Who Rules Australia?*

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To the very limited extent that political scientists and politic-
cal journalists are interested in the analysis of power in Aus-
tralia, they assume it to be competitive and fragmented.4
According to one well-known liberal journalist, power re-
sides with the multiplicity of interest groups and power concentra-
tions which pervade the Australian scene: big business, the trade
unions, the public service, the press, police, churches, courts,
universities, the political parties and finally the Governments
themselves. No one of these has a monopoly of power; instead
they compete for it, and the central balance at any particular
moment is probably between the various groups which have
been striving for it.5

This pluralist view of power is shared by almost all politi-
cal scientists, who soothingly pronounce that there are no
dominant classes or interests in our society. Hughes blandly
describes Australia as a 'free pluralistic society'.6 Wolfsohn
celebrates our 'plurality of pyramidal structures'.7 Miller
proclaims Australia as a 'pluralist society' in which power
is shared by 'highly differentiated and fragmented strategic
claims'.8 Parker declares that in New South Wales 'the rich
diversity of economic life maintains a stable - though not a
static - equilibrium among the compelling political interests
and pressures, and prevents any one group from perma-
nently dominating the political scene'.9 These observers do

1 The structure of this chapter owes much to Ralph Miliband,
_The State in Capitalist Society_, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, London,
1969. See also Isaac Talbot's review in Monthly Review, vol. 23,
May 1971; Niem Posthumus' review in New Left Review, no. 58,
November-December 1968; and Miliband's reply to Posthumus in
ibid., no. 59, January-February 1970. The insightful criticisms of
Miliband by Balbus and Posthumus deserve to be contracted with
the condescending remarks of the professor of social philosophy at
the Australian National University: 'So far as Anglo-American
political science is concerned (of course things are different in
countries like Italy or France which have not arrived at the ulti-
mate stages of political modernization) Miliband is like a survivor
from an earlier vanished world.' (P. H. Patridge, Politics, vol. V,
no. 2, November 1970, p. 258.)

2 Craig McGregor, _Profile of Australia_, Penguin Books, 1968,
pp. 337, 338. For a similar formulation by a conservative jour-
nalist, see Donald Horne, _The Lucky Country_, Penguin Books, 2nd

3 Collins, A., Hughes, 'Politics', in A. F. Davis and S. Enslin (eds.),
F Cribb also states that Australia is 'a liberal pluralist society'.
(Lett, 6 November 1971.)

4 Hugo Wolfsohn, 'Power in Australia', Arena, no. 6, Summer
1966, p. 10. It is also instructive to examine a more widely-read
work by Wolfsohn entitled 'The Ideology Makers' reprinted in
Henry Mayer (ed.), _Australian Politics: A Second Reader_, Cheshire,
Melbourne, 1969, ch. 3. The author is not at all concerned with
the vast ideological and cultural influence which business wields
on Australian society but he does attach considerable importance
to the activities of judges such as Sir Edmund Herring and clergy-
men such as Sir Irving Benson.

5 D. F. Miller, _The Culture of Social Quiescence_, Dissent, no.

6 R. S. Parker, 'The Government of New South Wales', in S. R.
Davis (ed.), _The Government of the Australian States_, Longman,
Melbourne, 1969, p. 60.
not deny the existence of ‘elites’ in the economic, political, administrative and other pyramids of power, but they maintain that such ‘elites’ lack the degree of cohesion and common purpose required to turn them into a dominant or ruling class. Indeed, they see competition between the different ‘elites’ as a guarantee that power in Australia will be diffused and not concentrated.

In all essentials, the pluralist analysis of power is false. Forming part of the conventional wisdom of most political scientists, it would be more appropriate to call it a conventional obfuscation of Australian reality. Crude marxist analyses of the local power structure have come much closer to reality than the smooth writings of those in the conforming academy. One prestigious political scientist has alleged that the concentration of economic power is of ‘first importance in Australian life’—if not in Australian politics. Such blindness to the close connection between economic and political power deserves to be contrasted with Neumann’s view that ‘the translation of economic power into political power and thence into political power becomes the crucial concern of the political scientist.’

Economic and Social Characteristics

Australia is a capitalist society in which the overwhelming part of economic activity is dominated by private ownership. There is, of course, a sizeable ‘public sector’. The state owns and administers various industries and services; it performs an important economic role by way of regulation and control; and it is also the largest customer of the ‘private sector’. Indeed, a number of industries could not survive without the subsidies and credits dispensed by the state. To quote a former Prime Minister, ‘the overwhelming bulk of expenditure in the so-called public sector is basic expenditure in the private sector.’

In a speech to the N.S.W. Chamber of Manufactures’ annual dinner on 5 August 1970, another former Prime Minister, J. G. Gorton, referred with pride to the fact that successive governments had provided millions of dollars ‘to help private enterprise develop’. According to the 1969–70 annual report of the Tariff Board, the protection of secondary industry alone was costing $7,700 million a year. Ansett Airlines receives extremely generous subsidies.

State intervention is nothing new in Australian capitalism; it has always been of crucial importance in the economic life of the country. In his presidential address to the Sydney Chamber of Commerce, W. H. Lambert recently stressed that Australian business had "nearly to the hilt" been marked by the "host" of Government since the days of John Macarthur. However, although the scale and pervasiveness of state intervention has been increasing in recent decades, the state still owes its present status to a subsidiary part of the means of production. Thus, to speak of Australia as a "mixed economy" - with the clear implication that capitalism is a thing of the past - is to attribute an incredibly misleading meaning to the notion of mixture. State intervention has cross-rafted the capitalist system; it has enabled private enterprise to function and prosper.

Despite the fact that most enterprises are small or medium-sized units, capitalism in Australia is increasingly synonymous with giant enterprise. The most important feature of economic life is the domination of key sectors of industrial, commercial and financial life by a handful of large firms. Particularly marked is the high concentration of ownership and control of the means of 'mental production' - the mass media - which makes possible the moulding of public opinion in the spirit of the desired ideology.

Another major feature is the rapid penetration of the multinational corporations which already control many crucially important industries. Foreign ownership and control introduce new political and economic dimensions into the structure of Australian capitalism. As Connell has noted: "Australia is not a natural unit for the analysis of power structure. The structure of power that bears on economic and political decision-making about the geographical entity we call Australia remains for outside its borders; to talk intelligently about Australian cities per se is not possible."

