

New Introduction

The origins of this book are the 1980s when Menzies had been dead less than 10 years and I was young. Hated, loved, revered, scorned, he was a political celebrity, a cultural touchstone for Australians to organise their memories, communicate their political allegiances and mark their generational differences. For some he had borrowed glamour from his much loved royal family and for others had done deeds of such political mendacity that Australia was able to feel itself part of the twentieth century's moral and political struggles.

When the book was published in 1992 and I was doing the media rounds as a very new author, interviewers from Bert Newton to Philip Adams were far more interested in telling stories about their encounters with the great man than in anything I had to say. And he was always just Menzies: the name heavy with the jowls of masculine power, but also familiar and homely. Menzies might have been the embodiment of political power, but he was ours, and in having spoken with him, seen him at a rally or school speech night, known his driver or an ex-neighbour, one could feel part of Australia's history.

The manuscript I delivered to Hilary Mc Phee in 1991 had an introductory chapter which did not survive her editor's judgement about popular readability. The chapter went some way to describing the book's theoretical context and methods. In my work as editor of *Meanjin* I had become adept at ridding academic articles of their theoretical superstructures, and I followed her advice, though with some regret. I would have liked to have shown readers how I developed my interpretations and arguments, so that they could better judge what I had done with the evidence. I left clues to my theoretical sources in the choice of words, in expository half sentences and in endnotes, but if anyone noticed the clues at the time, no one will now. Books are part of conversations, and many of the conversations this book was having are long over. In the introduction to this new edition, I want to revive some of these conversations to show the book's origins in my own intellectual biography.

The book began with an article I published in *Meanjin* in 1984. In 1980 I was teaching a course on Australian political parties at the University of Melbourne and

wanted to give the students something to read on Menzies that was neither hagiography nor polemic. Whatever one thought about him he was after all Australia's longest serving Prime minister and young politics students needed to know about him. Finding nothing, I turned to the archive. There I found a pamphlet, 'The Forgotten People', on shiny paper with black, deeply indented type you could run your finger across. It was a speech Menzies had written for radio in May 1942 when he was on the backbench of a demoralised Opposition. In 1941 he had resigned as Prime Minister and shortly after the government had fallen. John Curtin became Prime Minister and led the country for the remainder of the war. I was bowled over by the speech and started having ideas about it, lots of them. In fact I have been having ideas about that speech ever since, and have returned to it again and again as a lever to prise apart the interconnections between political ideas and social experience in twentieth century Australia. Here was Menzies in his prime, pitting the language of the home against the impersonal world of work and organised labour. Here was Menzies talking about class even as he denied its relevance, citing Robbie Burns, and speaking in the prose and rhetorical forms of countless Sunday sermons. Here, it seemed, was Menzies in his own words.

But of course they weren't just his own words. They were also the words he shared with the people to whom he spoke, words and ideas from contested political traditions, parts of arguments about what was important in life and what politics could and should do about it. I have come to see Menzies' speech to 'The Forgotten People' as a crystallisation of a tradition of Australian thinking which rejects the relevance of class to the way people understand themselves and others in favour of a common sense moral individualism where a person's worth is in their character rather than their job or their bank account. The roots of this tradition were in the nineteenth century, in colonial liberalism's faith in the opportunities the new land of Australia offered to ordinary men and women to make something of themselves, free from the Old World's strictures of status and deference. And its arguments could still be heard at the end of the twentieth century, when ordinary men and women talked about class.¹

When I first read the speech, class was the big question for scholars of politics and history. The strength and early success of the Australian labour movement, its bitter

schisms and its spectacular failures, were a magnet for scholars who interpreted Australian history in terms of an underlying class conflict in which the ruling class, or at least ruling class interests, always came out trumps. There were more or less sophisticated versions of this, but the majority of Australians who voted for nonlabour federal governments far more often than for Labor were always a problem. Also a problem was that the Liberal Party repeatedly denied that it was a class-based party. Of course it was easy to dismiss this as hypocrisy, but at the cost of failing to engage with the party's self-understandings and political traditions, The result was a lop-sided understanding of Australia's political history, which left the motivations of some of its key actors obscure.

