

deconstruction of the bourgeois institution of the 'traditional' family as a prelude to its elimination, at least as a preferred model. This requires the acquisition of Foucauldian power, and the Foucauldian touchstone, the avenue to power, is command over discourse. A first step, therefore, is to break the nexus between illegitimacy, risks for children, and social problems by recasting the prevailing discourse about such matters.

A revolutionised discourse is characterised by attempted reversals of meaning (Orwell's 'war is peace'; 'ignorance is strength') and the smudging or disappearance of distinctions, including distinctions of usage reflecting different forms of social or personal conduct. As the meanings and distinctions are lost, our grasp on reality is weakened and pressure for indiscriminating and uniform moral judgements is increased. One consequence may be the discursive marginalising of institutions sustaining independent moralities or ways of life. Other tactics, although not key issues in this book, are the ridiculing of stands against post-modern cant and defining as 'offensive' any discourse that is bold enough to challenge the 'politically correct'. Accordingly, to accept without demur Reekie's project of 'normalising' single parent families, and thereby to diminish the significance of marriage and the socially-relevant distinctions between traditional and single parent families, would be to acquiesce in such a process.

In the Foucauldian sociology, power in a society where the bourgeoisie prevail is always oppressive and may never be benign. Bourgeois society and bourgeois power, must therefore be destroyed. However, one of the marks of bourgeois society is the existence of a plurality of vigorous and independent

institutions operating under the rule of law in ways which *constrain and direct* power by establishing a variety of limited objectives and by generating rules of conduct and motives for action appropriate to those objectives. Yet the perverse end of the Foucauldian program is to eliminate these disseminated powers, and the moralities sustaining them, in order to accrete to the political centre the power needed to destroy them and thereby to liberate us all.

From this perspective, we can understand why Reekie's long excursus into illegitimacy concludes with two particular policy objectives. The first is to remove the problem of illegitimacy from the discourse:

'The starting point of this de-problematising project would be to affirm the right of a single woman to bear a child and to make public discourse and government policy recognise that "female-headed families are a viable, normal, and permanent family form, rather than something broken and deviant that policy should eradicate", as Iris Marion Young puts it' (p.187).

The second objective is to move towards 'the state provision of job training, employment opportunities, child care, education, accommodation and physical support schemes; programs which make fathers pay child support and encourage them to be actively involved in their child's upbringing [because that would mitigate 'problems?']; and acceptance of the principle that the whole community has responsibility for the welfare of children' (p.187).

The sudden and inconsistent moralising here about community 'responsibility' is simply a smokescreen for consummating a Foucauldian project of institutional destruction, whereby the state takes control of precisely those arrangements that define the

traditional family. And the coup de grace will be the further weakening of intact families by adding to their taxes in order to fund the functions which the state will assume. But then, we are already well down that road, are we not?

Reviewed by Barry Maley



Open Australia

by Lindsay Tanner

Pluto Press, Annandale, 1999,
248pp., \$24.95 (PB).

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It is easy to criticise *Open Australia* for lacking rigour, being faddist, and treating some issues superficially. However if the book is seen as a partisan publication aimed at influencing the Australian Labor Party (ALP) from the inside, then these criticisms are mostly irrelevant.

Open Australia ranges over a wide political landscape and focuses in depth on national identity, the role of government, the consequences of globalisation, and social problems, including loneliness and alienation. The title *Open Australia* refers to an option presented in the book; does Australia want to become a forward looking country, open for business in a global society or a backwards looking, closed one which 'slowly descends into a trough of stagnation, isolation and bitterness'? The title, reinforced by the foreword and style elements, mislead the reader into believing that the book proposes a rigorous and comprehensive blueprint for Australia's future.

