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Working Nation: Context and Consequences
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Abstract

This paper provides an overview of the issues and dynamics which is necessary to situate the diverse concerns for the rest of the papers that make up this issue of the Journal. We provide an overview of those issues that we see as salient for an understanding of the political and economic context in which Working Nation was developed. We also foreshadow some of the key aspects of Working Nation and in so doing preview some of the key points of the rest of the essays that follow.

Introduction

No Australian government since the war had delivered such a complex statement on the matter of employment and unemployment. Indeed, it was much more complex, and no less definite, than the famous white paper of 1945. (Watson 2002, p. 487)

The point of opening up this economy and deregulating it, and lowering tariff walls, and building an export culture, and best practice, was to make sure that Australia became a player in the premier league. I mean where the technology is, where the high value-adding is, and where the best jobs are. To opt for any other goal is to opt for a place in the second division – where the second rate jobs are and where the national pride is missing. (Keating 1994)

This Labor government has given us 11 budgets, eight major economic statements and five employment statements. All have been presented in the most glowing and superlative terms, each one being the ultimate solution until the next one comes along and reveals otherwise. They have all been spectacular failures, despite all the money that has been thrown around. We are still left with unemployment of around 10 percent. (Boswell 1994)

Since the present Coalition government's initiatives on the long-term unemployed could be argued to be a development of particular reforms in the Working Nation case, such as individualised and contracted case management and performance incentives for private providers, an analysis of Working Nation is important for understanding the policy ideas, issues and conflicts that underlie the present system of assistance to the unemployed in Australia. (Edwards 2001, p. 139).
The Background

*Working Nation* was a response to economic recession and the consequential increase in unemployment. In 1992 and 1993 the unemployment rate averaged over 10 percent and the average duration of unemployment was over 12 months. Addressing unemployment became a priority, especially given that the ALP government was still operating its Prices and Incomes Accord in conjunction with the trade union movement. The precursor to *Working Nation* was the policy discussion paper or Green Paper, Restoring Full Employment (Committee on Employment Opportunities (CEO) 1993). The report stated that the 'Committee has set out a general strategy for restoring full employment…[and] presented a range of ideas for better assisting unemployed persons, and particularly those who are long-term unemployed back into work' (CEO 1993, p. viii).

Mass unemployment had arisen under Labor and under its flagship Accord with the trade unions. The recession of the early 1990s was the 'recession we had to have'. Despite being able to engineer real wage cuts and implement a range of microeconomic reforms, there was virtually no net job creation between 1990 and 1994. The unemployment rate was high, the average duration of unemployment had increased and there were a large army of long-term unemployed with seemingly no where to go. The Green Paper set out to address this jobs crisis, and it follows in the tradition of Chifley's white paper on full employment policy in 1945 to put jobs at the cornerstone of ALP policy and to develop a comprehensive and integrated program to address job generation and reduce unemployment.

Behind the recession was an array of policy initiatives and policy reviews that established the hallmark of a government that was seen to be addressing the 'big' issues and shaping a reform agenda. Despite all the inquiries, reports and policy initiatives from Hilmer on competition policy to the One Nation program, it was difficult to identify any material progress and gains from all the 'pain' of the policy reforms.

The Process

Edwards (2001, ch.5) provides a detailed report of the process of inquiry and policy development that preceded the release of *Working Nation*. The idea of an inquiry was attributed by Edwards (2001, p. 144) to the then Governor of the Reserve Bank, Bernie Fraser, who in a speech in 1992 called for a far reaching investigation into developing a long-term program for addressing unemployment. The Committee on Employment Opportunities was formed in May 1993, its membership included three public service heads, three academic advisers and an adviser from the Prime Minister's office. The taskforce was headed by Dr Michael Keating (Secretary, Prime Minister and Cabinet). The process was sponsored and pushed by the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet, and Edwards suggests that it can ultimately be seen as a 'Prime Ministerial statement' (Edwards 2001, p. 141; also Watson 2002).