The doyen of Australian class analysis was Bob Connell. His and Terry Irving's *Class Structure in Australian History* was published in 1980. Ambitious and enormously influential, the book put forward a chronological framework for the analysis of social power in Australia which took antagonistic class relations as fundamental. The protagonists of this conflict were the working class and the ruling class. The book's avowed aim was to help people to a clear understanding of the pattern of class relations that shaped their lives so that they would be better able to change them. 'The Forgotten People' was included in a section on 'The Political Crisis of the Ruling Class', and the authors pointed to the skilful identification the speech made between the social customs and prejudices of the people addressed and the strategic interests of capitalism.² A painting of by Noel Counihan called 'Election Eve' adorned the book's cover. Menzies leered from the gloomy canvas across a podium and a Union Jack, rubbing his hands together at having conned yet another victory out of a duped and anxious electorate.

Class was, indeed, able to explain a great deal about Australian politics, in particular the links of the major parties to different economic interests and producer groups, their characteristic stances towards industrial relations, patterns of financial support, and the power of class identification in mobilising Labor's working class vote. What it was less able to do was to explain the basis of the Liberal Party's electoral support, why time and again the majority of Australians voted it into government. In my lectures I would quote the judgement of labour historian Finn Crisp

that the Liberal and Country Party are 'first and foremost the owners and controllers of private productive and commercial capital, urban and rural'.³ It was the orthodox class-based reading of the time, but it didn't quite ring true to me. I would scoot over it, fingers crossed that no student would ask me to explain. 'Owners and controllers of private and productive capital, urban and rural' seemed too grand and powerful a description for the Liberal Party supporters I knew: the fathers of people I was at school with in Nunawading, clerks and accountants of modest means and their home-making wives; the good women my mother worked with at the YWCA, who lived out the importance of service; the men who turned up to working bees at the church and the school; my paternal grandparents on a dairy farm who had little time for Labor; my returned service men uncles and my respectable, genteelly poor maternal grandmother; and so on. These were the salaried officers and white collar workers, the small business people and the farmers Menzies had addressed in the *Forgotten People*. Did they know they were serving the strategic interests of capital? And even if they were, might not they also be serving some interests of their own?

The big problem for the standard, class-based analysis of Australian politics and history was the middle class which provided the core of the Liberal Party's electoral support. Australian historiography on the middle class was thin in the 1980s.⁴ When the middle class did appear in historical narratives it was not generally the major villain, for after all most of the middle class were ordinary people of small means; but they entered from stage right as the dupes of powerful interests who played on their fears to frustrate Labor's progressive political goals. The mobilisations around honest finance in the Depression, or against Chifley's plans to nationalise the banks, or in the moral panic about the excesses of the Whitlam government were interpreted in this way. Part of the problem historians had with the middle class was the failure to resolve whether it was an analytical term in a schema of social classification, or a term of self-description. I was interested in it as a term of self-description, what people meant when they described themselves as middle class, and what it said to them about the basis of their political identification. I still am. Eleven years after publishing *Robert Menzies Forgotten People* I published a history of the relationship

between the Liberal Party's political traditions and the social experience and self-understandings of the Australian middle class.⁵ And I am currently working on the way people interviewed at the end of the century talked about class. Some of this is in the conclusion of my co-authored book, *Ordinary People's Politics*.

In 1980 though, the support of the middle class for the Liberals was something to be explained rather than understood, as were the many working class people who voted Liberal. Class analysis provided answers, with concepts like ideology, false consciousness and hegemony to explain how the ruling ideas of any time served the interests of the ruling class, and how alternative, oppositional understandings were marginalised and suppressed. Such arguments were powerfully attractive to intellectuals and political activists who were able to believe they knew better than the subjects they were studying; but they were of limited use to historians intent on understanding how people thought and felt.

If Marxism and class analysis created the problem of how to interpret middle class politics, developments in Marxism also provided the solution. The translation into English of the writings of the Young Marx in the 1960s had led to a resurgence of interest in Marxism, and in particular in the nature and role of ideology.⁶ No longer was this to be understood, as it had been in classical Marxism, as a simple reflection of the economic base of society. Ideology was now granted a relative autonomy and re-conceptualised through the ideas of culture and language as a complex system of meaning. The standby excuse of false consciousness for the failure of the workers' revolution was rejected. Ideology was not illusion, as in Marx's infamous dismissal of religion as the opiate of the people. Rather people's ideas, beliefs and common sense understandings were seen as attempts to make sense of real experience. I came to see ideology as the partial representation of real experience.⁷ This provided me with a way of thinking about both the distortions and partiality in all systems of representation, but also their grounding in people's everyday lived experience. It gave me a way to think about how the Australian middle class understood themselves.