The inflow of foreign capital has led to the relative weakening of the "native industrial bourgeoisie" which is exhibiting an ambivalent attitude towards foreign capital. The multinational corporations exert pressure on the state to do nothing in economic policy which would discourage further foreign investment. Foreign capital also exerts an influence on Australia's foreign policy but regrettable the connection has hardly been touched on by social scientists.


22. A pioneering attempt - marvel unfortunately by appeals to rationalistic capitalism - to analyze some of the issues involved in
A small number of persons own a markedly disproportionate share of personal wealth in Australia. Many of them also control the uses to which their assets are put, but increasingly this control is vested in people who—although generally wealthy—do not themselves own more than a small part of the assets which they control. The owners and controllers together constitute the class which Marxists have traditionally designated as the ruling class.

The other end of the social scale is occupied by the working class. The major form assumed by the 'relations of production' is that between capitalist employers and industrial workers. The economic and political life of Australian society is primarily determined by the relationship between the class which owns and controls and the working class. In fact, the political process is mainly about the conformation of these social forces. The intermediate strata, however, are of considerable importance and they significantly affect the relations between the dominant class and the working class. Australia is usually described as 'democratic' on the ground that its political institutions prevent any class of interest gaining a permanent political advantage. Marxists on the other hand, term it a 'bourgeois democratic' society in which an economically dominant class rules through these institutions. They argue that this class, by virtue of its economic power, is able to use the state as an instrument for the domination of Australian society.34 However, before determining whether an economically dominant class wields decisive political power, it is first necessary to demonstrate the existence of such a class.

The economic power

Australia has never lacked purveyors of the myth that we live in an egalitarian society. A former Prime Minister said: 'I do not know any free country in the world where what is produced by the community is more fairly and evenly distributed among the community than in Australia.'35 The present Premier of N.S.W. has observed: 'We have no poor people in New South Wales. Not any very rich people. Ours is a classless society.'36 These affirmations were echoed by Horne who once wrote that the 'distribution of wealth' had 'great inequality' (unless by a sense of inequality you mean envy) a minor problem ...'.37 More recently, he has declared that 'Australia is the most egalitarian of countries, untroubled by obvious class distinctions, crass or communal domination ... there are still inequalities of wealth, power and opportunity, but the ordinary people have won—or had delivered to them—a profound and satisfying ideological victory.'38

The evidence, however, tells a very different story. Walker has noted: 'The information available on labour's share in the national income ... suggests that labour's share has

Pitsch and Wheelwright, op. cit., ch. 18. See also Marshall Windmiller, The Peace Corps and Five Americans, Public Affairs. 23. On 16 September 1976 the then Deputy Prime Minister, Sir John Gorton, stated in the House of Representatives that Australia had already 'achieved democracy', while the Federal Attorney-General had earlier asserted that civil disobedience could never be justified in Australia since it was 'a fully democratic society'. Cited in Henry Mayer, Speaking Freely, Australia, 27 August 1976. For an outline of the Marxist theory of the state, see Millshead, Marx and the State, in Ralph Miliband and John Saville (eds), The Socialist Register 1965, Merlin Press, London, 1965. Sec

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not risen to any marked extent since early in the century.**

Encl concluded that the distribution of income "appears to have remained largely unaltered during this century, and class, in particular, has remained virtually the same.\(^{20}\)

Russell has demonstrated that the distribution of income in celery Glass argued that it is "probably more unequal than all capitalist societies, the maldistribution of wealth in fact more pronounced than the uneven distribution of income.\(^{21}\)

In a recent special report on Australia in The Times, Michael Morris-Evans wrote: "The distribution of wealth is one very rich and the poor are very poor, and while there is very little income for poverty in such a potentially rich country, the point is that social service payments are a percentage of the Gross National Product were 1.9 per cent in 1968-9, as against 15.2 per cent in the EEC countries and 16.9 per cent in Scandinavia.\(^{24}\)

Despite the fact that a small class of people owns a large share of wealth in Australia, many writers argue that ownership is today a fact of declining significance, not only because it is subject to legal and political restrictions, but also because it is no longer the determining factor in the allocation of resources.\(^{25}\)

The owner of a business is likely to place great emphasis on the object of profitability. The professional manager is likely to be concerned with securing a reasonable rate of profit, not in maximizing profits. Once he has secured the desired rate of profit he will concentrate on other more professionally-relevant objectives, such as innovation, market standing, and manager performance and development.\(^{26}\)

because of the increasing separation between the ownership of private wealth and its actual control. It is alleged that control is passing into the hands of managers who own only a small part of the assets they control. Consequently, ownership is said to be no longer a decisive element of economic or political power.

It is true that the separation of ownership and control in recent decades, particularly in large-scale enterprises, is an important feature of the internal organization of capitalist enterprise, although 'family capitalism' is still to be found at the directorial and executive level.\(^{27}\)

The most dynamic and powerful enterprises are increasingly headed by managers whose position cannot be attributed to ownership and who are largely immune from the control of individual shareholders.

The theory of managerial capitalism is based on the assumption that managers are motivated by considerations other than those of owners and that they are more socially 'responsible' and more concerned with the public interest than the classical capitalist entrepreneur.

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\( ^{26} \) Playford, op cit; Encl, op cit, pp. 376-89
\( ^{24} \) Another local example of obfuscation comes from J. C. McNiel, managing director of HOP: 'Much of the confusion caused by, inadvertently, by Karl Marx, and less excusably by his disciples, can be put down to the fact that he lived before the division between management and ownership which characterizes modern industry.' (Australian Finance Review, 1 July 1971.) However, over a hundred years ago, Marx had already drawn attention to the 'the transformation
of the actually functioning capitalist into a mere manager, administrator of other people's capital, and of the owner of capital into a mere owner, a mere money capitalist." (Capital, Foreign Languages Publishing House, Moscow, 1966, vol. III, p. 436).

The claim that there is a 'new class' of managers who are radically different from capitalist owners is false. The most important imperative demand inherent in the capitalist system is still that managers should make the 'highest possible' profits. The differences of purpose and motivation between owners and managers are completely overshadowed by a basic community of interests. Managers receive high salaries; they constitute an important group in the shareholding population; their social origin is close to other men of high income and substantial property. Tertiary educational qualifications are increasingly required to reach the top levels of management, but universities are not very accessible to children of working-class parents. In other words, the owners and managers are socially cohesive, and the small minority of working-class origin are easily assimilated into the property class - both in their style of life and in their outlook. Managerialism simply means that the most important elements of capitalist property have grown too large to be wholly owned and efficiently run by owner-entrepreneurs. In no sense does it mean that capitalism is being transcended.

