The Political Theology of Conservative Postmodern Democracies:

Fascism by stealth

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1 Abstract

Claims that a fusion of religion, politics and postmodernism can produce an extreme variant of right-wing conservatism are analysed historically and contemporaneously as a world-wide phenomenon which encompasses many religions and forms of government. Focussing on this alignment in western Christian cultures the result of this amalgam has been described as leading to a new form of fascism. This hypothesis is measured against the current Australian polity. There is a growing volume of evidence that a variant of fascism may be the collateral damage resulting from the Government's approach to dealing with contemporary events domestically and internationally.

2 Key Research Questions

Does the political theology of right-wing conservatism in western postmodern democracies evolve to produce a variant of fascism? This hypothesis is deconstructed into a sequence of subsidiary questions. What is the relevance of political theology in the 21st Century? How does postmodernism interact with religion, democracy and ultra right wing conservative populism? Does the combination of these factors give rise to a new form of fascism? If so what are its attributes? What is the evidence of this fusion in contemporary Australian democracy?

3 Methodology

The prime methodology is a comprehensive literature review of scholarly works on political theology, postmodern democracy, conservative movements and an analysis of the characteristics of fascism. The literature review is supplemented by extensive surveillance of commentary on these issues on Twitter® by following eminent commentators and literary journals. Media monitoring of current news articles and editorials has assisted in maintaining the currency of commentary in the mass media. All references and sources have been captured in a customised Notebook in Evernote®. Complex concept mapping has also been used employing MindManager®.

4 Literature Review

4.1 Political Theology

Political theology describes the relationship between the religious and the secular in government, linking spiritual values with the pursuit of material goods (Yannaras 1983, p.54). Through this relationship the will of God is claimed to be translated into earthly needs (Yannaras 1983, p.55). Political theology has been described as "a discourse on political authority based on a revealed divine nexus." (Lilla in Raschke 2008, p.104). It attempts to resolve the theological conundrum expressed in Jesus' *Sermon on the Mount* "No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and Mammon." (The Holy Bible 1959, Matthew 6:24). Jesus later clarified this by saying "Render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and unto God the things that are God's" (The Holy Bible 1959, Matthew 22:21). This suggests that God and Mammon can coexist provided the latter is "righteous" (Raschke 2008, p.106).

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The pendulous movement of political theology may be observed through its historic oscillation as Christianity has attempted to resolve the spiritually transcendent with secular materialism (Yannaras 1983, p.54).

After the collapse of the Holy Roman Empire, the 5th Century Bishop of Hippo, Augustine, pioneered the concept of the segregation of church and state through a "two kingdoms" dualism distinguishing between the "City of Earth" and the "City of Heaven" (Popescu 2003, p.24). Nevertheless, during the following millennium political philosophies tended to reflect ecclesiastical dogma.

In 1515 Niccolo Machiavelli urged the exclusion of religion from political life bringing a pragmatic focus to the exercise of power (Aronowitz 2005, p.22) (Machiavelli, 1515, p.36). This concept eventually led to the "secularisation thesis" which concluded that modernism and the rise of technology is characterised by a fading in the importance and significance of religion (Thiem 2012, p.19). The principle of secular dogma and the doctrine of the "separation of church and state" regained momentum in the first half of the 20th century (Raschke 2008, p.101).

In the late 20th century secularisation came under renewed challenge with an increase of spiritual interest, the rise of Pentecostal evangelism, new age values, the rise of Islamic fundamentalism and an upsurge of ethnic sectarianism (Norris and Inglehart 2003, p.1). With this re-engagement between church and state, world leaders invoke their own God in support of freedom, insurrection and war (Hickman 2008, p.177). "God's Politics" (Wallis 2005) are resurgent and are increasingly influential in the way political movements mobilise their supporters (Thiem 2012, p.16). Democracy has been described as a "temporal simulacrum for the church militant" (Raschke 2008, p.108).

In examining the linkage between religion and democracy it has been claimed that Christianity itself is not of itself inherently liberal or democratic (Hickman 2008, p.178). The theologising of American democracy may have led to the concept of a "born to rule" class within society which rules by divine order which is by definition "righteously absolute and rightfully unchallenged" (Hickman 2008, p.194).