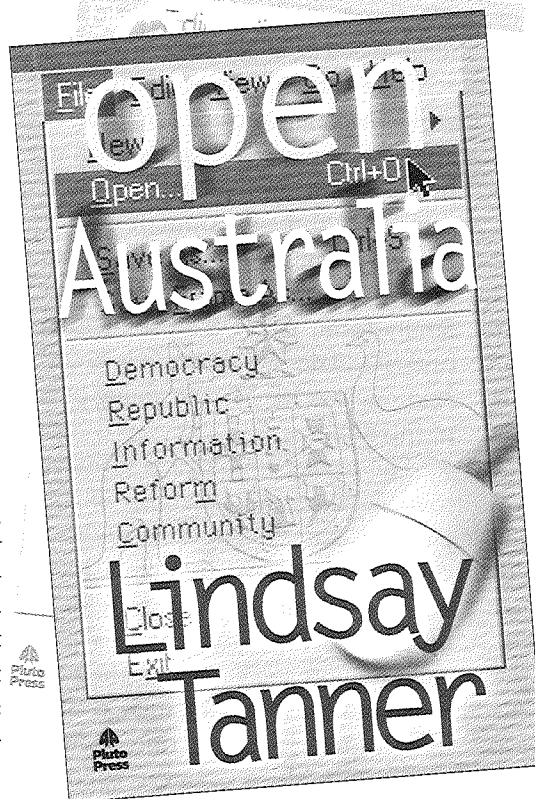
However a close reading of the introduction and book's contents reveals that the publication is far from comprehensive, nor is it meant to be rigorous. The introduction points out that the book 'is not a comprehensive examination of all areas of policy with which Labor inevitably must engage' (10), and that it is intended to contribute to Labor regaining government by reforming the ALP and building a new agenda (10). A less pronounced aim, but one which threads its way through the book, is to advance Tanner's personal interest of making social-democratic governments relevant in times of globalisation and individualism.

Tanner has addressed the aim of building a new agenda and reforming the ALP by proposing a number of actions with the main ones being developing new ideals and ideas which resonate with society, analysing the changes and consequences of the new economy, taking into account voter changes, and rebuilding the structure of the ALP.

One of his most important ideas is the need to embrace – but tame – the increasingly irresistible dominance of globalisation and markets. 'Globalisation is an essentially unavoidable reality driven by pervasive technological change. It cannot be prevented without enormous costs to our living standards but it can be negotiated' (12). Tanner presents a number of suggestions to ensure that the outcomes of globalisation are positive, such as introducing a Tobin tax to reduce destructive short-term global capital flows (85), continuing with domestic deregulation but only if international regulation occurs simultaneously (116), and increasing Australia's involvement in international policy and regulatory organisations such as

GATT, WTO and IMF. Reading the suggestions on offer, it is obvious that the list is far from comprehensive. For example, in the discussion on the last suggestion there is no mention of involvement in international standards and conformance activities or mutual recognition agreements. Both of these are essential to ensure that Australia's interests are continually represented once the policy frameworks are established.

Belief in the benefits of globalisation is also reflected in Tanner's support for domestic competition policy. He contends that



while its impact has been detrimental in the past, it can be transformed into a constructive force. This can be achieved by a 'greater emphasis on empirical analysis of outcomes likely to emerge from further deregulation and vertical separation. It must be balanced with the broader

considerations attached to community service obligations. It should be adjusted to take account of the fact that factors other than economic efficiency are built into government operations of schools, hospitals, train and communications systems, such as access, equity and redistribution objectives' (153).

Like the limited discussion on globalisation, omissions and a lack of analysis of competition policy can lead readers to believe that the author is deliberately being superficial. For example, omissions include any discussion on the changes required to make the public benefit test more robust, the requirement to develop evaluation systems for weighing up non-comparable costs and benefits during competition policy determinations, and the need for national legislative reviews rather than incompatible state based reviews. Examples of insufficient analysis include a failure to qualify comments on the need for empirical analysis and the problems with community service obligations (CSOs). It can be claimed that rather than too little empirical analysis, there is too much emphasis on empirical analysis which results in non-quantifiable issues being down-played. Also, simply stating that broader considerations need to be attached to CSOs ignores the problems of actually identifying what the CSOs are, determining which of the two unappealing options will be used to pay for the CSOs i.e., cross-subsidies or direct government funding, and dealing with the inevitable pressure of continually reducing CSOs over time.