Edwards (2001, p. 140) indicates that it was revealing that Treasury and Finance were not represented on what was essentially a policy document that addressed economic
policy. Despite this absence, the development of the policy proposals was conducted within a context of implied fiscal constraint – there was going to be no bold and expensive job creation program in this document.

In his account of the Keating Prime Ministership, Watson (2002, p. 478) states that the first drafts were dull and disappointing, largely a statement of what had been done, what the problems were and with very little substance with respect to proposals. However, the final version was regarded as a dramatic improvement, containing some substantive policy initiatives that were visionary and challenging (Watson 2002, p. 487). These challenges and proposals were taken up by Keating in his press club address after the release of the White Paper (Keating 1994).

Edwards (2001, p. 159) claims that there was a process of extensive consultation between the Green and the White paper and cites as evidence 340 calls on a toll free number, 1400 written submissions and 430 meetings. However, the time between the release of the green and white papers was only 5 months. Pixley (1994) argues that there was largely an absence of consultation and debate, with the Committee and ministers openly avoiding public debate after the release of the Green Paper. The only consultation that took place ‘was behind closed doors’ (Pixley 1994, p. 38).

What is impressive is the speed of the process. There was about 12 months from conception to the delivery of the white paper. One of the major Federal policy discussion documents since the 1956 Vernon Report had taken around 12 months of consultation, research, co-ordination, costing, feedback, debate and politicking. The process does stand out in terms of its being able to deliver a policy statement in a short period from such a wide net of advice and input. Despite the apparent haste, the public reaction that counts (the media) was seen to be supportive and receptive to the ideas and analysis contained within Working Nation (Edwards 2001, p. 164).

The Economics

Economic growth and the better design of labour market and social welfare programs were what Working Nation proposed in terms of reducing unemployment. There was a reluctance to set a full employment target, and the discussion accepts the context of fiscal conservatism, a deregulated financial sector and an underlying NAIRU (non-accelerating inflation rate of unemployment – see Indecs Economics 1995). While the links between economic growth and unemployment were discussed in detail, there was an absence of discussion regarding the growth strategy. Despite the apparent complexity, economic jargon and complexity of the supporting econometric evidence (Pixley 1994), there is very little of substance in terms of how to go from 10 percent to five percent unemployment (and why five percent should be the goal). Microeconomic and labour market reform were regarded as important in facilitating growth, but there were no details provided as to how they would do this. Real wage cuts were addressed as an alternative to a growth strategy, but these were dismissed as involving unacceptable cuts so as to be effective. There was very little discussion regarding the nature and quality of jobs – there was recognition for the need for ‘real’ and long-lasting jobs in relation to the Job Compact, but the reality of a growth strategy being linked to an economy generating part-time and casual jobs was largely overlooked. Likewise, while working hours were discussed in terms of job creation
possibilities (short hours, job sharing), this was summarily dismissed. However, the possibility that economic growth might lead to longer working hours and relatively fewer (full-time) jobs, was not considered. Wiseman (1994) argues that the White Paper largely abandoned full employment and provided insufficient basis for any debate on the future of work in Australia.

It was Federal labor that commenced the program of privatisation, that deregulated the financial sector, that fundamentally altered the operation of monetary policy, that introduced the fiscal troika, dismantled tariffs and introduced self-funded retirement savings through the Prices and Incomes Accord. In this context the Working Nation program can be viewed as a continuation of the process of policy review, redefining the State and demonstrating Labor's (neoliberal) 'reform' credentials. Langmore and Quiggin (1994, p. 173) highlight what they saw as the absence of direct job creation as reflecting the basic assumption that there should be a withdrawal of government provision of community services. Direct job creation in Working Nation was confined to the 'extra work options' process associated with the Job Compact.