Successive theoretical waves broke across the humanities and social sciences from the middle of the 1960s to create an extraordinarily productive and exciting couple of decades. Structuralism, semiotics, structural Marxism, discourse theory, Lacanian

psychoanalysis, cultural studies, deconstruction, post colonialism, ending in the melee of theories that get bundled together as post modernism. New writers, ideas, concepts and movements came at a bewildering rate and it was easy for young scholars to lose their footing. Some undoubtedly did, but the collective result was a much expanded and greatly enriched repertoire of ideas and concepts for understanding human experience.

The axiom on which all these theories were based was the relative autonomy of language, and by extension of other systems of representation. Language was conceptualised not as a transparent medium for the description of the world nor the expression of thought, but as a dense, complex reality constructing the world and the self in ways which neither could resist. Rival theories put forward different ideas about how to explain this autonomy of language, and how to understand its effects. Different interpretive techniques were developed; and different balances were struck between the play and fictiveness of language, the resistance of reality and the imperatives of power and control. How to respond to so many new ideas and theories? Promiscuous eclecticism and rigorous discipleship were the two poles. I tended to the former, and decided early on that my interest was in the usefulness of theories for the tasks of interpreting the world, rather than in the arguments amongst the theories.⁸

My first go at this was my PhD on the Austrian *fin de siècle* poet Hugo von Hofmannsthal.⁹ I did this thesis in a Politics Department in the 2nd half of the 1970s under the indulgent eye of Alan Davies, and I shudder now at my head-strong commitment to following my nose and his carelessness with my job prospects. Like *Robert Menzies' Forgotten People*, the thesis began with a short text, stumbled on accidentally. I was reading Alan Janik and Stephen Toulmin's *Wittgenstein's Vienna*,¹⁰ when I came across some paragraphs from Hugo von Hofmannsthal's Letter of Lord Chandos and sparks started to fly. This was a fictive letter from a young poet to his patron in which he describes the breakdown and slow re-building of his relationship with a language which had once flowed from him so easily into lyric poetry that he felt that he and language were one. The text had been studied before, as an expression of the crisis of meaning in *fin de siècle* Vienna, and it was clearly autobiographical. As a precocious sixteen year old poet, the young Hofmannsthal had been the darling of the Viennese coffee houses, only to find his gift and his words

desert him in his early 20s. The Chandos Letter was his first published piece after this breakdown, and marked his move from the intense subjectivity of lyric poetry into more public and contained forms of writing. He never wrote lyric poetry again, and soon after began the collaboration with Richard Strauss through which his poetry has lived on. The thesis used psychoanalysis to interpret the crisis and the resolution of Hofmannsthal's relationship with language, mainly the work of Melanie Klein and British object relations theory, but also the ideas of Jacques Lacan. It proceeded through detailed, close readings of selected texts of Hofmannsthal's, returning again and again to the central *Brief* as the pivotal text in a story of profound psychological and literary transformation.

I now see that my PhD on Hofmannsthal was a rehearsal for my work on Menzies. Both take a central text and use it as a pivot; both develop their arguments from detailed close readings; and both ponder the interplay between private meanings and the publicly available forms for their expression. I didn't realise this until after the book on Menzies was published, and it was, I must say, a great relief. The five years of my twenties spent poring over German and reading a huge amount of difficult theory redeemed what might otherwise have been a huge waste of time.

My PhD on Hofmannsthal was also a rehearsal in the use of psychoanalytic theory to interpret the interplay between language and lived experience. Being about literary rather than political language, the balance between personal and public meanings was different, but all language has an inner and an outer face to which biographical interpretation must attend. The task I set myself in writing *Robert Menzies Forgotten People* was to develop interpretations adequate to both faces of the language. Work on ideology, discourse and rhetoric guided my readings of the public face and psychoanalysis the private. But how to understand the way they interacted? I was not interested here in the labour of theoretical reconciliation but in the challenge of interpretive practice. I came to understand the task as locating the points of interconnection between the dominant public forms of Australian Liberal ideology in which Menzies was so skilled and the deep themes in his own psychology and biography.

