is bewildering. By a kind of Gresham's Law, whereby the bad drives out the good, the unprofessional atmosphere now surrounding international debate bids to supplant cool analysis. Nor is it merely that candid thought is suffocated by emotionalism—the very agenda has been hijacked. The World Economic Forum in 2005 was dominated by two topics dear to the hearts of NGOs, climate change and poverty, and attended by celebrities who would barely have the prerequisites to take Economics 101. Sub-Saharan Africa's problems, substantially induced by its own bad governance, are a special obsession; tragic though they are, they are not the only issues faced by policymakers. Notice, too, how the lessons of economic success in East Asia are ignored as remedies for Africa.

The evil that interventionists see in globalisation is an effect of increased competition in labour, capital and commodity markets. Greater efficiencies necessitate adjustments for which badly governed polities are ill prepared. It is hard enough for anyone to distinguish trend from cycle but the degree of emotion that clouds these issues is unhelpful, to say the least. Where has it come from? David Robertson sees it as an unintended consequence of affluence in the Western world. Individuals have more time and resources to bestow on salving the world's ills. Personal ambition, eagerness for quick fixes, incomprehension that government failure may be harder to eradicate than market failure, all impede a clear-sighted view of problems and remedies. This book splendidly describes the malfunctioning of the debate about trade. It is the most important volume on how economic analysis can be frustrated to have come out of Australia since

William Coleman's *Economics and its Enemies*. Buy a copy, and give one to your MP, but don't forget to have him sit the exam.

Reviewed by Eric Jones

In an ideal liberal universe individuals would make decisions on the basis of reasoned arguments and change their minds when the force of an argument ceased to carry any weight. Human beings, however, are not completely rational entities and often are drawn to act in particular ways on the basis of what Edmund Burke called 'prejudices'. As is well known, children have a tendency to vote in the same way as their parents, just as they follow the same football team.

Then there are the much stronger attachments that individuals develop when they commit themselves to a political creed that promises to replace the imperfections and evil of the mundane world with the promise of something approaching perfection. Such attachments are so strong because they are based on powerful moral longings rather than the somewhat weak sentiments that
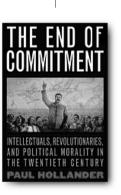
go with rational calculation.

What then happens when the promise of utopia evaporates and individuals are forced to face the reality that their perfect world is a far from nice place? Paul Hollander has written a book that looks at a number of case studies of those who renounced their commitment to communism during the second half of the twentieth century. The case studies include subjects from communist countries, including the Soviet Union, China, Cuba and Nicaragua as well as from the West. While the study focuses primarily on those who renounced their commitment it also includes, for comparison, a group who continue to 'maintain the rage' against the evils of capitalism.

His subjects include a number of high profile figures ranging from Susan Sontag to David Horowitz to Noam Chomsky, as well as a group who responded to an advertisement that he placed in *The Nation, The New York Review of Books* and *Dissent* asking for the views of those who had been drawn to radical regimes and who had since reassessed their positions.

Of course those who made a break with a communist regime were the unusual ones. There were compelling reasons to continue supporting a regime no matter how vile its actions had become. If one lived in a communist country the costs of breaking with the regime were enormous. It would mean persecution not only for oneself but also for one's family. It would mean forgoing the various privileges that an individual

enjoyed as an intellectual, as a member of the ruling elite, such as access to decent food and to other scarce goods.

The easiest path was simply to become a cynical realist, paying lip service to the ideals of communism while taking advantage of its corrupt practices. Those who chose not to take that path were true believers, individuals who believed in the communist ideal and were disgusted that it did not live up to its high ideals. They shared many characteristics in common with whistleblowers in modern corporate organisations who pull the plug on dishonesty and corruption, even though they know that it will lead to painful consequences for themselves.

In his *War & Peace & War,* Peter Turchin cites experiments that claim that in any society about 20% of people are free riders, about 60% are conditional co-operators and about 20% are what he calls 'saints'. It is from the highly idealistic 'saints' that those who opposed communism from within came. They were individuals who could not stomach the disparity between ideology and reality, who were disgusted by the mass rapes of German women by Soviet soldiers only to be told that the authorities turned a blind eye to them, or who could not reconcile the ideal of equality with the system of privilege practised by all communist regimes.

The second cost of departing from communism was the loss of a set of beliefs that made sense of the world and of a culture that provided these individuals with intellectual and emotional support. Hence when many of them found flaws in the system their response was to immerse themselves in the works of Marx and Lenin looking for answers. The situation

is similar to that of an individual brought up in a Christian sect such as the Closed Brethren. To leave means renouncing one's former life, including family, but not necessarily Christianity.

This is particularly the case with those in the West who were led to renounce their former communist convictions. Many came out of families that owed an allegiance to communism and they had been brought up in a Left intellectual subculture. They had to deal with the disparity between ideal and reality, or with the hypocrisy of their fellow communists. One individual, interestingly, was turned off communism because of its inability to provide decent plumbing. But it was one thing to renounce the reality of real-life communist regimes and another to move away from Marx, let alone a faith in what a number call Left Libertarianism.

What sustained many Western communists and leftists was a combination of the belief that countries like the Soviet Union showed the way to a much improved future with a very strong hatred of capitalism in general and the United States in particular. Hence their disillusionment with the communist model did not necessarily lead to an embrace of the United States or American ideals. For example Christopher Hitchens renounced the Left because of its failure to denounce terrorism in the face of Islamic extremism but he still considers himself to be a 'Marxist libertarian'.

Hollander argues that someone like Noam Chomsky has not changed because what drives him is not a desire to locate utopia that is an alternative to capitalist America but an obsessive hatred

of America and Israel. He has invested nothing in a 'better world' and such hatred can be sustained regardless of what happens in the wider world.

What Hollander demonstrates in these various studies is the importance of personality in determining the path any particular individual takes in re-evaluating their past ideological allegiances. Strangely enough it appears to be the true believers who possess the strength of character to break with a political system or a system of beliefs when it fails to live up to its utopian hopes. They have needed all their strength to face the consequences of making such a break.

Reviewed by
Greg Melleuish

*Voting for Jesus:
Christianity and Politics in
Australia*
by Amanda Lohrey
Quarterly Essay 22, Black Inc,
Melbourne, 2006
112pp, $14.95
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Religion in politics: what is more susceptible to distrust in the modern liberal mind? For millennia religion and politics were intertwined, till the rational spirit won out. Since the triumph of the secular state the western mind has perched itself upon the battlement, ever watchful for its enemy's return. If the plethora of books and essays on the rise of the Christian right and the growth of the megachurch are anything to go by, the fight has begun. A Christian herself, Amanda Lohrey is, nevertheless, a passionate secularist, and it is as