It cannot be denied, of course, that members of the property class are divided over many issues. However, these divisions - whether regional (based on economic differences), industrial (e.g. coal v. oil), corporate (e.g. GMH v. Ford) or political (liberals v. reactionaries) - are contained within a conservative ideological spectrum. These divisions cut across and mutually condition one another, and the dividing lines are irregular and shifting. These factors introduce elements of indeterminacy and instability into the behaviour of the ruling class and make of capitalist politics something more than a mere puppet show staged for the benefit (and obstruction) of the man in the street. But we must not exaggerate the depth of the divisions inside the ruling class: capitalists can and do fight among themselves to further individual or group interests, and they differ over the best way of coping with the problems which arise from the class position; but overshadowing all these divisions is their common interest in preserving and strengthening a system which guarantees their wealth and privileges.

One obvious manifestation of the basic political consensus on the crucial economic and political issues is that in the main the dominant economic class supports the Liberal Party. Moreover, it does not exert pressure for a redistribution of the national income that would change the distribution of wealth and power.
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Section of income, the rationalization of private enterprise, extension of trade union rights or increased social benefits. Beyond all their tactical differences, men of wealth and property are fundamentally united within a strategic consensus concerned with defending the social order which affords them their privileges. They possess a high degree of cohesion and solidarity, with common interests and purposes which far transcend their differences on specific issues.

Does the existence of this dominant economic class make up a ruling class? In other words, does its ownership and control of crucially important areas of economic life mean that it exercises a decisive degree of political power?

Role of the State

It cannot be emphasized too strongly that the assumption of governmental power is not equivalent to the control of state power. Government is formally invested with state power, but it may not effectively control that power. State power lies not only in the institution of government but also in institutions such as the public service, the military, the police, the judiciary and the arbitration apparatus. The form of the state system is shaped by the interrelationship among these institutions.

The capitalist class does not actually 'govern' Australia. Businessmen have not been exactly under-represented in the political executive at both the Federal and State levels, but they have not assumed the major share of government. Nor is it the case that the entire state system in which businessmen have a direct say. As the state becomes more closely concerned with economic life, businessmen are lib-

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381: 'This may not ensure that the pipe plays the right note without any discordant notes; but at least there are fewer such notes.'


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it is to be found in Australian society, thereby obscuring the degree to which it does not exist.

More frequently, men (and, very occasionally, women) from the subordinate classes have been brought into the elective part of the state system – the political executive and parliament. However, they have usually constituted only a minority of those who have achieved high political office, notwithstanding Menzies' claim that Federal parliamentarians with 'few exceptions ... begin life with no advantages of wealth or social position.' By social origin or previous occupation, the majority have belonged to the intermediate strata and the ruling class. It is true that the growth of the ALP brought into parliament many people who were workers, but the changing social composition of Labor parliamentarians in recent times indicates a marked expansion of those from the intermediate strata. As for the non-Labor parties, although they have undergone some extent a process of social dilution, they still remain solidly intermediate strata and ruling class in their social composition, with businessmen and property owners constituting a sizeable part of their parliamentary representation. Even such an inveterate anti-Marxist as Crisp has described the Liberal and Country Parties as 'first and foremost the political instruments of the owners and controllers of private, productive, and commercial capital, urban and rural.'

51. L. F. Crisp, Australian National Government, Longmans, Melbourne, rev. ed., 1970, p. 227. Some writers argue that the Liberal Party is not the perennial instrument of private capital because it 'is not on all issues the party of all “big business” interests' (Katharine Went, The Australian Liberal Party, Longmans, Melbourne, 1968, p. 43. Her italics.) But who has ever advanced such a good proposition?

Here it must be emphasized again that although not a few members of the state ‘élite’ were not born into the economically dominant class, this fact does not fundamentally affect the state’s class character and its role of guardian and defender of the interests of property. For example, the social origins of senior public servants in Australia are more divergent from those of their British counterparts, although they come from a much narrower range than is commonly believed. This is an interesting and salient finding, but class origins are not decisive. The really important point is that the public service and other elements of the state system are subject to the structural constraints of the capitalist system.

Role of Government

The leaders of the major political parties insist that there is a vast gulf separating them from their opponents. However, the achievements have not been a fundamental kind. The Liberal and Country Parties agree over the foundations of society, political office-holders agree over the foundations of society, and in particular the existing economic and social system of private ownership and private appropriation. Governments have been composed almost completely of men who, beyond 1960, have had a common basic belief in the validity and virtues of private ownership and private profit. The Sydney Stock Exchange was chosen as a typical example of the new Sydney Stock Exchange in 1960, and then 1970. Premier of N.S.W. declared:

The ethics of the Sydney Stock Exchange are ethics that we can all be very proud of indeed. I cannot imagine a modern city like ours getting along without the Stock Exchange. Those running the Stock Exchange are a most responsible band of men. 52

The commitment of political leaders to the capitalist system means that their attitude to businessmen as a class or a group is of relatively minor significance. The favourable view they take of capitalist enterprise is highly likely to produce a sympathetic view of businessmen, many of whom have never been allowed to bring into question the validity of the capitalist system. Australian politicians have not been about radically different social systems; it has been based on different conceptions of running the ongoing economic and social system.

The political office-holders fail to see that their commitment to capitalist enterprise is evidence of bias towards particular classes and interests. While Deputy Prime Minister in 1969, Sir John McEwen spoke of 'the tremendous importance of partnership between government and private industry in working for national progress'. In similar vein, G. L. Carter, Federal Chairman of the Australian Finance Conference and General Manager of Australian Guaranty Corporation Ltd has stated that 'government and industry are a working partnership with one common aim: a secure and viable Australian economy.' These two statements are excellent examples of words and concepts being used in an ideologically and politically loaded way. For what is being improved is not just the economy but a capitalist economy and this ensures that capitalist interests are least likely to lose.