In many respects the economic thrust of Working Nation did not differ too much from that of the OECD Jobs Study (1994). The core assumptions about the functioning of the economy and design and limits of economic policy were very similar. This underlying economic orthodoxy remains strongly embedded within prevailing government thinking on economic policy and has continued to shape the Howard government's policy agenda, with there being differences in emphasis and priorities between Working Nation and Coalition policies (Pierson & Castles 2001).

The Politics

Both the Green Paper and Working Nation provided the Keating government with a rare political opportunity to demonstrate that the economic pain of the preceding two years or so had not been for nothing. Moreover, the circumstances of the 1993 federal election proved fortuitous, although at the time they seemed anything but favourable. People were increasingly nervous and despondent about the future (Mackay 1993). The government was decidedly unpopular. The unemployment figures for the previous year nudged eleven percent, which meant that the actual numbers of people out of work was much higher. Interest rates were very high and looked like remaining so for the foreseeable future. Economic recovery was sluggish if not stalled. The ALP had been in office for ten years and was now led by someone whose personal popularity was never very high. The Opposition had reinvented itself. It appeared to have resolved its leadership problems. It elected John Hewson to the leadership and under his guidance produced its election manifesto, Fightback, in which it laid out a range of policy initiatives that included a proposal for a Goods and Services Tax (GST). All seemed to bode well for a coalition victory.

But it was not to be. Keating seized on the GST proposal and made it the central election issue. In a remarkable electoral performance the ALP managed to turn the prospect of certain defeat into a narrow victory. A large part of this, of course, was due to the GST, which meant that the vote was less for Keating and his government and more against what the Coalition were offering. However, one important and oft overlooked part of the election campaign was Keating's admission that his
government had made mistakes, especially in relation to how past Labor government policies had impacted negatively on employment and interest rates. However, the government had learned its lesson and it would, if re-elected, make lowering unemployment one of its post-election priorities. Just two days before the election, on the same day as the official unemployment figures of eleven point one percent were released, Keating told the National Press Club that 'Australians can vote for a GST or they can vote for jobs. But they can't vote for both' (cited in Watson 2002, p. 347). In this respect, the re-election of the Keating government could be understood as a mandate for something positive to be done about unemployment. This was the immediate context for setting up the Committee on Employment Opportunities that produced the Green Paper.

However, there was a wider context that needs comment here as it formed the constant backdrop to the government's policy directions. This involved political management of the transformations of the Australian economy. The centre-piece of this was the Prices and Incomes Accord, the agreement between the ALP and the trades union movement as to how these transformations would be undertaken. The Accord was intended to be a reform program drawing on the Swedish model that would offer a long-term strategy for economic recovery. In return for its cooperation on wage restraint, the union movement would get a government committed to pursuing social-democratic policies that would deliver a range of benefits, including the restoration of full employment. The Accord was perhaps a recognition by the union movement and the ALP alike that the Australian economy had serious structural problems in need of attention.

Despite high levels of government assistance (ie, tariffs and protection) manufacturing industry was in a state of decline by the early 1980s. There were increasingly high levels of unemployment and there was very little export income being generated through manufacturing. Moreover, Australia's economy was seen to be too dependent on primary products deriving from agriculture and mining. The manufacturing sector needed to be restructured to enable value-added exports to be created. This in turn translated into an agenda to pursue policies that would enable Australia's manufacturing industries to become more efficient and productive. Such policies were cast in a language that spoke of modernisation and entailed that idea that the only way that this could be achieved would be through the manufacturing sector becoming more competitive. This was seen as one of the key means to achieve long-term economic growth, and consequently the most effective way in which there could be a return to full employment. As part of the reconstruction of Australian industries, tariff barriers and other forms of industry protection were to be removed. To offset the inevitable job losses and the reluctance on the part of manufacturing businesses to re-invest in other areas the government provided various forms of assistance such as job retraining subsidies, investment incentives and tax breaks. This had a twofold effect. On the one hand, it led to dramatic increases in labour productivity (as fewer workers did the same or increased levels of work). On the other hand, there were massive job losses. These were not easily offset by job retraining and redundancy schemes.