My use of psychoanalysis drew some criticism at the time. Although the name of Freud does not appear until 212 of a 274 page book, and the name of Oedipus until page 213, some critics reviewed the book as if it were a psychobiography of the crudest and most impudent sort.¹¹ It seemed that the names of Freud and Oedipus triggered such powerful responses that they swamped the first part of the book, which owed nothing to psychoanalysis, as well as grossly distorting the way the psychoanalytically based arguments were read. I have dealt with this more fully in the Introduction to a subsequent edited book, *Political Lives*, and in an essay in that book on the uses of psychoanalysis for political biography. This explains in much more detail than I have room for here the way I used psychoanalysis to understand Menzies' political life.¹² Although in hindsight I perhaps should have removed the names of Freud and Oedipus from the text (as my friend and colleague Graham Little advised me to), I still stand by the general shape of the argument. To quote from the conclusion to my essay 'The Tasks of Political Biography':

To look long and hard at a life, to remember that one's subject was once a vulnerable and dependent child, to realise that their achievements may have only been possible because of their self-deceptions, to remember, above all, that this person is not a god or a saint or even a hero, but only a man or woman is to refuse both denigration and idealisation. For those who want a world of villains and heroes, psychoanalysis will never be convincing, but for those who want to understand political leaders and their quest for power it has much to offer.

In 1994 the Liberal Party celebrated the 50th anniversary of its formation which coincided neatly with the centenary of Menzies' birth 1894, 1944, 1994. There was a five part ABC documentary, a couple of conferences, an exhibition at the National Library of Australia, which holds the papers of both Menzies and the federal Liberal Party, and much media commentary.¹³ The celebrations were edgy, because the Liberals had just suffered their 5th successive electoral defeat in which Paul Keating wiped the floor with the hapless John Hewson. Perhaps, they hoped, the past would hold clues to help the party regain its electoral ascendancy.

Prominently displayed at the National Library's commemorative exhibition was a bronze bust of Menzies by Victor Greenhalgh, captioned 'Founding Spirit'. This bust,

visitors were told, normally stands in the meeting room of the Federal Council of the Liberal Party and occasionally travels to meetings of the Council held outside Canberra. We heard time and again in the media that 'Menzies had founded the Liberal Party'. Gerard Henderson even called his book on the Liberal Party *Menzies Child*.¹⁴ To be sure Menzies had a big hand in it, but as historian Ian Hancock has argued, it defies commonsense to think that one man could found a party.¹⁵ Menzies may have been the new party's most prominent spokesman, but its successful formation out of a score or so of other organisations depended on a huge amount of organisational work by many people. Commonsense however is no match for people's need for heroes, and the identities of these organisations and people have all but disappeared from Liberal Party memory. Only Menzies remains. The myth of the party's origins had thus become the myth of leadership, the myth of the great man who can gather into himself the competing tendencies of the historical moment to rise above all other contenders for power, quietening their ambition with his incontestable superiority.

In 1993 Alan Martin published the first volume of his biography of Menzies which took the story to 1943, and in 1999 the second which dealt with the revival of the Australian Liberals and the long period of the Menzies' governments.¹⁶ These were landmark publications, embraced with admiration and gratitude not only by the Liberal Party but by journalists, historians and the general readers for whom Martin wrote. Martin wrote in full awareness of a fact of which I was careless: that many of his readers had no memory of Menzies as an active politician and only the sketchiest of knowledge of Australia's political history. So he wrote carefully researched and contextualised history on which one could rely absolutely for a factually based account of Menzies' life and political career. I wrote as if I were having arguments with people who already knew the facts and would be impressed by my arabesques. I admire enormously Martin's achievements, and I could never have done it. Even so, I think he fudges some of the most difficult questions about Menzies: his struggle with ambition in the first twenty years of his political career and its often transparent rationalisations, and his shifting,

ambivalent positionings on civil liberties during the Cold War. And to say, as Martin does in the Introduction to the first volume, that he will not formally deal with Aboriginal, women's or environmental history, because they were not 'on the agenda' in Menzies' time seems to me to be wilfully naive. Aborigines, women, the land were all in the world in which Menzies grew up and worked, and the processes which kept them off 'the agenda' surely warrant the historian's attention.

Pondering the limitations of Martin's biography of Henry Parkes, and his turning away from the 'murk of the personal' when earlier in his intellectual life he had been more daring, Inga Clendinnen argues that, in the end, with his self-effacing moral temperament, he could do no other.¹⁷ In the case of the Menzies' biography I think there was another reason. The project was initiated by Menzies' family and they made various family papers available. Menzies' daughter Heather Henderson and her husband Peter read the manuscripts. Martin makes clear that the family made no attempt to influence his interpretations, and I am sure this is so. However, imagining them reading his words could not but have inhibited Martin's interpretation, and strengthened his decision to limit himself to the observable public life. The children of politicians have a difficult lot sharing their parents with the public, and if they want to protect their memories and idealisations, this I respect. It is a reason though for historians to be wary of getting too close to their subjects' families. I doubt that Martin gained much not already available on the public record from his closeness to the family, and he told us virtually nothing about Menzies' family life.

