

CHANGING AUSTRALIA

I am constantly surprised by the diligence and success with which Socialists, Marxists, Neo-marxists, Neo-socialists and collectivists of all shades seek out, find and employ respectable stalking horses behind which to advance the collectivist society and condemn the liberal society. One of their more notable recent successes has been to imply a collectivist preference to the Christian Church. One of the more recent shots in that war, which the collectivists have partly won, has been the document, "Changing Australia", produced by the Anglican Social Responsibilities Commission, the Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace, the Australian Council of Churches, and the Commission on Social Responsibility of the Uniting Church.

"Changing Australia" adopts the political techniques not of the gospels but of the worst sort of vote grubbing politicians appealing to the baser human motives of envy, fear, and hatred, while offering the sanctimonious warmth of doing good at another's expense.

Discussing society's ills in retrospect it absolves individuals of responsibility by offering them scapegoats in the form of the world economy, multinationals, corporations, and United States bases; in prospect it demands a collective responsibility, enforced by government. It even says "... the loss of integrity is no longer something personal." It is all a far cry from, and much more comfortable to live with, than that personal moral responsibility which was the subject of the many sermons of my schooldays.

Although probably the work of one unnamed author "Changing Australia" claims to be a consensus document evolved out of discussion with many groups, "and with the bishops and leaders of the churches." Were it not for the implied imprimatur of the Christian churches it would be extremely unimportant - just another piece of badly argued political junk, dishonest in the impression it seeks to convey but not rating much serious attention. As it does seem to speak with the authority of the churches it should be answered.

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Several have criticised the author's assertions and the role of the churches in propagating them. The Sydney based Centre for Independent Studies conducted two one-day seminars at which the skills of theology, economics, philosophy, law and foreign affairs were brought to bear on the publication. Seldom have I seen anything so delicately carved up. The job was done, (not collectively but each according to his own judgement and on his own responsibility) by Rev. Dr. John Williams, Rev. Br. Paul McGavin, Br. Hugh Henry M.S.C., Professor Lauchlan Chipman, Professor Geoffrey Brennan, and Mr. Greg Sheridan. The proceedings are to be published in July.

Central to "Changing Australia" is the author's notion of economic justice, which is seen as an egalitarian distribution of wealth and income bearing no relationship to the processes by which wealth is created or to individuals' contributions to that process. This seems as unjust as the opposite extreme idea, that wealth is gained by merit alone and therefore no redistribution can be justified.

He, or she, attempts to ground the concept of economic justice in the biblical writings and then to apply it to all Australians, Christian and non-Christian alike, by resorting to government compulsion. How like the Ayatollah Khomeini.

Were "Changing Australia's" idea of justice to be as well founded in the Bible as it claims to be, it might give devout Christians an insurmountable problem.

The Rev. Dr. Williams shows that it is not. The Bible is not a socialist tract. Although it condemns many means of becoming wealthy, and lays clear obligations upon the wealthy, wealth itself is seen as a sign of God's favour. A procedural, not an end pattern of justice is involved. The Bible says nothing about a right to receive as much from Mammon as fourteen million other Australians but more than nearly all of seven thousand million other people of the world. I suspect "Changing Australia" would not appeal to Australians as much if the author had taken the argument to its logical conclusion where Australians are compelled to redistribute most of their high living standard and capital to foreigners.

The problem of wealth is seen as one of distribution rather than of creation. Taxes must be higher to pay for higher social welfare benefits but no thought is given to making our economy more productive. It is not even suggested that

Unemployment is seen as a major crisis. I do not quarrel with that assessment but why isn't the role of unions and the price of labour considered among the <sup>documents</sup> <sup>list</sup> of possible causes of unemployment ?

The tract also deals sloppily with the notion of power. Power is not defined but wealth is seen as its source. Wealth obviously gives an individual more power over his own life but power, as distinct from mere influence, over others' lives requires the ability to compel obedience. Short of resort to criminal behaviour, wealth cannot compel; it can only offer; compulsion is the prerogative of government. Wealth can make offers to unwise government; I am sure it often does, but that circumstance provides at least as good a case for limiting government as for limiting wealth.

All six speakers at the CIS seminar were concerned for Australia that the authority of the church had been employed to support a very one sided view of the social sciences. At least some of the speakers were concerned for the church also. The church has a long reputation for intellectual rigour which it can not afford to squander. The Roman Catholic Church (Divini Redemptoris) ~~says~~ <sup>says</sup> ~~in its history~~:  
"... in the sphere of the social sciences the church has never proposed a definite technical system, since this is not her field." I predict that the three churches concerned will come to be more careful how their reputations are appropriated by people with strong political preferences. Men and women of the church will still be encouraged by the church to speak out on the great social issues but greater care will be taken to ensure that it is well known that it is not the church which speaks, and they will be expected to enhance not diminish the church's reputation for intellectual discipline.

Finally there is a religious and collectivist society similar in some ways to that advocated by "Changing Australia", to which it might have referred its readers. It is Poland.