The politics of this modernisation process through the 1980s (and into the 1990s) has been described by Paul Kelly (1994) as the dismantling of what he termed 'the Australian settlement', a sort of national consensus that balanced contending political interests and values that for most of the twentieth century underwrote the ongoing
development of Australia's political economy. Two of the central features of this 'settlement' as identified by Kelly were centralised arbitration/wage fixing and industry protection. By the mid-1990s most forms of industry protection were being removed or radically reduced (Conley & O'Connor 2004, p. 147-148), and the role of the arbitration commission curtailed with various reforms to the industrial relations environment (Harley 2004, p. 283-284). While there has been considerable debate over Kelly's characterisation of the idea of the 'Australian settlement' (see Stokes 2004; Smyth & Cass 1998), it remains the case that there have been changes across a range of political conventions, institutions and practices that had their roots in the years immediately following federation.

Furthermore, the modernisation process entailed a politics that represented itself not merely as reforms of sclerotic markets but increasingly as a liberator of the forces constrained within those unreformed markets. In this way policy planners could claim that economic growth and social justice could be maximised. But the goal of social justice was understood to be logically secondary to, indeed dependent on, economic growth. Hence political decisions over the allocation of resources had to be tempered by deferral to the logic of the market. This is the essence of neo-liberal politics. The logic of the market sets the constraints within which political decisions and policy making takes place. It also treats unemployment as an unintended or accidental by-product of that logic, rather than as an outcome of political choices. In terms of addressing the problem of unemployment both the ALP (at least when in government for thirteen years) and the Coalition accepted the constraints on political action that are integral to the neo-liberal paradigm. In this respect the policy assumptions and approaches signified by Working Nation suggest some affinity with the Third Way and its seeming acceptance of the inescapable realities of market forces.

While the Third Way is most commonly seen as part of the revived fortunes of the British Labour Party under Tony Blair, it also fair to say that the idea of the Third Way captures similar shifts within social democratic parties in Europe to realign their politics and polices to what they perceive to be the new post-1989 realities (Giddens 1998; 2000; Kitschelt 1994). But more importantly, much that is central to the policy thrust of Working Nation can be seen to have had a strong resonance if not presaging the policy approach of the Third Way. This is not surprising since there were and remain strong political and personal links between Australian and British labour (Scott 2000; Frankel 1997). Various ALP politicians, most notably former Federal ALP leader Mark Latham, have been active participants in the discussion of the Third Way agenda in both Australia and internationally (Battin 2004; Latham 2001a, 2001b). Latham explicitly identified the ALP governments of Hawke and Keating as having pioneered the Third Way (Latham 2001a, p. 31). Other scholars, including Pierson and Castles (2001), Frankel (1997) and Johnson and Tonkiss (2002), have provided detailed accounts of the links between the programs and policies of Australian Labor in office of the development of Third Way programs and the New Labour policies in the UK.

The policy program outlined in Working Nation contained a number of principles that have ongoing resonance with the Third Way, new Labour in the UK and the Coalition policy agenda in Australia. These principles included making the unemployed 'job ready', shifting policy attention towards the long-term unemployed and moving them from benefits into work, reforming the public sector job placement system, and
introducing the principle of mutual obligation and reciprocity for the unemployed. Granted, policy transfer is neither exact nor systematic, either within or between polities (Dolowitz & Marsh 1996). Much can change in the transmission of a policy cluster from one political arena to another, or from one social context to another. Different political regimes of varying political persuasions adopt and adapt policy initiatives from elsewhere to suit their own political agenda. Thus as Pierson and Castles (2001) point out, while the incoming Coalition government of 1996 took up many of the embryonic Third Way measures contained in *Working Nation* and developed them further (eg, the Job Network, work for the dole), the Coalition effectively abandoned the bulk of the *Working Nation* program as being too expensive and ineffective, especially the active jobs component.