54. An example of the 'partnership' between public and private capital is the 20 per cent participation by the Administration of the Territory of Papua and New Guinea in the equity of Cominco Etiwanda's Bougainville copper project, which entitles it to appoint a director to the board of the company (Australian, 2 March 1970).
part of the 'transom' which has to be paid in order to protect the rights of property in general. Crisp has noted that the owners and controllers of private capital 'have to offer a "transom" . . . of social and other legislation attractive to the unattached and detached voters in return for the continued security of the essentials of the free enterprise capital framework within which is set their own superior wealth and social status.' In other words, governing renders property a major service, although the less sophisticated and short-sighted sections of property which cannot understand the vital importance of distinguishing between socialism and social reform are often not very appreciative. It must also be pointed out that, as a result of popular pressure, government has at times been forced to take action against certain property rights. Nevertheless, these concessions are far less important than the extremely positive support which government has always given to the dominant economic interests. It is positively misleading to picture government as exercising 'countervailing power' against private capital.

Labor Governments

There have been occasions, particularly at the State level, when executive power has come into the hands of Labor


58. Menzies once wrote that 'many men in industry . . . take short views' and were 'affected by the prospect of some immediate advantage' (The Interdependence of Political and Industrial Leadership in the Modern State, p. 9.) Two political scientists have written of Sir Thomas Playford who was non-Labor Premier of South Australia for 27 years: 'Unlike the Establishment, he overrode the need for minimal concessions to maintain the quasi-market order.' (Keith Bennett and Don Jarvis, Playford to Duff: The Politics of Transition, Charnam, Melbourne, 1971, p. 11).


The context of the Curtin and Chifley governments did not weaken capitalism.


64. Sydney Morning Herald, 5 August 1943.

65. Waters, op. cit., p. 58.

66. Chifley had previously threatened union officials with the use of the military to break strikes in 1945, see L. F. Cripp, Chifley, Longman, Melbourne, 1961, p. 256.

67. Daily Telegraph, 3 August 1945.

68. Chifley was only continuing Labor's traditional of strike-breaking. See Humphrey McQueen, Labor and Industrial Relations, 1949-55, Employment and Industrial Relations, Australian government 1955, pp. 213-5.

69. Daily Telegraph, 3 August 1945.

70. Chifley was only continuing Labor's traditional of strike-breaking. See Humphrey McQueen, A Distinguished Biographer, Class (Monash University of the Australian Society), no. 2, May 1978, p. 9.

71. John Thomsen, Five to Remember, Lindon, Melbourne, 1964, p. 82.

eliminate the 'private sector' of the economy Calwell has claimed that the difference between the two major parties is 'largely how wide is the private sector and how wide is the public sector'. Addressing the American Chamber of Commerce in Australia, the Labor Premier of South Australia, A. D. Dunstan, referred to the 'totally discriminated status' that social progress involves the appropriation of private capital. The Labor Premier of Western Australia, J. Tookey, recently condemned the former Liberal Minister for Industrial Development, C. Court, for having an attitude of 'pure socialism' towards millionaires mining entrepreneurs Lang Hancock and Peter Wright. 'He wants to take away something they hold as individuals for the benefit of the State.' Whittam clearly accepts as permanent the present contours of the economy. Nationalization, he believes, has 'little relevance to contemporary Australian problems'. At the annual banquet of the Melbourne Chamber of Commerce, he told those present that private enterprise could not really prosper without government initiative at the national level. At a luncheon of the American-Australian Association in New York on 14 July 1970, he stated that the priorities of a future Labor government will give 'more attention to the restruction of the public sector than of the private sector'. His vision is of Australia as an 'off-shore fantasy for South-East Asia', 'the stepping-off point, the launching pad' for the development of that part of the underdeveloped world by U.S., Japanese and Australian capital. The British journalist Jonathan Aitken, who is also an aspiring Conservative politician, recognizes that the ALP presents no threat to the existing power structure. He describes the party as 'a friendly sheep dog whose policy is to keep the laissez-faire capitalists in vague order with a few gentle nips and nudge'. Aitken goes on to recount how Whittam was asked at a London press conference in 1970 what were the major socialist reforms he would introduce in the Prime Minister. The reply was a dreary recital of drainage statistics, which he said proved that Perth and Brisbane were the least Sewered cities in the world. Whittam concluded his salary inspectors' figure as follows: "We are the only party in Australia that will ever reform this situation. Sewers are usually socialists." Most of the very small minority of Labor parliamentarians who consistently describe themselves as socialists optate state action with moves towards socialism, while at the same time they seem unable to come to grips with the fact that capitalism is no longer in its laissez-faire stage. Calwell has referred to Australian capitalism as a 'composite system': 'We live now not so much in a capitalist system as in a technological one.' Moreover, he went on, even Menzies was 'enough of a realist to be a socialist when necessary'. As for Albert Monk, former president of the

76. , 18 October 1968.
78. Calwell, op. cit., pp. 75, 81. See also Calwell's statement in the Sun (Melbourne), 6 August 1958, that Menzies was 'a better
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Council of Trade Unions (ACTU), he believes that we are already far along the inevitable path towards a socialist society: "We must gradually evolve from capitalism to socialism - first by the nationalization of major undertakings, in which great progress has already been made."

His successor, R. J. Hawke, uses the term 'socialism' more readily - but with the same connotations. Indeed, he believes that the Curtin government 'abolished' capitalism during the Second World War; subsequently, Australia returned to a 'liberal-capitalist economy.'

The belief that any kind of state intervention, particularly public ownership, represents a espousal of capitalism and most therefore be treated as an advance towards socialism is deeply embedded in the thinking of those socialists who still remain in the ALP.

The assumption in the ALP's theory is that the government is in full control of the state. It is based upon the possibility of the neutralization of the state. As Calwell has declared, the state belonged to the people and should be used freely and consciously by the people as the instrument for their own betterment and progress.

The ALP has never understood the nature of economic and political power in Australia. Marxists, on the other hand, realize that the principal objective of revolutionary action is state power and the necessary precondition of any socialist revolution is the complete subordination of all classes other than the working class to the movement for social justice.

Socialists see the need for a great deal more to be done to socialize the country than we ever did.

(McGregor, op. cit., p. 187.)

81. For a detailed example, see G. H. Gray, MHR, Socialised Industry, Queensland Central Executive of the ALP, Brisbane, 1965, with a foreword by Senator Jim O'Keefe, then Federal president of the ALP.

Architectural School of the Bourgeois State Apparatus, 83. The conclusion is obvious: the ALP is out and never has been a socialist party. As Lenin pointed out as long ago as 1913, it is a "bourgeois-liberal party." 84

The business and propriety interests have been able to rely on the active goodwill of all Australian governments. However, there are other elements of the state system whose activities and ideological views are of crucial importance in determining the state's relationship to the different classes and interests in Australian society.