The book begins with three competing ways of remembering Menzies: the grand old man of the Liberal Party, the fascist-sympathising, authoritarian Menzies, and the ageing Menzies whose refusal to retire was preventing political and cultural change. The villainous Menzies has faded with the passing of the old Comms; and the coming of Whitlam swept away my generation's sense that he was holding Australia back, though he continued to provide a marker of the distance Australia had travelled from

complacent suburban homogeneity. The Liberal Party's grand old man is the one that has survived. This is not surprising. Liberals have good reasons to continue to remember their longest serving leader, and have institutionalised occasions for remembering, most notably the Annual Sir Robert Menzies Lecture. Given by prominent Liberals, this always includes homage to Menzies and the achievements of his government.¹⁸ He is also remembered by dissenting Liberals such as Malcolm Fraser and Petro Georgiou, who appeal to him as the standard bearer of Liberal values in arguments with the Howard government. Howard in particular enjoys remembering Menzies, and the prosperity and social harmony of the 1950s and 1960s when he governed. His belief that he has been maligned by left wing historians is one of his motives in participating in the so-called history wars.¹⁹ Journalists inevitably peg his electoral successes against those of Menzies, and speculate about whether he, like Menzies, will choose the time of his departure, and the fate of the government he will leave behind. The uses of Menzies to subsequent Liberals are rich and contradictory, as are the uses of the life and words of any political leader who has moved from the realm of history into myth.

Since John Howard returned the Liberals to federal electoral ascendancy, there has been a new reason for Australians to remember Menzies. Does he help us to understand Howard? In fact, Howard himself invites this comparison with his constant references to Menzies and his achievements. What, if anything then, do the Liberal Party's two most successful Prime Ministers have in common, apart from the obvious fact of their political success? These are historical questions, and until Howard's success has run its course they are hard to answer. There are obvious parallels in their governing during periods of economic growth, and in the problems experienced by the Labor Party in finding a leader able to match their political skill and powers of communication. These are superficial resemblances of circumstances however, and do not get us very far in understanding their political skills or their relationship with public power.

In my work on John Howard, I have argued that he is the most creative Liberal political leader since Menzies.²⁰ My argument is based on the way both men re-worked their inherited political tradition to respond to new political and social circumstances. Menzies took the idea of the Forgotten Class and turned it into the Forgotten People, thus bypassing Labor's class-based and collectivist politics with a confidently virtuous, independent individualism. Howard took the core Australian Liberal belief that, unlike Labor, Liberals were free of vested interests and so able to represent the interests of the nation as a whole, and turned it into a powerful vernacular nationalism. Howard's takeover for the Liberal Party of Labor's traditional claims to the imagery of the Australian Legend has permanently changed Australia's political symbolic order.

Menzies and Howard were both keenly focussed on their major opponent, the Labor Party, and able to take ruthless advantage of its weaknesses; but both were also attuned to the patterns of Australian experience and able to talk to the electorate with ease. Menzies' skill with the language is the more obvious: the resonant voice, telling image and quick wit of old style political oratory, an actor's sense of timing, and the barrister's skill with structure and argument. By contrast Howard's vocabulary is limited, his speeches repetitive, and there is no wit. He does, however, speak with conviction, and his plain, direct speech has been shown to advantage by the differing linguistic inadequacies of Opposition leaders Beazley, Crean and Latham. And he is a master of talkback radio.

And like Menzies he has a strong sense of service to the people from whom he came. Every successful political leader has a core group, a personal social heartland, whose values and experiences he or she elevates to the national stage and makes the centre of the national story. This must be done skilfully, in ways that are not too exclusive, but it remains a source of passion, a reference point which anchors the purpose and hard slog of a political life deep in the formative relationships of childhood. Menzies praise for the Forgotten People and their homes was also praise for his parents; much of the speech's imagery has autobiographical references. Howard too draws on his childhood to locate

his political values, in particular the long hours his father worked in the petrol station. He came to identify deeply with small business's problems and took on small business's enemies as his own - an interfering socialist government and the trade unions.