*Working Nation* represents the clearest expression of the shift by the ALP 'towards an employment centred social policy' (Pierson and Castles 2001, p. 13) that kneaded economic rationalism into the dough of social democracy within a centre left context. Hence *Working Nation* needs to be understood as an expression of a new social democratic program, one that both presages the Third Way of British Labour as well as articulating the reconfigured policy assumptions of Australian Labor (Johnson and Tonkiss 2002, p. 8).

**The Proposals**

The development of the White Paper as a policy document needs to be seen in this wider context of neo-liberal politics in which the relationships between the state and the individual, and the state and the market are the focus of ongoing reconfiguration. The Green Paper was largely the Keating government honouring its electoral commitments. It had promised to take the problem of unemployment seriously. It would draw together ideas and suggestions for ways to solve unemployment, in effect to return the country to full employment as had been promised in the Accord some ten years earlier. However, the White Paper was not put together against a background of electoral success. Rather it came to be shaped some fourteen or so months later by the reassertion of 'normal' modernisation politics, the sort of politics that had been characteristic of much of the previous decade. In effect, the White Paper was unable to avoid the 'common sense' of the neo-liberal paradigm.

The Green Paper essentially dealt with two issues: higher economic growth and the supply of labour. The discussion of growth was largely confined to the growth rates required in order to reduce unemployment, however, how growth rates were to increase and how they were to be sustained was largely left untouched. There was a general discussion of possibilities including industrial relations reform, microeconomic reforms and increased investment. However, there were no specific recommendations for a growth strategy. It is almost a derivative of having the right (orthodox) macroeconomic policy program.

The remainder of the Green Paper dealt with skill enhancement (Ch. 3), labour market programs (Ch. 4), a job compact (Ch. 5), employment services (Ch. 6), income support (Ch. 7) and social security (Ch. 8). The key proposals (CEO 1993, p. 195-196) were the job compact for the long-term unemployed, reforms to the Commonwealth Employment Service and employment service provision (to
individual case management) and the removal of work disincentives from social security eligibility criteria. It was in the key recommendations of the Green Paper that we can see the genesis of the later work for the dole program.

When we move on to Working Nation (1994) the key issues of economic growth and reforming the supply side of the labour market remained. Indeed, Pixley (1994) suggests it had more to do with reforming social security programs than reducing unemployment. However, into the policy program was now inserted the additional issues: industry development and regional development. Both issues were largely absent from the Green Paper, so it is surprising that they occupy centre stage in the White Paper. Stilwell (1994, p. 117) commented that for the Labor government 'it was a bold move to integrate the employment policy proposals arising from the Green Paper with its other reviews of industry and regional policy.' Early reviews in these areas (eg, The Taskforce on Regional Development [Kelty 1993]) implied a more active and integrated strategy in both areas. However, despite their prominence, the actual allocation of funds to industry and regional policy was very modest, and in Stilwell's words there remained 'the continuing attachment to economic rationalism' (1994, p. 119). Nevertheless, retrospectively the discussion and proposals appeared both bold and innovative relative to what followed under the Coalition.

In expenditure terms the main recommendations that followed from Working Nation were the Job Compact for the long-term unemployed, a training wage (subsidy) for the unemployed, increased provision of training and work experience programs for the unemployed, an expansion in pre-vocational training places, increased employer payments for apprenticeship training, the provision of a youth training allowance and the introduction of intensive case management arrangements for the unemployed. Once again, while higher economic growth was a priority, discussion as to how to achieve this was largely couched in terms of providing a better infrastructure for growth – microeconomic reforms, decentralised industrial relations, tariff cuts and a stable macroeconomic environment (Working Nation 1994b, Ch. 1).