The influence of Pentecostal evangelicalism in the 2000 US Presidential elections as well as the religious fervour of radical Islamists confirmed this turn to the recombination of religion with politics (Thiem 2012, p.16). In its 1st November 2007 edition *The Economist* contained an eighteen-page Special Report on "The new wars of religion," suggesting that the relationship between religion and politics defines what was termed the new "global postmodern," (Raschke 2008, p.102).

The debate continues. A conference in London on 'The religious right, secularisation and civil rights' was held on 10-12 October 2014. The focus of the conference was to examine the hypothesis that what we are witnessing is not religious or spiritual renewal but rather the skilful use of this as cover for the rise of extreme right wing political movements (Tran 2014). Concerned by these developments, conference organisers in a 'Secularist Manifesto' called for the complete excision of religion from the state, family law, public policy, education, healthcare and scientific research (Namazi 2014).

4.2 Postmodernism

The concept of postmodernism confounds definition. It has been described as a "semiotic marker" which still requires definition and discourse (Kellner 1995, p.46).. The term has become an omnibus descriptor for a global shift in values and discursive practices (Raschke 2008, p.102) and which questions any argument that seeks to evaluate its claims (Tushnet 1995, p.582).

4.3 Critics of postmodernism point to its adherents' reluctance to forge a "grand narrative" to describe life's moral and political choices, thereby abdicating the need to address them (Tushnet 1995, p.583). Postmodernists are accused of possessing an "anything goes" attitude to life in which you can say anything you want, but so can everyone else (Raschke 2008, p.587). This is akin to the concept of "permanent temporariness" used to describe the plight of the Palestine State (Crooke 2011).Conservatism

Evidence of Crowder's assertion may be seen in the paradigm shift within the US Republican Party caused by the emergence of the ultra-rightwing Tea Party movement. The rise of far right nationalistically-based parties in Europe is further evidence (Crowder 2004). In postmodern politics the traditional "left" has become marginalised and increasingly irrelevant (Aronowitz 2005, p.39). Neiwert distinguishes between "conservatism" and the "conservative movement"; the former being a state of mind and the latter a dogmatic political movement with clearly defined tenets and agenda. The strength and resolve of the conservative agenda relies on bluff and bluster, attacking their political opponents as weak and vacillating. This strategy is assisted by a compliant mainstream media (Neiwert 2005, p.7).

American conservatism has been described as is an alloy of cultural conservatism and political liberalism but that if the latter is sacrificed in favour of the former then it produces a variant of right-wing socialism (Goldberg 2007, p.396).

4.4 Postmodern Democracy

The arrival of postmodern democracy coincided with the end of 500 years of the "Age of Reason" with an explosion of competing ideologies - fascism, communism, socialism and capitalism - which eventually saw the ascension of the Right as the voice of law and order (Saul, J.R. 1993, p.18). The outcome of these ideological clashes favouring right wing conservatism has allowed those in power to distort complex reality through a postmodernist appeal to our baser instincts (Saul, J.R. 1993, p.36).

The Conservatives' hold on power not only in the US, but around the world, was strengthened after the September 2001 terrorist attacks in New York and Washington which allowed the Bush/Cheney Administration to introduce authoritarian measures justified in the name of the "War on Terror" (Dean 2006, p.169). In 2014 the war continues unabated and we have entered an age where the politics of fear "drives out reason, suppresses the politics of discourse and opens the door to the politics of distraction" (Al Gore in Dean 2006, p.172).

Authoritarian behaviour has been described as "protofascist", sowing the seeds of a fascism of the future. It is facilitated by strident responses to confected crises and is characterised by dominating behaviour, inequality, vengeful action, lack of compassion, lies, prejudice, militancy and overt nationalism (Dean 2006, p.180).These changes in public life have

introduced a postmodern ambivalence in how we understand democracy, challenging its "grand narrative". Postmodernism's destruction of these symbolic markers which helped people to make sense of their lives has led to a public sense of disorientation (Sennett 2000, p.56). Their disappearance has seen a "retreat to a weary and ultimately defeated postmodern politics" where the power of citizens has shrunk to that of a voter when required by the political elite (Aronowitz 2005, p.2).

Within a postmodern government, pragmatic ad hockery supporting corporate and political power relations has become the norm (Crowder 2004). An electoral outcome no matter what its majority is taken as a mandate for the implementation of policies some of which may be significantly different from those used to gain power (Crowder 2004). Through this process of disengagement, postmodern democracy may lead to an ethical stand-off and political paralysis (Crowder 2004).

