that their implementation
is said to produce (Barry 1998 p.71, see also Culpitt 1992 Ch. 1).

Liberal capitalists want freedom from State regulation and freedom from the burden of meeting
the social and environmental costs of production. In similar fashion, the Howard Government
wishes to escape the burden of dealing with those who can be deemed to be 'dependent' on others
- families, churches, and 'not for profit' agencies. This is particularly clear with regard to
migrants who now have a two year wait before becoming eligible for most social security
payments and in the way that people who, subsequent to arriving without entry permits, are
granted 3 year temporary residency permits but are prevented from claiming many of the benefits
available to approved refugees. This is so even though before applicants are given such a
temporary residency permits they must prove they meet similar requirements, in relation to
political persecution, as do other refugees.

The contradictions

An interesting contradiction has emerged in welfare policies since the Howard Government came
to power. At the very time the Government berates those who need to rely on income support
from the State for being 'dependent' it has moved to reinforce low income earners' dependence
on their family and local community based charities. The changes to Austudy, the abolition of
Abstudy, the changes in student HECS, have forced students to depend on their parents until they
are 25 years and in some cases 30 years old. The abolition of the low income earner dental
assistance scheme, cutbacks in welfare service funding and the introduction of nursing home fees
have forced many older Australians to rely on their children for financial support at the very time
when they are most vulnerable. Many of these children are paying off their HECS debt and
trying to raise young families at the very time their aging parents are calling on them for help
which was previously supplied by the tax payer.

The message which the Howard Government is sending to working and middle class Australia is
that it is bad to be dependent upon the Commonwealth for assistance but good that family
members are forced into a co-dependency relationship with each other. This message is pushed
at the lower orders whilst at the same time the rich are told they are paying too much tax so
they'll be handed out massive income, capital gains and business tax rebates to provide them
with an incentive to amass more wealth and just to sweeten the pie they had better have a third of their private health insurance costs met by the taxpayers (Leeder 1999).

There is a further contradiction which derives out of the amalgam of conservative and liberal ideologies driving the changes in Australia's welfare, health, education, industrial relations and employment policies. On the one hand there is a push to uniformity driven by a desire to end 'special rights' for certain recipients, an intense desire to remove standardisation in work place relations yet, on the other hand, newly created privileging for well off sections of the society.

Uniformity has been pushed through cutbacks in the scope and coverage of Awards, the introduction of the Common Youth Allowance, the abolition of Abstudy, the extension of 'work for the dole' from young unemployed to all unemployed, the proposed expansion of ‘mutual obligation’ to include those with disability and lone parents. These changes have at least in part been driven by a desire to end 'special rights'. The desire for uniformity has not extended into abolishing the age discrimination explicit in youth wages, youth rates of income support, nor to ending the distinction between beneficiary and pension rates of income support.

The introduction of individual work contracts, the expansion of enterprise bargaining, the watering down of unfair dismissal provisions all run counter to the notion of uniformity. The ending of legislative provisions which ensured life time community rating in private medical insurance and replacing it with specific age community rating, the decision to axe the Commonwealth funded dental health program designed to assist those on the lowest incomes, whilst providing a one third subsidy of health insurance costs, even where that insurance covers dental treatment, rewards the better off at the expense of those unable to afford the highest scales of health insurance. It also rewards the middle aged compared with older Australians. The push to privatise public utilities removes from all citizens their share of the common wealth whilst rewarding those who buy shares in privatised public utilities.

Perhaps nowhere was this contradiction which derives out of the amalgam of conservative and liberal ideologies more clearly spelt out than in the Howard Government's revisions to the Native Title Act in 1998. The tension between the drive towards uniformity and the creation of privilege was palpable. The 'special rights' of one group of Australians, Indigenous Australians, which the High Court had found them to have, were removed to provide 'certainty' to a privileged group, pastoralist and miners, whom the High Court had found against. (See Chapter 6).

Conclusion

Social conservatism coupled as it is with a neo-liberal economic agenda - interpreted, explained and propagandised within public choice paradigms - seems omnipresent in current welfare debates in Australia. Each of these features has relevance to the choice between universal income support and the existing categorical social security system. But before such a choice can be examined, the interrelationship between ideology and ‘needs’ based benefits will be considered in relation to unemployment, locality, Indigenous and disability issues.
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