Public Service
Senior public servants often claim that they are politically neutral and that they merely implement the directives of the political executive. However, they obviously play an important part in the process of governmental decision-making. As a former secretary of the Department of Trade, Sir John Crawford, has observed:

Civil servants are not merely doers: they are part of the collective process of the government including the task of making policy decisions . . . . The relations between officials and Ministers in thinking through the problems were so close and continuous that whoever began what hardly mattered.

The ideological views of senior public servants significantly affect their advice. These men usually play a conservative role in the state system; it is true that some of them have been involved in economic and social reforms, but this involvement is never seen as anything but a temporary expedient.

has been accompanied by a strong determination to strengthen the existing social order. To quote Sir John Crawford again, he found it 'most insulting and offensive' to be described as a socialist: 'I have devoted a great part of my public life to the strengthening of private enterprise in the Australian economy and to furthering co-operation in economic policy matters between the leaders of private enterprise and Government.' On another occasion, he called for an ever closer partnership between private enterprise and government if the agreed economic purposes were to be served and conflicts of interest best resolved. 'It is a primary task of management in private enterprise and in Government to establish practical permanent machinery to find those solutions which seem best to fit with the national interests of Australia.'

Since Labor governments have never attempted to supplement a coherent set of policies in conflict with conservative interests, there is no reason why public servants should not be 'neutral' as between Labor or non-Labor governments. Dr H.C. Coombs, former Governor of the Reserve Bank, has said that a public servant can give 'different kinds of government honest service' only if he 'believes in the system broadly for which he works; not necessarily for that government or for that government, but believes that the system, by and large, is its appropriate one for the country in which he lives'. There is little evidence to suggest that higher public servants have not served governments with equal loyalty. They have not yet been forced to make a clear choice between serving what they view as the 'national interest' and serving a government seriously intent upon fundamental socio-economic change. Of course, they are not expected to subscribe to a rigid political ideology, but they are expected to stay within a spectrum of thought ranging from strong conservatism at one end to right-wing Laborism at the other. Outside that narrow spectrum of thought there is the certainty of an unsuccessful career.

The conservative outlook of top public servants is reinforced by their increasing closeness to the world of business which turns them into positive supporters of capitalism. State intervention in economic life entails a constant relationship between businessmen and public servants, not as representatives of antagonistic interests but as partners in the service of the 'national interest' which public servants, like politicians, define in terms consistent with the long-range interests of capitalism. While Prime Minister, Sir Robert Menzies stated that the 'whole essence of life' in Australia 'is that there should be no hostility between public administration and business, but the utmost co-operation and mutual understanding'. Sir John Crawford spoke of the partnership between businessmen and public servants when addressing the Australian Industries Development Association in 1966: 'Public and private economic power are no longer independent of one another, either in objectives or interests or in the exercise of their decision-making. They are in fact inter-dependent and require co-ordination.' A vice-president of the organization stated that Crawford had brought wonderfully to our attention the degree of inter-relationship which must exist, and exist to an ever increasing extent, between government and private enterprise... it has

86. Sunday Telegraph, 9 August 1964.
87. Sir John Crawford, Responsibilities of Management in a Growing Economy (Second John Storey Memorial Lecture, 1963), Australian Institute of Management, p. 22. 'Practical' is one of Crawford's favourite words: on the page just cited he wrote: 'Fortunately, we are a pragmatic people looking to practical solutions to problems as they arise.
88. Policies of Power, Australian Broadcasting Commission, Sydney, 1970, p. 40. See also H.C. Coombs, Other Peoples's Money: Australian National University Press, Canberra, 1971, p. 59: '... civil servants must accept broadly the general philosophy of the government which they are serving'. More recently, the Prime Minister, W. McMahon, has recruited the one-time confidant of Chifley as a 'kind of guiding philosopher' (Australian, 28 October 1971.)

89. Sydney Morning Herald, 19 October 1963.
been developing...along quite healthy lines. There is ample evidence in the actions of the government in setting up various advisory committees, and in its willingness and preparedness to listen to industry from time to time on major issues.

Today, it is difficult to separate private enterprise in fact from the business of government and all the administration that comes along with government.

Moreover, the public service and business are increasingly linked in terms of interchanging personnel. A significant number of higher public servants are finding their way into lucrative executive and directorial positions in large-scale enterprises in the private sector.

Recent examples of retired Commonwealth officials include Sir Roland Wilson, former secretary to the Treasury and for some years chairman of Qantas Airways, who has become a director of ICI Australia Ltd, and of the Mutual Life and Citizens' Assurance Co. Ltd; Sir Harry Black, former secretary of the Department of Labor, who has joined the boards of Associated Portland Cement Manufacturers ( Aust.) Ltd, Westinghouse Brake and Signal Company (Aust.) Pty Ltd, and United Bearing Corporation Pty Ltd; and Sir Richard Randall, former secretary to the Treasury, who has been appointed a director of CIG Ltd. As for public servants who resign in mid-career, one of the latest to join the steady stream leaving the Department of Trade was J. M. Guthrie, first assistant secretary of the Export Promotions Division, who became chief executive officer of Australian Motor Industries Ltd.

Industry groups such as the Associated Chambers of Manufactures of Australia (ACMA) are attracting officials away from the Commonwealth public service, particularly the Department of Trade, to improve fusion with government.

91. Ibid., p. 7.
95. Ibid., p. 7.
100. Australian, 23 December 1970. Two months earlier he was appointed a director of a Canberra-based computer firm - Information Electronics Ltd (Ibid., 27 October 1970).
service as well as closing the door to a business career.

The advantages enjoyed by business do not operate in favour of the labour interest. Labour is unable to exercise anything even approaching the kind of pressure which busi-
ness applies to the public service or to government. More-
over, labour has nothing to offer to senior public officials;
they do not enter the service of trade unions after retiring
or resigning from the public service. As between contending
classes and interests, public servants are not "neutral". They
are not an apolitical element in society, far above the con-
flicts in which classes and interests engage. On the con-
trary, they are the conscious or unconscious allies of capital
against labour.