Dick Morris, former advisor to President Clinton set out a blueprint for a postmodernist government in *The New Prince* (Morris 1999) urging a pivot towards pragmatic politics postulating a return to Machiavelli's "down-to-earth, street-smart realism" (Morris 1999, inside front flap). The premise of his book is that if politicians transparently pursued issues which are in their own self interests then the political process would be clearer, more positive, non-partisan and issues-related.

This profound conservative ideological shift presents a sophisticated version of pragmatic rationality as the capacity of governments to control capital, labour, ideas and people is thwarted (Aronowitz 2005, p.21). Where their capacity to determine what happens domestically is disrupted governments focus on those things they still control allowing them to create scapegoats out of welfare recipients, immigrants and other minority groups thereby fomenting fear, division and suspicion in the electorate (Aronowitz 2005, p.8). This leads to an haphazard, uneven, disjointed, pragmatic application of ideas, policies and loyalties in which governments may be unsure as to how everything fits together, and whether this even matters (Gilbert 2009).

With the jettisoning of political ideals and an *ad hoc* approach to governing, democracy has become vulnerable to a renewed intrusion of religious fundamentalism and right wing extremism (Irigaray and Marder 2014). This is postmodern democracy in action and leads to the conclusion that representative democracy may be impossible to sustain in the postmodern context (Gilbert 2009).

4.5 Fascist Fusion

Mussolini coined the term "Fascism" from the Latin *fasces*, the word for the wooden rods used by ancient Romans for beating their subordinates (Alexa 2006). He adopted and changed the words of St Paul "Everything in Christ, nothing outside of Christ, nothing against Christ" (The Holy Bible 1959, Romans 11:36) to "Everything in the State, nothing outside the State, nothing against the State" (Alexa 2006).

In retrospect, 20th century fascism raises the question of how could sophisticated, well-educated and technologically advanced European nations with long and proud histories descend into "a collective pack of murderous thugs devoid of a moral compass or

conscience"? ('Fascism reborn' 2010). The postmodernist experience has exposed the vulnerability of modern nations to the loss of values, beliefs and the basic morality which binds civil society together making possible the commitment of unthinkable crimes. This has led to a claim that "The new name that Fascism has taken for itself is Postmodernism" ('Fascism reborn' 2010). It scratches at deeply ingrained public prejudices whilst at the same time praying on their sense of justice and patriotism (Georgi Dimitrov in Kossaly 2010).

The fascism we may be heading towards will not look like the totalitarian fascism of Hitler and Mussolini but rather a new radical right-wing populism. It will have a fresh friendly face and will be a twenty-first century "designer fascism" (Copsey 2013, p.1). The point is

illustrated by a disarming photograph of Sarah Palin with a caption quoting Sinclair Lewis in 1835 that "When fascism comes to America it will be wrapped in the flag and carrying a cross" (Kossaly 2010). Its defining features will be "nativism", a combination of nationalism with xenophobia, authoritarianism on law and order issues, and populism (Copsey 2013, p.2). It will be controlled by a Big Business-Big Government partnership preserving the privileges of the ultra-rich, the corporate overseers, and the military whilst removing the rights and liberties of other people (Gross 1980, p.161).
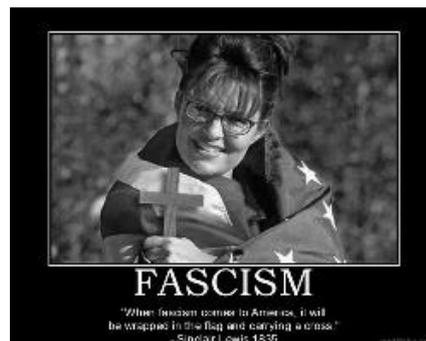
The success in the US of the religious, conservative, ultra right wing political agenda suggests that its aim is to not merely obtain power but to shore it up by transforming itself into a simulacrum of a friendly populism masking the violence and hatred seen in earlier variants of fascism (Neiwert 2005, p.3).

5 Argument - the evidence in Australia

5.1 Church and State

In western democracies the concept of a separation of powers between church and state may be constitutionally explicit, implicit or absent. While the Australian Constitution proscribes religious discrimination it is silent on the separation of powers. Australia is a Constitutional Monarchy; its Head of State is also the Head of the Church of England therefore by definition State and Church are inextricably intertwined. This is reinforced each parliamentary sitting day which commences with the Lord's Prayer. Our national flag displays in its upper left-hand quadrant the crosses of St George, St Andrew and St Patrick. To become a secular republic the Monarchy would have to be disengaged and a referendum held to allow Constitutional confirmation of a separation of church and state (Wallace 2006).