Menzies was also the son of small business people, in his case shopkeepers, but their vision was broader and their enemies less vivid. Local and state politics engaged much of his father's time and energies, and onto this commitment to community involvement Menzies grafted the values of the professional middle class with their belief in a liberal education and culture. Sport interested him, but it was not his only source of recreational pleasure, and he took pride in Australia's writers and artists as well as its cricketers. He may have been conservative in his cultural tastes, but his range of interests was far wider than Howard's. As well, he valued education in a way Howard has singularly failed to do. At the end of his life Menzies cited the expansion of Australia's universities as one of the achievements of which he was most proud, and his reforms ushered in something of a golden age in Australian university life. By contrast funding for Australian universities has fallen on Howard's watch to levels that threaten Australia's capacity to replace its professional workforce, let alone provide a liberal education to its young people. Why were Menzies' cultural horizons so much wider than Howard's? Do we see here one of the benefits of Empire? All his life Menzies carried a passionate attachment to the British Empire which began, as he later described it, 'in a cottage in the wheat lands of the North-West of the State of Victoria with the Bible and Henry Drummond and Jerome K. Jerome and *The Scottish Chiefs* and Burns on the shelves.' The imagined communities of the British race and of the English speaking peoples with their history and literature nurtured the young Menzies' sense of who he was and of a larger world beyond the remote new settlement of Jeparit. The Empire was all but over when Howard was growing up. He absorbed the more confident nationalism of post war Australia, on which he drew in his symbolic take over the Australian legend, but it is has something of the philistine narrowness of which the Liberals once accused Labor.

The big moral question, though, for any historical judgement of John Howard is his handling of asylum seekers and the war on terror. Did he manipulate fear, racism and xenophobia to win the 2001 election? Has he over-reacted to the threat of Islamic terrorism by introducing draconian legislation that breaches fundamental principles of

civil liberty? Similar questions have always surrounded Robert Menzies' uses of anti-communism during the early years of the Cold War, in particular his unsuccessful attempt to ban the Communist Party of Australia and his role in the defection of the Soviet diplomat, Vladimir Petrov, on the eve of the 1954 election.

Here I think there are interesting parallels to be explored between the way Menzies and Howard handled the global threats of their times, though doing so one has to remember that historical judgements about the reality of perceived threats and the appropriateness of responses to them are extraordinarily difficult to make, particularly if these threats do not come to much in the end. Were they successfully thwarted by firm and timely action, or were they largely imagined in the first place? And if the latter, were these imaginings honest mistakes or opportunistic political manipulations? Answering such questions is tricky not just because it depends on assessments of what might have happened, but also because it deals with deep psychological differences amongst humans as to how they themselves experience and respond to aggression. When is an aggressive response to threat realistic, and when is it a distorted, paranoid overreaction which magnifies what it was meant to prevent?

Trying to understand how Menzies reconciled his strong and genuine commitment to civil liberties with his belief that Australia and the free world faced a real threat from Communism, I read political historian Richard Hofstadter's marvellous essay. 'The Paranoid Style in American Politics'.²¹ Hofstadter argued that the anticommunism of the 1950s was a version of a paranoid belief system which, at different times in American history, has posited a threat to the American way of life of such magnitude and evil that the most extraordinary and urgent responses are required by the state. Hofstadter wrote his essay in the 1960s, to explain the excesses of McCarthyism, but the paranoid style he describes fits many aspects of the beliefs fuelling the war on terror, in particular the belief in a vast, sinister conspiracy to undermine a whole way of life, and the construction of the enemy as an agent of pure evil. He links this to the history of

Manichean thought in the US, and its belief in a cosmic struggle between good and evil which affects both the way the enemy is perceived as well as the understandings of the self. George Bush's response to global terrorism since the September 11 is the latest appearance of this belief system. This is not to say that the enemy is not real, but to draw attention to the deep cultural discourses which Bush has mobilised in the way he has responded to it. Small people like David Hicks and Jack Thomas who find themselves on the wrong side in this black and white world quickly become scapegoats, as did many small people in the McCarthyist era in the US.

Australia has a much more secular and pragmatic political culture than the United States, yet as allies in global wars our leaders are drawn into its constructions of political reality. How do they fare? The contributions of political opportunism and conviction in Menzies' anticommunism have been matters of fierce historical debate amongst Australian scholars, many of whom were themselves minor players in the politics of Australia's Cold War. To my mind the most convincing account is by David Lowe, who brings a younger scholar's fresh eye to the arguments and evidence and argues that Menzies' anti-communism was based on real fears of Soviet military aggression, but that he was nevertheless fully alert to its political benefits.²² The question which interested me about Menzies' anti-communism was: What symbolic strategies did he use to strengthen the paranoia in his makeup to enable him to do what he believed was necessary? Some of my argument seems quite speculative now, but I stand by its underlying assumption that Menzies had to do a good deal of psychological work on himself to overcome his commitment to civil liberties for the fight against communism, and that the ways in which he activated his paranoia are revealing of deep emotional structures.