Armed Forces and Police

Like higher public servants, senior members of the armed
forces see themselves as dedicated to the ‘national interest’
and free from ideological and political partisanship. In fact,
they constitute a markedly conservative element in the state
system. Their social origin, class situation and profes-
sional interest lead them to stand for a ‘national interest’
conceived in highly conservative terms, which includes a
strong hostility to radical ideas and movements. High-
ranking officers who are active in political parties are invari-
able to be found in the favoured institutions of the ruling
class. 101 The armed forces are increasingly coming to enjoy a
close relationship with large-scale private enterprise, simply
because the military requirements of the contemporary
state are fostering an association between them far more
intimate than at any previous time. However, the movement
of senior members of the armed forces into industry — par-
101. John Playford, 'Top Brass in Australian Politics', Australian

cularly those firms enjoying defence contracts — still
occurs on a relatively small scale compared with the mas-
sive ‘gold rush’ to be found in the U.S. 102

Policemen, like the ‘top brass’, also believe that they are
politically ‘neutral’. Superintendent E. L. Cadger, who was
the first commander of police on duty for the anti-war mora-
tum march in Adelaide in September 1970, has stated:

I believe that the Police are an impartial body. Whatever
Government is in power, it is a political body, and I would not
expect it to make such an impartial decision in these matters
as the police. 103

Although the overwhelming majority of police officers
are born into working-class and lower-middle strata families,
they also reinforce the conservative bias of govern-
ment and act as a voice of restraint against policies
which fail to correspond to their own conservative concep-
tion of the ‘national interest’. After pointing out that police
in the U.S. had moved ‘so far to the right that the only
friends they have are extreme societies such as the Ku
Klux Klan and the John Birch Society’, a sociologist noted

102. Playford, Neo-Capitalism in Australia, pp. 16, 35, 37; Ennals,
103. op. cit., p. 368. For Air-Chief-Marshal Sir Frederick Scherger’s
speech, see Australian Financial Review, 14 August 1969; Harold,
Alister Murdoch, Chief of the Air Staff 1965-9, accepted a seat on the
board of Phillips Industries Limited (Australian, 5 Feb-
uary 1971). In June 1971 Lt-Col. Sir Thomas Dryb, who had
recently retired as Chief of the General Staff, made
the first move into the business world by joining the board of
Austalasian Securities Ltd (Australian, 22 June 1971). In August
1971, Air-Vice-Marshal J F Lush, former RAAF Support Com-
mander, was appointed Australian executive representative of the
GOODWIN Aerospace Corporation (Australian, 2 August 1971).
105. Herbert L. Schiller and Joseph D. Phillips (eds), Super
state: Readings in the Military-Industrial Complex, University of
Illinois Press, Urbana, 1970, pp. 65-74. See also Mike Doolan and
Gary D’Leray, The Military-Industrial Complex in Australia, Rad-
ford Education Project no. 6, Adelaide, 1971.
recently: "The same situation is already occurring in Australia. Given their ideological conviction, they support with brutal zeal the determination of the civil power to curb
but left-wing ideas and movements. In a study of the police in five late capitalist societies, one authority has stated that
more than any other institution they "exhibit an antagonism
both in concept and practice, to some of the basic precepts
of a democratic society."²⁴⁰
The police act as the coercive agents of the existing social
order, particularly in periods of social strife and open class
conflict such as the 1912 Brisbane strike,²³⁹ the 1929 miner-
ners' strike in which Norman Brown was killed by policemen
protecting 'scabs' labour at Rothbury,²³⁸ and the 1948 rail
way strike in Brisbane.²³⁸ More recently, their political bias
has been shown in encounters with left-wing students, for
the use of 'basher tactics' against Sydney University stu-
dents peacefully marching in favour of Indonesian national-
ists in 1947²⁴¹ to the premeditated violence directed towards La Trobe University students in 1970 when Inspector
K. Plaf lur remarked: 'They got some baton today and
they'll get a lot more in the future.'²³² Peter Hain, the anti-
apartheid campaigner and chairman of the Young Liberal
in Britain, witnessed the warlike violence against demo-
strators at the rugby match between white South Africans
and Victorians in July 1971: '... the police have confirm-
that reputation for toughness: the match at Melbourne pro-
duced the most shocking police action I have seen outside
South Africa.'²³³
As for the secret political police, they also form part of
the coercive apparatus of the state. As an editorial in the
Canberra Times commented in 1968, the fact that the
Australian Security Intelligence Organization engages in
photographing, phone-tapping and shadowing people who
exercise their political rights is 'a chill breath of the police
state.'²³⁴
Judiciary
Although judges in Australia are independent of the govern-
ment, the notion of judicial independence must be consid-
ered more broadly. Judges cannot be independent of a
multitude of influences such as class origin, education, class
situation and professional interest. Most of them have born in
into the 'middle' and 'upper' classes,²³⁵ and the rest have come
106. George E. Berkley, The Democratic policeman, Beecroft
107. A. A. Morrison, 'The Brisbane General Strike of 1912,
D. J. Murphy, R. B. Joyce and Colin A. Hughes (eds), Prelude
108. Robin Goffin, The Condominers of New South Wales, Mel-
109. Doug Oliver, The Queensland Railway Strike, February–April
111. Sunday Observer, 20 September 1970. At least two stu-
dents were clubbed unconscious and one girl had a suspected nose
arm. See also Stephen Bradley's account of police brutality during
the last May Day march in Melbourne, Farrago (Melbourne Uni-
versity), 7 May 1971.
112. Australian, 16 July 1971; See also Stewart Harris' article in
the Age, 29 July 1971, and his letter to the Australian, 12 August
1971; Harris is chief correspondent in Australia of the Times, Lon-
don.
Wynne, The High Court of Australia: A Collective Portrait
1903–1979, Occasional Monograph No. 5, Department of Govern-
ment and Public Administration, University of Sydney, 1971. The
majority of magistrates, on the other hand, are not born into the
aristocratically dominant class, but this does not affect their role as
members of the existing power structure. A recent book on civil
liberties refers to 'general conservatism' and to the fact that
they 'must to adopt the value judgments of ruling authority and to
remain in favour of the testimony of policemen'. (Ken Buckley,
Oliver and Obrecht, Uni Smith, Sydney, 1970, pp. 14, 17.) See
also the observations of the criminologist Dennis Chappell in the
to belong to these classes by the time they reach the bench. Moreover, the conservative bias created by the class situation of judges is powerfully reinforced by the fact that they are recruited from the legal profession, whose conservative ideological views are widely known. After pointing out that judges come from "a very narrow section of the community", Professor Peter Brett has observed: "For their whole training in the law they get an inherently conservative bias.