In 2013 Australians elected a Liberal/National Party coalition government which, during its first year in office, has revealed its right wing ideological credentials. This shift has been matched by an increasingly irrelevant Labor Opposition seeking to rebuild and regain its own populist support. Both the LNP Coalition and the ALP have strong links with Christian denominations particularly Roman Catholic, Anglican and increasingly Pentecostal Evangelistic movements such as Hillsong and ShireLive as well as the mysterious sect The Exclusive Brethren. This strengthening of links between Church and State is moving

Australia away from the notion of a secular democracy. In 2006 Kevin Rudd urged Christians to get more involved in politics and Peter Costello made similar comments in his speech on 23 September 2006 to the Australian Christian Lobby National Conference (Wallace Max 2006). Their comments imply that Christian values form the core of Australian culture at odds with the popular self-perception of scepticism towards authority, mateship and a fair go.

The first decade of the 21st century saw global surges of support for the conservative theology of the extreme right in Christianity, Islam and Judaism (Mackay 2005, p.73). In Australia this effect was diagnosed as creating a preoccupation with the self and an addiction to materialism. In turn this led to disengagement with the larger issues of the day, the loss of narrative, a taste for lifestyle issues and an outbreak of fear and prejudice towards outsiders. Sadly Mackay's optimism in 2005, that this was a temporary aberration which would fail to gain any sort of permanent hold, was misplaced.

In the same edition of *The Griffith Review*, Julianne Schultz saw the fusion of ideology and religion as providing a reputational shield behind which a "sophisticated rebadging of totalitarianism" could occur (Schultz 2005, p.9). She predicted that the imagined fundamentalist threat would lead to new forms of engagement undermining traditional cultural values of tolerance, respect and reason (Schultz 2005, p.10).

5.2 Australia – a Postmodern Democracy?

The prediction of a pragmatic postmodern democracy leading to the election of a plethora of individual self-interests (Morris 1999) has now occurred in the Australian Senate where single-issue candidates have been elected on very low percentages through anomalies in the electoral laws. These Senators along with minor parties form the balance of power and pose significant challenges to representative democracy. PUP Leader Clive Palmer is a perfect example of Morris' transparently self-interested postmodern politician.

Since 1996, under Prime Minister Howard and now under Mr Abbott, Australia has trended towards being a revisionist, minimalist democracy with voter disengagement and a sense of anti-intellectualism (Maddison 2007, p.32). Under the Howard mantra of "relaxed and comfortable", rational choice theory has prevailed in which voters simply support what is in their personal interest. This has seen a climate of "quiet authoritarianism" flourish with increasingly ethically-questionable measures implemented and a centralisation of policy and power in the Prime Minister's Office (Maddison 2007, p.37). We have now graduated into an environment of being "alert but not alarmed" having moved along a continuum from Huxley's *Brave New World* towards Orwell's *1984* (Kindon 2014).

The devolution to State and Territory governments of policy, power and funding on education, health and the environment proposed by the Abbott Government correlates with a postmodern view of democracy comprising smaller government, local control and the dilution or removal of regulatory authorities (Aronowitz 2005, p.9).

5.3 Australian Conservatism

Conservatism in Australia is bivalent. At one level it embraces a strong sense of nationalism, a suspicion of foreigners, a predisposition towards militarism and government by a "born to

rule" elite. Conversely it embodies a love of the nation, group loyalty, belief in the common good, sense of duty and support for traditional family values (McKnight 2005, p.90).

The success of radical right-wing populist parties is bolstered by the electoral alliances forged through a paradoxical coalition of marginalised blue collar workers, young lower-educated people, and the unemployed. The support of these groups was instrumental in the initial success of Hansonism, Howard's "Battlers" and now the Palmer United Party (Betz 1993, p.423).