Essentially the tone set by the Green paper together with its core recommendations appeared to be followed by the White paper. However, Working Nation's policy program was underpinned by the pursuit of economic growth and microeconomic reform. However, it shifted the emphasis dramatically in that it also involved reconfiguring the welfare state in an ongoing process of change that embodied moving people from benefits to work, targeting and means testing benefits and moving towards active programs that revolved around reciprocal obligation. It proposed a more active labour market program agenda of which the core recommendations were the Job Compact, expanded training and job placement possibilities, intensive case management procedures and subsidised wages. While higher and sustained growth rates were regarded as essential, these were seen as being a derivative outcome from an improved economic environment that arose out of microeconomic reforms that Working Nation would help put in place. Working Nation represents the clearest expression of the shift by the ALP 'towards an employment centred social policy' (Pierson and Castles 2001, p. 13) that kneaded economic rationalism into the dough of social democracy within a centre left context.
Issues

Many of the programs encompassed within Working Nation were quickly dismantled by the Coalition Government – especially in the area of labour market programs. Ten years after Working Nation unemployment rates have halved and the numbers in long-term unemployment have declined substantially. The growth arithmetic encompassed within Working Nation has seemingly been vindicated. Yet, these outcomes have rested on a large pool of new part-time and casual jobs, a large number of older workers moving into disability support programs, a growing polarisation of working hours (the over and under-worked) and a growing polarisation of earnings (Burgess, Lee and O'Brien 2004; Watts and Burgess, 2000). While the Coalition ditched many of the Working Nation proposals, it refined and extended others including the concept of reciprocity and mutual obligation and the marketisation of employment services. The Australian system of labour market support has shifted closer towards the workfare model to be found in the USA.

Ten years after its promulgation, Working Nation remains an important policy document in terms of:

- its statement of economic orthodoxy,
- its repositioning of the government in labour market delivery,
- its tensions between the 'old' Labor concern with jobs and supporting the welfare state with the modernising and market based programs of 'new' Labor,
- its shift away from the model of 'Australian settlement', and
- its possibilities for shifting governments towards more extreme forms of neoliberalism on the one hand (taken up by subsequent Coalition governments), or towards redefining the Labor agenda, on the other hand.

The various essays in this special issue of the journal share the view that Working Nation marked a turning point in Australia. The policy terrain began to change significantly, and much of that change has its roots in the thinking that framed Working Nation. Though written from differing perspectives each essay explores aspects of the themes we have noted above.

Jose and Burgess explore the issue of competition and its significance for the clear shift in thinking and emphasis that marked the differences between the White and Green papers. They argue that Working Nation marked a pivotal shift in the public policy agenda in Australia. The policy framework articulated by Working Nation was built around the idea of 'competition', a view also noted in passing by several other contributors (see Jones and Brown & Waterhouse in this volume). They trace the lineage of competition and its roots in the thinking that shaped Working Nation. They conclude that Working Nation and the thinking underlying it provided the model for embedding the ethos of competition within other policy areas.

Jones takes up the issue of industry policy and notes that it become marginalised in the Labor years in favour of the orthodox 'microeconomic reform' agenda that had come to dominate economic policy-making and constrain the possibilities available for other policy areas. Jones notes that Working Nation was concerned with the 'supply side' of job creation, rather than developing possibilities of employment
creation. As such the industry policy component of Working Nation was wide-ranging though fragmented and naïve as to the capacity for implementation in a hostile institutional environment. The Keating government missed the opportunity to push an industry policy that could have helped it maintain its electoral ascendancy. Ironically, concludes Jones, the Howard Government has been more pragmatic in its industry policy and has succeeded in achieving electoral sympathy, despite its callous and cynical employment initiatives.