At the Federal level, non-Labor governments have generally held office. They have never hesitated to elevate people of conservative views to the judiciary.118 Labor governments, on the other hand, have been extremely reluctant to appoint Labor-inclined lawyers.119 Judges with liberal views have never constituted more than a small minority on the bench. Moreover, their liberalism must not be mistaken for hostility to the basic economic and social institutions of the ongoing society. Evatt and Young were eminent liberal judges but only antediluvian reactionaries believed that their liberalism was not contained within the framework of Australian capitalism.

The conservative ideological views of judges118 are important because they significantly affect the manner in which the judicial function is discharged. Judges are not

115 Sydney Morning Herald, 7 October 1968.
118 Witting in the Sunday Mail, 9 April 1968, a former justice of the South Australian Supreme Court, Sir Charles Abbott, stated that his involvement in politics began in 1928 during the Australia-wide maritime strike: 'We had gone down to Port Adelaide to maintain order. It was a volunteer corps organized by A. S. Blackburn. It is interesting to note that Blackburn, whose corps
Arbitration Judges

The arbitration system in Australia is an integral part of the state apparatus. It is based on the assumption that capital and labour share a common interest in "prosperity" despite some differences about wages and conditions. Imperial "unions" are appointed by the government to arbitrate between these two interests. The arbitration system, however, is not impartial; it does not stand above classes and interests. On the contrary, it functions for the purpose of mediating, regulating and controlling industrial conflict and to contain it within the confines of the capitalist system. 62 Mr. Justice C. Powers claimed in 1920 that the arbitration system was the only safety valve which prevented the spread of Social War, Communism and Bolshevism in the Commonwealth or the extent they are spreading elsewhere. 63

One of the prime purposes of arbitration is to preserve the existing division of the product. Several years ago, a well-known economist wrote:

...there is no evidence that the arbitration system has raised labour's share of national income over the past twenty years, or that it has succeeded in obtaining for Australian labour a higher share of national income than it earned by workers in other countries with a similar degree of economic development. 64

Improvements won by labour, such as the forty-hour week introduced after the Second World War, can be traced to militant trade union action rather than to the benevolence of those who man the arbitration machine. 65

Australian writings on industrial relations generally maintain the fiction of decision-makers uninfluenced by any...

62. See chapter by Szondi in this volume.
thing but the evidence placed in front of them in public hearings or on inspections. However, the class origin, education and ideological views of arbitration judges and conciliation commissioners are significant influences. Most of the men in the upper echelons of the system come from conservative backgrounds. Not a few enjoy close ties with the world of business. Mr Justice H. B. Piper retired as Chief Justice of the Commonwealth Arbitration Court in 1947 and transferred immediately to the boards of the Brocket Hill Pty Co. Ltd and Australian Iron and Steel Ltd. His successor, Mr Justice E. A. Drake-Brockman, was both a non-Labor Federal parliamentarian and president of the Central Council of Employers before being appointed to the bench. As for the next incumbent, Sir Raymond Kelly, he held views which were permeated by the ‘spirit of the corporate state’, and he believed that ‘contentment and peace is only to be found in the acceptance of authority’. Two members of the present Commonwealth Industrial Court—Sir John Spicer and Mr Justice P. E. Joske—are former Federal Liberal parliamentarians; Mr Justice W. A. Smithers was president of the Young Nationalists in Victoria in 1940.

A minority of arbitration judges once had close connections with the ALP, including two members of the present Commonwealth Conciliation and Arbitration Commission—Sir Richard Kirby and Mr Justice F. H. Gallagher. Mr Justice Kerr of the Commonwealth Industrial Court was also once an active member of the ALP and of the Australian Association for Cultural Freedom, affiliated with the then CIA-financed Congress or Cultural Freedom. Not only have these ‘Labor’ judges helped to reinforce the legitimacy of arbitration among trade unionists, but they have also frequently acted against labour with more than usual severity. The late Mr Justice A. W. Foster, who once advocated the abolition of the arbitration system and was slated by the *Australasian* as a ‘Bolshevik’, meted out Draconian sentences to the leaders of the 1949 coal strike. Such behaviour is not unexpected. These men are not appointed to upset the status quo; their function is to maintain the capitalist system. The arbitration system is simply another part of the complex mechanism through which the ruling class wields a preponderant influence over the policies and actions of the state.

The ideological views and composition of those occupying leading positions in the state apparatus ensure that the dominant economic interests can rely on their support. However, these interests cannot always count on government and the other elements of the state system. For example, government may wish to follow policies which they believe to be beneficial to capitalist enterprise in the long run but which powerful economic interests may find disturbing. Government may also at times be subjected to pressure from other classes which it cannot completely ignore. Thus the general support which capitalist interests find inside the state system does not eliminate the need to exert pres-
Labour v. Capital

Nor indeed is there anything to suggest that big business has succeeded in controlling or chiefly influencing Government policy.138

Phlalists are correct to the extent that they have observed a multitude of groups, competing with each other for advancement of their various aims. But they have created a myth by assuming that the most important organized interests, particularly capital and labour, compete on approximately equal terms, and that no one interest is able to gain a decisive advantage in the process of competition. Business is not just another interest group in Australian life; it is the keystone of power.

Business is able to exercise immensely stronger pressures than labour in pursuing its aims. The most important is the pervasive and permanent pressure on government and the state generated by the private control of concentrated economic power. The existence of this major area of independent power is a fact which no government can ignore in determining its policies and which makes it extremely difficult for any government to impose on business policies which are strongly opposed. In other words, the limits of intervention against business are narrow. Of course, the veto power of business is not absolute, but it is extremely large; by virtue of its control of economic resources, capitalist enterprise enjoys a strategic position in its dealings with government.

139 Sir Ian Potter, 'The 17/18th to Mere', Australian Accountant, vol. 31, August 1961, p. 478. Potter is not only a well-known company director but also a prominent figure in the extra-parliamentary wing of the Liberal Party.

