

207 printed.

ON THE DRY SIDE THE NEW ENLIGHTENMENT John Hyde  
The 'new right' label is applied indiscriminately to incompatible points of view and I smell a minor conspiracy. The terms 'left' and 'right' are about as descriptive as 'damn' and 'bloody', but these days left and right both imply an overweening and powerful state. To describe people who want less state authority as 'right' is slander.

In the late seventeenth hundreds the first 'left' adopted 'Liberte, Egalite, Fraternite', and declared itself the enemy of all governments. It degenerated into enforcing state authority by guillotine, but it is ironic the so-called 'new right' should have much in common with the original, short-lived left.

Without serious offence to the language the 'new right' might therefore be called 'left' but never 'right'. Right-wing has always been associated with powerful government and preservation of privilege---with what the new right does not favour.

'New Enlightenment' would be a better label. The Concise Oxford Dictionary defines 'The Enlightenment' as 'an eighteenth-century philosophy allegedly placing too much emphasis on reason and individualism against tradition.' The Liberal Party wets and the Industrial Relations Club say or imply we do that.

Mainstream advocates of smaller government are simply good old-fashioned European liberals slandered. New liberalism is winning intellectual ascendancy. The spate of name-calling is the intemperance of frustrated collectivists. One silly employee of the Australian Chamber of Manufacturers, Mr Powell, called us 'fascist', an expression I would not use to describe him in spite of his preference for the corporatist Arbitration Commission.

In Australia the new liberalism, enlightenment, or right (if the reader insists) was born of the certain knowledge that the economy was being led into trouble; fear that if economic difficulties caused living standards to fall sharply, Australia would suffer political and mob excesses like other countries in like circumstance; despair of governments which have abandoned long-term interests; disgust with political favouritism; disquiet at the trend of social indicators such as single parenthood, drug-addiction and unemployment. These are mainstream concerns.

The new liberals favour less public debt, less taxation, no political sales of tariffs, no two-airline agreements etc., and less intrusive government. So do most people.

The new-right-bashing industry has concentrated on the new liberals' calls for more free employment but here too the new liberals are in mainstream. Recent opinion polls show 83% of Australians oppose compulsory unionism, 78% think unions have

too much power and 68% of even trade union members think unions hold too much power. In Poland a worker has no right to join a real trade union, in Australia he has no effective right not to join.

The liberal tradition that law should be even-handed is neglected. In Australia influential people and lobbies do best. Don't let Mr Wilenski, head of the Public Service Board and defender of big government, tell you governments discriminate to help the poor and under-privileged. The principle of even-handedness is flouted to help the powerful---often union and company bosses who have the ears of the cabinets, as the public know. In NSW, Victoria, Queensland and WA stories of extreme political favouritism are rife.

Instead of name-calling those who believe in more public and foreign debt should present arguments for it. Those who believe in centralised regulated labour markets should defend these. Those who believe the rise in unemployment, single parenthood and drug abuse are not exacerbated by government policies can give their own interpretations.

Many of our opponents do. But, because they are not winning public opinion, they use 'right' to associate us with big government at its worst---a clear case of Orwellian doublespeak.

Spasmodic attempts are also made to associate the new liberals with the brigade of double-standard bearers who defend economic privileges such as arts grants, tariffs and monopoly wheat-marketing, while selectively condemning privileges such as the dole and land rights. There are people who defend the privileges of the rich and condemn those of the poor, but a fair assessment of most of those who are so loosely labelled 'new right' shows they have no truck with hypocrisy.

The new liberals do not want people to be left to sink or swim, and have never implied they do, but middle-class welfare recipients who also say their taxes are too high and the welfare industry paint them as monsters.

I have never met such a one, but Rowena Stretton, of The Financial Australian, evidently has. These were his attitudes:

- to unemployment: 'it's always nice to have a surplus of just about everything.
- to equity: 'I don't get hooked on inequities'.
- to responsibility for others: Rowena Stretton wrote, 'it is not fashionable to think in terms of the maxim "with privilege comes responsibility"---and forego skiing and or sailing to fund-raise for charity.'

New liberalism shares none of his attitudes. If the fellow can make a fortune in free markets, good luck to him; we are not hung up by envy. He will probably pay for it with other things

not done, but that is not the point. What matters is that in a free market, wish it or not, he will benefit others. We know, as anyone knows who looks about him, that the poorest people have higher incomes and more property in liberal societies than in statist societies.

His unconcern for the unemployed is as objectionable as is the trade union movement's unconcern, although he does not compound his want of compassion with crocodile tears.

The new liberals point out that man is often selfish. They do not advocate selfishness. They know that raising funds for charity is more worthy than skiing and sailing. They advocate a market economy because it turns the fact of skiing and sailing to some common good and denies selfish man the power of the state to be selfish with.

Finally, I will be accused of protesting too much. Perhaps. At first I dismissed new-right bashing but I now think the slander is affecting the debate. It must not set back the real human rights movement of this century.