In the end Menzies was saved by the Labor leader, Herb Vere Evatt, who threw himself into the fight against the anticommunist legislation with the passion of a mad man. More prone to paranoia than Menzies, Evatt saw in the legislation threats to Australians' civil

liberties which the government at the time argued were scaremongering exaggerations. Reflecting on the failure of the referendum to ban the Communist Party many years after the heat of the events, Menzies wrote the following curiously ambiguous reflection:

The whole matter offered interesting evidence that the electors, when they have the chance, are not only reluctant to vote for new powers for the Commonwealth, but are also, by deep instinct, unwilling to modify in any way the old principle that 'a man is innocent until he is proved guilty'.²³

In Menzies' political thinking, the deep instincts of the electors are generally to be respected as bearers of historical wisdom and moderate good sense. Is he here breathing a sigh of relief that they saved him from breaching one of Britain's most ancient civil liberties?

The politics of anti-terrorism since September 11 and the Bali bombing shares some features with the anticommunist legislation proposed by the Menzies government. The term 'terrorist' is as vague and general as was the term 'communist' and functions similarly as a bearer of pure evil lifted clear of historical motivation to become a generalised threat to all that is good. In the Howard government's anti-terrorist legislation, as in the anti-communist legislation, people are found guilty on the basis of beliefs and intentions rather than actions. This of course makes perfect sense when the purpose of the legislation is to thwart destructive actions, but intentions are far more difficult to prove than actions, so the chances of gross abuses of individuals' civil liberties are greatly increased. The net of suspicion is cast wide, and a significant minority of Australians feel afraid of arbitrary government power and of social ostracism and persecution. Just how this will play out is not at all clear. But any future biographer of Howard will need to think long and hard about the balance between conviction, opportunism and authoritarianism in the way he has responded to the US-instigated war on terror. I suspect that Howard is far less alert than Menzies was to the history of the long struggle for civil liberties and so is far less troubled by his authoritarian legislation.

I sometimes think it is my fate to write a biography of Howard, to complete a triptych on Australian Liberals begun when I went looking for something in Menzies' own words. But I'm not sure I'll be able to do it. As yet I have no spark of insight into Howard, no inklings of the empathy one needs to write a biography that goes beneath the events of the life to its inner logic. I didn't start out with empathy for Menzies either, but it soon developed, in particular for the young, clever, boy, born in Jeparit on the outer edges of the British Empire, and his ambitions for recognition at its centre. I knew ambition, and the tussle between England and Australia that was still real for my generation of writers and scholars, the pull of the metropolitan centres and the countervailing sense of commitment to Australia.

To be successful an ambitious politician must find a group to serve who will carry him to prominence and public power. A similar argument can be made for ambitious historians and biographers: they need a subject who will be of sufficient public interest to win them readers. Menzies did this for me. As a young scholar and writer it was my subject matter that initially drew readers to my book. I got more publicity for this book than for anything I have written subsequently, and won more prizes. And it gave me the public profile to participate more generally in Australian political debate. As well, Menzies gave me the subject matter for my next book. Although I didn't know it at the time, *Robert Menzies Forgotten People* was the first of three books I have now written on the Liberal Party and its leaders.

Having finished the first I wanted to know more about the history of the political discourses Menzies had so successfully deployed in his speech to the Forgotten People. And I wanted to know what had happened to them. I thus embarked on another ten year project, to write the twentieth century history of the political traditions of the Australian Liberals and their shifting relationship with middle class experience. This became *Australian Liberals and the Moral Middle Class: From Alfred Deakin to John Howard*. It is dedicated to my grandparents, none of whom voted Labor, and their grandchildren, most of whom do, because writing it I found I was writing the history of the people from whom I came. This is something I could never have imagined in 1980 when I went to the archives to find something by Menzies. His forgotten people were my own.

¹ Some of the people interviewed for project Ordinary People's Politics spoke about class in terms very similar to Menzies in this speech. *Ordinary People's Politics: Australians Talk about life, politics and the future of their country.* Pluto Australia, Melbourne, 2006, pp. 307-15.