140 T. G. Sharp, 'Industrial Relations in Australia', in Anatomy of Australia, p. 192.

141 Sydney Morning Herald, 27 April 1971.
is not as divided as labour. Of course, business is not an
economic or ideological monolith speaking with one voice
on all issues, but the divisions within business do not pre-
vent a basic ideological consensus. Business presents a rea-
sonably united front on most of the important issues of
economic policy, and over many other large national issues
as well. As Ensell has noted: 'When it comes to basic ques-
tions about the relation between capital and labour, the
employers speak with one voice.'142 The outstanding char-
acteristic of the trade union movement on the other hand
is division over fundamental matters, particularly ideology.
It should be emphasized here that to a significant degree the
trade unions have been integrated into the structure of Aus-
tralian society, although their officials are not represented
on as many government advisory committees as are their
British counterparts.143 Nevertheless, the great majority of
them live up to the picture of a 'responsible' union official
painted in 1970 by the then Minister for Labour, B.M.
Snedden: 'He starts giving real leadership when he presents
objectives which run parallel to the objectives of the na-
tion'.144

There are many other reasons for dismissing as unrealis-
tic the view that labour is of comparable strength to busi-
ness. As far as prestige, group activity at the executive
and administrative level is concerned, business enjoys relations
with cabinet ministers and senior public servants which are
markedly different from those of labour. These men, as we
have seen, are influenced by social background, personal
ities, class situations, ideological views and conceptions of
the 'national interest': given these influences, business se-
cures a degree of sympathy of a kind qualitatively different
from that accorded to labour. An important reason for this
difference is that labour always appears as a very much
more 'sectional' interest than business. The legitimate de-

143. Playford, Non-Capitalism in Australia, Appendix.

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mands of labour can always be construed as detrimental to
economic viability or inflationary, as selfish or unrealistic;
in other words, as against the 'national interest'. The de-
mands of business, on the other hand, can always be plau-
bly presented - given the capitalist context in which they
are made - as consistent with the 'national interest'. Cabinet
ministers and senior public servants are very likely to feel
that in endorsing the demands of business they are further-

145. S. H. Davis, 'Diversity in Unity', in Davis, op. cit., p. 635.
fraction of a minority. This imbalance does not automatically ensure that business interests always achieve their objectives. Neither do other interests always fail to achieve their objectives— even against strong business opposition; in fact, it would be absurd to speak of competition at all if business dominance had been absolute. Nevertheless, the odds are stacked very heavily in favour of powerful capitalist interests.

Parliament

The marked imbalance between business and labour is also seen in the workings of parliament. As is widely known, the legislature plays a subsidiary role in the decision-making process, with government increasingly insulated from effective parliamentary pressure. Nevertheless, it retains some degree of influence, and the major interests still find it worthwhile to exert pressure through parliament. Despite universal suffrage, it remains much more the instrument of the dominant class than of the subordinate classes.

To begin with, conservative parties have dominated parliament, particularly at the Federal level. As for the ALP, it has acted on a view of the 'national interest' in which working-class interests have been subordinated. Almost every Labor parliamentarian has succumbed to the parliamentary environment which has markedly affected whatever political virility a small minority of them once possessed and has caused them to see the world through a parliamentary haze. After his party had been out of office for almost two decades— although at times it had a clear majority of the total vote— and in full knowledge of the increasingly weakened legislative and non-legislative functions of parliament, Labor's Whip in the House of Representatives stated in 1967:


Conclusion

A Marxist analysis of power does not advance the absurd notion that the ruling class actually dominates the bourgeois democratic political system in Australia. That is nothing but an invention of vulgar anti-Marxists eager to demolish the

148. G. S. Reid, 'Parliamentary Politics', Politics, vol. II, no. 3, May 1967, p. 89. When a well-known journalist interviewed the prime minister on 9 March 1971 to call the then Prime Minister a Nazi, Calwell immediately demanded that the Speaker 'deal with the individual who had - the audacity' to shout at Gorton, thereby demonstrating a 'despicable attitude'. The paramount role of parliament in Australian society has been argued for by a former Labor President of the Senate in a book interfaced with crude anti-communism. The Senator Swain, My Demos. from Socialism to Senarit. Ringwood, 1955, pp. 75-95.

straw-man view that a 'small clique of people... monopolizes privilege'. These critics claim that 'light conspiracies' theories of society can be demonstrated to be untrue. A lot of the people who make decisions in Australia just never meet each other. Such a superficial observation completely ignores the fact that, although some of these 'strangers' never make personal contact, they have an excellent means of recognition - their common wish to maintain the capitalist system. Obviously, if aware of their own position and if working toward a common goal, the members of the ruling class need not 'conspire' to assure behaviour in their common interest.'

Encel's curt assertion that 'The notion of the “ruling class” has — with reason — been out of favour for a long time' is on a par with Mills' dismissal of the concept in a famous footnote in *The Power Elite*. It is true that the structure of class power in Australia relies on a considerable extent on a complex mechanism of mediated and conditioned consent which makes it appear that the economically dominant class does not exercise a decisive degree of political power. In reality, however, the most important political fact about our society is the existence of concentrated private economic power, whose owners and controllers enjoy a massive preponderance in the determination of the policies.


154. S. Encel, 'The Political Elite in Australia', in Hughes, op. cit., p. 86.


and actions of the state and in the political system as a whole.

Several years ago Nairn pointed out that Marxists have tended to concentrate upon the obvious instruments of power: the coercive state, the police and the army, deliberate propaganda for a way of life and certain sacred values. However, he continued:

... the modalities of power are infinite. In reality, the hegemony of one social class over subordinate classes in society
may be extremely complex, a cultural tissue of great variety
and subility, extending all the way from the education of
infants to the naming of streets, present in people's inhibitions
and mental blocs as well as in what they profess to believe —
all that tradition of the generations 'weighing like a nightmare
on the brain of the living', as Marx said. The validity of Nairn's statement does not contradict the fact that the power of the ruling class ultimately rests on coercion and violence, as any revolutionary socialist trade unionist or student can readily confirm. Nevertheless, it is important to remember that contemporary Australian capitalism is maintained not by the state's superior fire power but by the fact that the whole structure of economic and political domination is dependent upon the support — or at least the acquiescence — of the great majority of those who are subject to it. Most Australians accept the existing social order and confine their demands and aspirations within its limits. Vigorous and protracted struggle will be necessary to smash the economic, political and ideological domination of the ruling class.


157. Woodsworth (op. cit., p. 76) has written that 'the scope of the application of force is usually in reverse proportion to the depth of ideological domination.' See also Alan Wolfe, 'Political Repression and the Liberal Democratic State', *Monthly Review*, vol. 23, December 1971.