Radical right-wing populist parties generally criticise high levels of taxation, the large and inefficient bureaucracy and the welfare state, leading to tax cuts for the wealthy and the corporate sector and the abolition of other taxes. The Abbott Government's first federal budget scored highly on these critieria. Smaller government is achieved through privatisation of government assets and services, attacks on public broadcasting services, deregulation of the private sector, and widespread cuts in the public sector (Betz 1993 p. 418). By using the Party as a reputational shield voters can support can lend support to policies such as restrictive immigration policies without being accused of racism or extremism because the party is also known for promoting other less controversial policies (Ivarsflaten 2006, p.7).

5.4 Australian Fascism

It is unlikely that we are witnessing a deliberate move towards a fascist state; rather that fascism is the collateral damage resulting from an ultra right wing conservative populist agenda. Political scientist Dr Laurence Britt identified fourteen characteristics of fascism which will be used as reference points to measure Australia's alignment with them (Britt 2003). They are summarised in the following diagram.
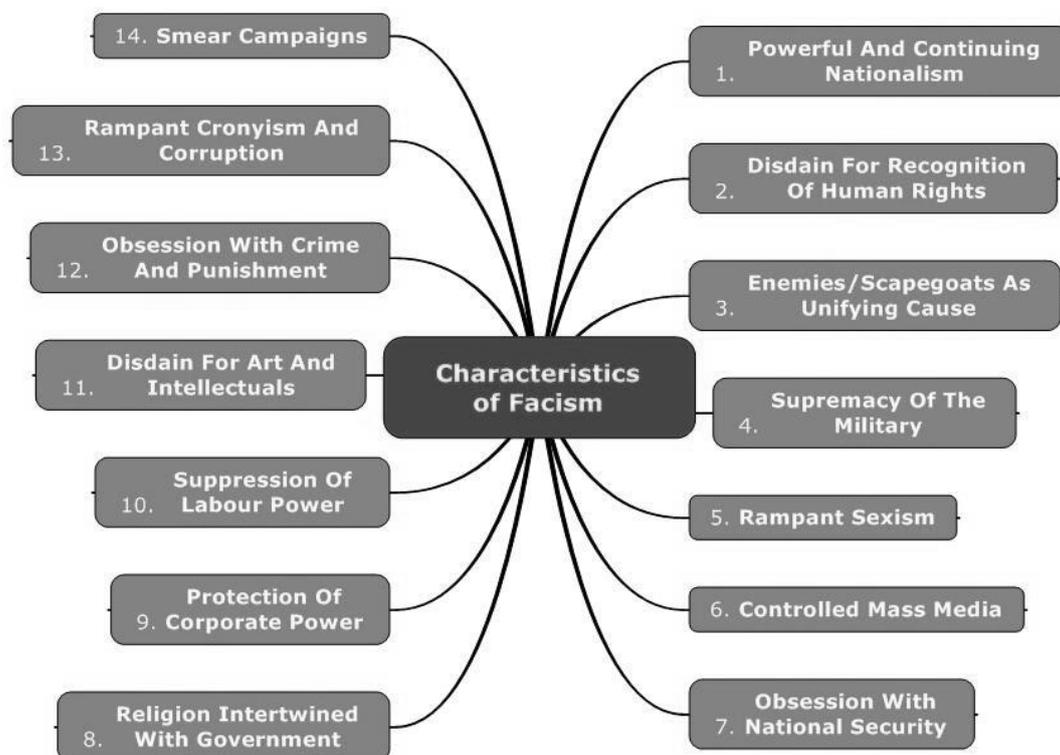
Britt's 14 Characteristics of Fascism

Examining Britt's first characteristic (B1) *Powerful and continuing nationalism*, the shift to the right in politics, assisted by a *Compliant mass media* (B6) has revealed a disturbing xenophobic undercurrent in the Australian community. This sense of jingoistic nationalism connects with Britt's seventh characteristic (B7) *Obsession with National Security*. The "war on terrorism" identified with Islamic extremism fuelled the Cronulla race riots in the summer of 2005. In August 2011, the self-styled "Convoy of No Confidence" demonstrated in front of Parliament House in Canberra. It was attended by the then Opposition front bench standing in front of banners reading "Ditch the Bitch", "Juliar", "Sack the Crack" and most concerning of all "Tolerance is our Demise". The event was compered by Mr Alan Jones who was also instrumental in inciting the Cronulla riots. The convoy was described by Mr Abbott as representing "middle Australia".