² R.W.Conell and T.H. Irving, *Class Structure in Australian History: Documents, Narratives and Argument.* Longman Cheshire, Melbourne, 1980, p. 349.

³ L.F.Crisp, *Australian National Government,* Longman Cheshire, Melbourne, 1965, p.227.

⁴ A four volume paperback history produced for the Bicentennial virtually ignored its existence. Edited by Jenny Lee and Verity Burgmann it was called *A People's History of Australia since 1788,* (McPhee Gribble/Penguin, Melbourne, 1988). Influenced both by labour history and by social history's commitment to history from below, it included a great many interesting and valuable articles. The middle class, though, were virtually absent. They were clearly not part of what the authors meant by 'A People's History'.

⁵ *Australian Liberals and the Moral Middle Class: From Alfred Deakin to John Howard.* Cambridge University Press, 2003.

⁶ *Writings of the Young Marx on Philosophy and Society,* translated by Loyd D. Easton and Kurt H. Guddat, Doubleday, 1967.

⁷ I remembered this as being a dictum of Louis Althusser's from his essay 'Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses (Note Towards an Investigation), in Louis Althusser, *Lenin and Philosophy,* Monthly Review Press, New York and London, 1971. When I went looking for its source in Althusser's essay however, I found that my memory had subtly transformed Althusser's meanings. His defines ideology as a Representation of the Imaginary Relationship of Individual to their Real Conditions of Existence. What he means by Real Conditions of Existence is much more specific than what I meant by my much more common sense idea of reality.

⁸ The concepts of which I made most use in interpreting Menzies language where discourse, rhetoric and ideology, and the writers I found most helpful were Michel Foucault for his conceptualisation of discourse as structured patterns of meaning, Claude Levi Strauss for his attention to the way binary oppositions structure symbolic systems, and Kenneth Burke for his argument that language is strategic symbolic action, persuasion directed to both the self and other which can be more or less successful.

⁹ 'The milk of language: A psychoanalytic interpretation of Hugo von Hofmannsthal's Chandos Crisis', PhD University of Melbourne, 1980.

¹⁰ Wittgenstein's Vienna, Simon & Schuster, New York, 1973.

¹¹ The worst offender was Gerard Henderson, who mocked the book in the *Sydney Morning Herald* (5 September 1992) and recycled the mockery in *Menzies' Child.* I would not be at all surprised were he to do it again with this new edition.

¹² 'Introduction' and 'The Tasks of Biography' in Judith Brett (ed) *Political Lives,* Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 1997.

¹³ *The Liberals: Fifty Years of the Federal Party,* (5 episodes), ABC, Sydney, 1994; the papers for the NLA conference were subsequently published in *Voices,* 5/2 (Winter 1995).

¹⁴ Gerard Henderson, *Menzies Child: The Liberal Party of Australia 1944-94,* Allen & Unwin, Sydney 1994.

¹⁵ Ian Hancock, *Menzies and the Liberal Party, 1944-66,* *Voices,* 5/2. See also Hancock, *National and Permanent: The Federal Organisation of the Liberal Party of Australia 1944-65,* Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, 2000, chap 1.

¹⁶ *Robert Menzies: A Life.* Volume 1 1894-1943, Volume 2 1944-1978. Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, 1993 and 1999.

¹⁷ 'In Search of the "Actual Man underneath": A.W.Martin and the Art of Biography'. The Inaugural Alan Martin Lecture, Pandanus Books, ANU Canberra, 2004.

¹⁸ This lecture is organised by the Sir Robert Menzies Lecture Trust in conjunction with the

¹⁹ For example, Sir Thomas Playford Memorial Lecture, 5 July 1996, The 1996 Sir Robert Menzies Lecture, *The Liberal Tradition,* 18 November 1996;

²⁰ See *Australian Liberals and the Moral Middle Class,* chap 9, and *Relaxed and Comfortable: The Liberal Party's Australia.*

Monash University Liberal Club. Alan Gregory (ed), *The Menzies Lectures, 1978-1998*, Sir Robert Menzies Lecture Trust, Melbourne, 1999.

²¹ *The Paranoid Style in American Politics and Other Essays*, Alfred Knopf, New York, 1965.

²² David Lowe, *Menzies and the Great World Struggle: Australia's Cold War 1948-1954*, UNSW Press, Sydney, 1999. See especially chapter 4.

²³ Robert Menzies, *Central Power in the Australian Commonwealth: An Examination of the Growth of Commonwealth Power in the Australian Federation*, Cassell, London, 1967, p. 20.