Waring turns our attention to the all-important area of industrial relations and explores the curious timing of the release of Working Nation and the implantation of the Labor Government's Industrial Relations Reform Act just a little over a month earlier. Waring suggests that this was not merely a temporal coincidence. He notes that the White Paper made many references to the need for complementary industrial relations reform to support its employment objectives, yet the reality did not match the rhetoric. As he argues, the objectives contained in the government’s industrial relations reforms ran counter to the objectives articulated in Working Nation. He concludes that there is little evidence that the industrial relations reforms measures listed in Working Nation complemented its labour marker programs; to the contrary, the evidence he adduces suggest that the actual impact of enterprise bargaining was contrary to the industrial relations aims envisaged in Working Nation.

Brown and Waterhouse take up the issue of the public sector. They argue that even though Working Nation established critical roles for government and the public sector within its broad agenda it remained silent on the issue of public sector employment. They suggest that Working Nation therefore appears to represent firstly, the first substantive break with some of the public sector’s traditional roles, and secondly, relegates Working Nation to a piecemeal, reactive approach to unemployment. The foundations for these developments are to be found in the failure to including public sector employment policy more substantively within Working Nation.

McGrath-Champ and Searle explore what Working Nation had to offer for regional policy. They survey the state of regional policy at the time of Working Nation and the subsequent developments in that area. They highlight a number of issues such as a growing emphasis on community led approaches to policy development and implementation, the importance of industry clusters for job generation, the role of local and regional networks, and the growing concern over environmental degradation. They also note the growing disparity between town and country in terms of investment priorities and infrastructure sponsored by state governments. They note that the Working Nation's importance was in giving policy emphasis to regional development as part of its solution to the problem of long-term unemployment. But its emphasis on self-help chimed in well with the neo-liberal emphasis on individual self-sufficiency.

Employment policies presuppose a reasonable understanding of the nature of the labour market. Denniss offers a broad discussion of the current shape of the labour market and where it might develop in the years ahead. He argues that the current shape of the labour market owes much to the policy thinking that was expressed in Working Nation. Taking a perhaps kinder view of the architects of the policy he discusses the extent to which the issues faced today were unforeseen by the authors of
Working Nation. He also explores briefly the implications for the development of long term labour market policy today.

Dow returns our attention to the need to build institutional means to address employment policy. He too notes that *Working Nation* ended up becoming part of the problem it was allegedly produced to solve because it was less concerned with employment creation and more concerned with labour market deregulation. In particular, it moved away from the quasi-corporatist approach represented by the Accord. Furthermore, and contrary to the prevailing neo-liberal orthodoxy, he argues that the arbitration system provides an excellent institutional mechanism for enabling employment creation directions to be better integrated into social and economic policy, while also allowing a progressive and effective involvement of trade unions in national decision-making processes. Policies aimed at employment creation need to be linked more closely with other policies, especially those concerned with the pursuit of social justice. Therefore, what is needed he suggests is more, not less, corporatism.

Finally, Ramsay and Battin explore the ideological and political possibilities that were presented by the opportunity to develop *Working Nation*. They place their analysis of this opportunity in the context of policy critiques of the successive Labor governments of Hawke and Keating and explore the possibilities that were present in the early 1990s. In their view there was a brief time following the 1993 electoral victory that offered a rare political opportunity for the Keating government to have taken a sharp change of direction. The Green Paper perhaps symbolises this moment. They conclude, however, that the eventual policy that became *Working Nation* represents a missed opportunity and a capitulation before the ideological imperatives of neo-liberal thinking. In that respect *Working Nation* became part of the problem.

Each of these papers provides some indication of the importance and impact of *Working Nation*. Ten Years on the significance and impact of *Working Nation* in the development of public policy in Australia should not be underestimated. In many respects the successive Howard governments since 1996 took up where Labor left off. It has been the view of the various authors in this issue that *Working Nation* was an important moment in the development of public policy in Australia. This was not just in relation to the problem of unemployment, the occasion for *Working Nation*, but also with respect to policy-making generally. Despite their differences each of the two political regimes spanning 1983 to the present shared some important assumptions. Many of these are to be found in the pages of *Working Nation*.

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