Now following Prime Minister Abbott's announcement of "Team Australia" as a way of galvanising a sense of nationalism – we are on the Team or against it. It has been described as a "nationalism framed in terms of external threats" (Crowe 2014) with a return to the wartime concept of nationalism from the Menzies era. The term has been criticised as "absurdly jingoistic and precisely un-Australian" leading to an increase of fear and hatred towards those seen as not being on the Team (Saul, B 2014).

Evidence mounts daily over our obsession with national security, supported by a docile Opposition and a compliant mainstream media. After previously debunking in Opposition, Australia's push for a seat on the United Nations Security Council, the Abbott Government has now used its position to lead international debate on issues such as the shooting down of the Malaysian airliner MH17 in July 2014, sanctions against Russia, investigatory teams to the Ukraine and troops and fighter jets sent to the Middle East as part of a coalition to counter and eliminate the fighters of the Islamist State (IS).

This international posture has increased the threat of terrorist attacks within Australia. On 1 October 2014 the Government introduced the first two tranches of National Security Legislation. The provisions of the first two Bills, in defence of freedom, paradoxically trade public freedom for national security and have drawn sharp criticism from the media, the legal fraternity and those who feel targeted such as the Islamic community. The provisions give increased powers to the Australian Secret Intelligence Organisation (ASIO) including jail for journalists and whistlebowers, computer hacking, ASIO immunity from prosecution, detention without charge, restrictions on freedom of movement, jail for Australian jihadists and mandatory retention of private web and mobile phone data. The Bills were rushed into Parliament so quickly that amendments proposed by the Parliamentary Committee on Human Rights were not tabled until after the legislation had passed through the House of Representatives and before the Senate Scrutiny of Bills Committee Report had been tabled (Bacon 2014).The legislation led to former intelligence officer and independent Tasmanian federal MP Andrew Wilkie accusing the government of exploiting fears about terrorism and pushing Australia towards a "police state"(Wilkie 2014).

The media's response to the passage of the legislation in the same week that it bungled reporting on a frenzied attack by a young Muslim man on Victorian police officers supports

the contention that the *Mass media in Australia is controlled and compliant* (B6). The media's performance caused The Guardian's Australian Deputy Political Editor, Katherine Murphy to write a "loveletter to my profession" and "an outpouring of grief for its failings" (Murphy 2014). Her plea for journalists to ask themselves whose agenda they serve and to apply standards of self-accountability led to extensive attacks on her by News Ltd journalists on social media.

A *Focus on the Military* (B4) has been ascendant in the years since the 2001 attack on the World Trade Centre with the defence budget mainly quarantined from fiscal cuts. Australian defence forces are deployed in many overseas conflicts and this has been accompanied by the introduction of "Operation" terminology to label Government policy, for example Operation Sovereign Borders, Operation Bring Them Home and the counter-terrorism raids, Operation Hammerhead. The trend towards militarism has led to the conclusion that Australia is "obsessed with war" and that undemocratic, hierarchical military prowess appears to increase as public disillusionment with legislators increases (Reynolds 2014).

The recruiting of Australian volunteers to fight with rebels in the Middle East has reinforced the focus on national security with threat levels raised over the possibility of terror attacks in Australia and the prevention of the battle-hardened jihadists from returning to Australia. This has allowed the *Use of Enemies and Scapegoats as a Unifying Cause* (B3) to flourish. Allegedly over 100 Australians volunteers are also fighting with the Israeli Defence Force (IDF) but this is seen as legitimate because Israel is a recognised State with no UN sanctions and the backing of the US. In September 2014 we witnessed counter-terrorism raids involving 600 police officers conducted in Sydney and Brisbane against alleged terror suspects creating a high level of community anxiety and an increase in public antagonism towards the Islamic community.

The *Use of scapegoats* (B4) is also evident in the plethora of Inquiries and Royal Commissions into the alleged misdeeds of the previous Government. Unions (B10) have been firmly targeted by the Abbott Government as have welfare recipients carrying the burden of recent budget cuts whilst more entitlements were delivered to the wealthy and the corporate sector despite having seen the "end of the age of entitlement" announced by the Treasurer.

Britt's second characteristic (B2), a *Disdain for the Recognition of Human Rights,* correlates with the manner in which successive Australian Governments have dealt with the humanitarian problem of asylum seekers. Australia is the only country in the OECD that has no Bill of Rights or Human Rights (Broinowski 2014). There is increasing concern that Australia's human rights are under attack and that by voicing government policies as protecting freedoms they are actually being undermined (Saul, B 2014).