Open Australia contains numerous constructive ideas such as the need for

governments to facilitate rather than command, to address loneliness and isolation, and to develop structures which provide individuals with the capacity to participate rather than to achieve.

The ideas derive from analysing the consequences of the new economy and adapting social democratic values to them. Particularly important changes have included globalised markets, technological innovation, loss of community, job losses, and 'intense competition and commercialism which has swamped all aspects of Australian life' (20). In turn, these changes have led to numerous political impacts, including a dysfunctionality between society's institutions and citizens (21), the politics of envy and resentment against the new elites who are cosmopolitan and multicultural and remote from the 'realities of manual work, financial hardship and suburban normality' (22).

Tanner discusses these changes in terms of the impact on voter and membership support of the ALP. Not only does as little as 52 per cent of the electorate now always vote for the same party, 'young people leaving school do not have the deep commitment to trade unionism, social justice and Labor politics which their grandparents had' (193). The increasing importance of post-materialist issues draws the university educated class towards the Greens and Australian Democrats who are considered to address their political concerns better than the ALP. At the other end of the voter spectrum, the ALP vote is also being diminished by the traditional blue collar worker who is 'exhausted by change fatigue' (20) and is seeking populist solutions via One Nation. To support his case, Tanner acknowledges a number of past ALP policies which disen-

franchised voter segments. For example, 'the introduction of concepts of mutual obligation and case management under the former Labor government led to perverse outcomes, with some unemployed people forced to undertake inappropriate and even demoralising retraining' (135) and 'many Labor supporters believe that Labor betrayed them in the eighties, implementing policies contrary to our platform' (154). To his credit, Tanner does not adopt the paternalistic view that the voters were ignorant and would have supported the ALP if only they had understood Labor's message. 'This reaction [to changing policies] should not be dismissed merely as redneck hysteria. It reflects deep-seated insecurities which are often exacerbated by the intolerant way in which this new political agenda is sometimes pursued' (24). The purpose of this discussion is to justify the recommendations in the final 10 per cent of the book which focus on modifying the structure of the ALP. Tanner advocates 'democratising its internal processes, expanding its membership base and shifting its local focus outwards into the community' (14).

Like most of the ideas put forward in *Open Australia*, the proposed internal reform of the ALP reflects personal interest in traditional social democratic issues such as democratic representation, community and equity. Despite the onslaught of two decades of economic rationalism, Tanner is still convinced that 'Socialist ethics and ideals ... remain as relevant as ever' (98). However he recognises that the traditional left approaches are no longer relevant and advocates radical changes. 'Labor requires a new community philosophy which is universal rather than class-based, and is both collective, incorporating social frameworks of equity, security and

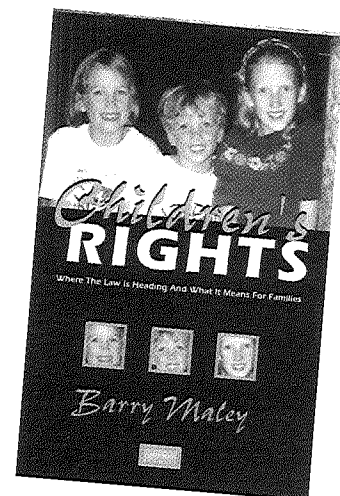
community, as well as individual, providing for personal freedom, opportunity and prosperity' (98).

Open Australia is a book aimed at the ALP leadership and members, with the objective of returning the ALP to power. Therefore it is necessarily circumspect about some politically sensitive subjects, and walks a fine line between modernising the left and disenfranchising its members. Judged on this basis, *Open Australia* makes a valuable contribution to repositioning the left back into the political debate and pushing social issues higher up the ALP agenda.

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Children's Rights

by Barry Maley



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