Australia has a long history of raising human rights issues with foreign governments including Russia, China, Myanmar, Malaysia and Indonesia. Now some of these countries, including China, are criticising Australia for its stance on human rights. On 15 March 2014 the ABC reported that China had expressed its concerns during regular human rights talks with Australia over the protection of refugees and the rights of children of refugees in

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education. The China spokesperson also raised the legality of repatriation of refugees to countries other than Australia (McDonell 2014).

The United Nations High Commission on Refugees has formally criticised Australia's policies and practices citing the Government's record on migration zone changes, maritime operations in which boats are turned or towed back, offshore processing and conditions in detention centres alleging that they contravene Australia's obligations as a signatory to the Refugee Convention. The Immigration Minister's response to this criticism has been to propose legislative amendments which remove mention of International Treaty obligations replacing them instead with the Government's own interpretation of them (Siegel 2014).

The appointment of Mr Tim Wilson as Australia's Human Rights Commissioner is an example of Britt's (B13), *Rampant Cronyism*. His appointment seems counterintuitive given his previously strong advocacy as an employee of the Institute of Public Affairs to abolish the Commission. Other examples of cronyism have included the IPA-aligned Kevin Donnelly to a Review of the Australian School Curriculum, climate sceptic and former head of the Business Council of Australia to head the National Commission of Audit, Climate sceptic Maurice Newman to head the Business Advisory Council, climate sceptic and former chair of Caltex to undertake the Review of the Renewable Energy Target, Head of the Sydney Institute and ex Chief of Staff to John Howard, Gerard Henderson to run the Prime Minister's Literary Awards and News Ltd journalist Janet Albrechtsen and Neil Brown former Liberal Minister, both strong critics of the ABC, to the Advisory Panel on unbiased appointments to the ABC Board (Secombe 2014).

These appointments also add substance to Britt's *Disdain for Art and Intellectuals* (B11). Announcements contained in the 2014 Federal Budget alarmed the education, science, environment, public broadcasting and research sectors with 230 government programs axed and 36 government agencies either abolished or merged. There is no Minister for Science in the Abbott Government. With the abolition of the Clean Energy Finance Corporation, Climate Change Authority, Climate Commission and the Australian Renewable Energy Authority the Abbott Government signalled a new approach to dealing with climate change. Both the ABC and SBS had base funding cuts totalling $120 million over the next four years with more cuts under review. The CSIRO had cuts imposed of $111 million suggesting that there was indeed an attack on intellectual and scientific endeavour in Australia ('Federal budget 2014: political experts react' 2014).

The *Intertwining of Religion with Government* (B8) has been a growing phenomenon since Prime Minister Howard's meetings with and promises to the Exclusive Brethren – an organisation which forbids its members to vote yet makes political demands on the Government. The introduction of the School Chaplain Scheme under Labor and maintained by the Abbott Government is another example of religious interference. The High Court has ruled the program to be illegally funded. It is unpopular with many in the community yet the Government is now examining ways of salvaging the program through indirect State and Territory funding (Stevenson 2014). Those groups contracted to provide the chaplaincy service tend to be the evangelistic Christian Ministries. A representative of Victoria's largest

chaplaincy provider has been quoted saying "We need to go and make disciples," and that "schools are our largest mission field" (Stevenson 2014).

Fascists are averse to rational argument leading to the conclusion that they are anti-intellectual. Legal principles are often challenged through criticism of the judiciary or by legislative change to legitimise previously illegal actions. When international conventions get in the way they are ignored or denigrated. (Broinowski 2014).

This is a depressing snapshot of Australia's current political environment with an increasingly right wing Government, an emasculated, copy-cat Opposition, a rag-bag of self-interests in the Senate and a compliant mainstream media. A truly postmodern democracy heading down the road to fascism.

6 Conclusions

Do populist right wing governments even realise that they are on the path to fascism? The writing of this essay has almost been outstripped by the frequency and volume of political announcements and events domestically and internationally leading to the conclusion that we are indeed on the road to a twenty first century variant of fascism.

Robert Theobald's parable of the frog comes to mind in which "Frogs permit themselves to be slowly boiled to death. If the cool temperature of the water in which the frog is immersed is slowly raised, the frog does not become aware of its danger until it is too late to do anything about it."(Gross 1980, p.209).

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