

Party convergence, again

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Abstract

That the major parties in Australia have converged is an idea of long standing. But proponents of the idea differ about when it happened, why it happened and what its consequences might be. In revisiting the party convergence thesis, this paper does three things. First, it provides a critical examination of the assumptions that underlie the thesis. It argues that claims of convergence focus on some criteria while ignoring others; confuse movements in policy space with changes in party distance; and typically involve an implicit essentialism, so that any two parties that share an ideology are assumed to share policy positions that can be derived from this ideology. Second, it reviews studies of election speeches since the war, and studies of government expenditure patterns and tax schedules from Whitlam to Hawke. All cast doubt on, or heavily qualify, the idea that the parties have converged or lost their traditional distinctiveness. And third, it shows that the view of the electorate is closer to that of the policy analysts than to that of the pundits. Voters continue to distinguish between the parties in left-right terms, think it matters who wins, and see the parties as different especially in the wake of election campaigns when the issues that divide them have been substantial.

Pundits

In the run up to the last election, Robert Manne (2001) described the differences between the major parties as 'narrower than I can ever recall.' Others said much the same thing but in more colourful language. One market analyst was reported to have remarked that the difference between the Coalition and Labor was 'similar to the difference between Pepsi and Coke', a matter of perception not something based on any 'distinct attributes of the product' (cited in Chessell 2001). Political scientist Judith Brett (2001) thought the choice was between 'ordinary ordinariness' (Beazley) and 'extraordinary ordinariness' (Howard). And while the political journalist Dennis Shanahan (2001) saw three parties (Labor, Liberal and the Democrats) vying for power, each of them was committed to the same thing - 'caution, caution, caution.' After the election, the voices were just as insistent. David McKnight (2002) wrote in the *Sydney Morning Herald* of 'the increasing irrelevance of the old left-right division', while Ray Cassin (2002), in the *Sunday Age*, described 'Labor and the Coalition' as 'virtually indistinguishable on broad economic policy' with political debate 'confined within the extremely narrow frame imposed by the dominant neoliberal ideology.'

These commentators are not alone in arguing that real policy differences, let alone differences that could be talked about in terms of left and right, are a thing of the past. On the contrary: among political observers, the idea that the major parties have converged and that this convergence is without precedence, it is now par for the course.

An earlier conception of the party system organised around the idea of a party of initiative (Labor) and parties of resistance (non-Labor or anti-Labor) still gets some airing - not least, during the Hawke years, from the non-Labor side (West 1984, 2; Nick Greiner, cited in Henderson 1994, 4; 1998, 28; Marsh 1995, 111). But the Howard years may have seen something of a sea change, with some Liberals claiming the initiative - not only in the name of the Government but on behalf of the Coalition during its spell in Opposition (Staley and Nethercote 2001, 8-10)¹ - and some on the Labor side worried lest the Party prove incapable of mounting an effective defence against the Howard government or of generating initiatives of its own. Thus, in a post-election essay, John Button, a former minister in the Hawke and Keating governments, claims that the 'Liberals' *raison d'être* has been to oppose the ALP'; but that 'John Howard's political philosophy goes beyond preserving the status quo: he's keen to turn the clock back'. The 'danger' for Labor is that

'it will continue to react to the conservative agenda rather than spelling out an agenda of its own', one consequence of which would be the continuation of a two-party system which voters can sense is 'tired and incestuous' (2002, 64, 61, 3).

The last election was not the first occasion on which many keen observers had difficulty putting the proverbial 'cigarette paper' between the parties; while Manne used the expression on that occasion to characterise the difference between the parties on just two key issues, 'party convergence' had been a by-word of political analysis long before this. When, then, did the 'real' differences between the parties first disappear? Did it ever re-appear?

On these issues there is no agreement. Even the most adamant is sometimes unsure. In *Robert Menzies Forgotten People*, Brett points to two different dates on which the Labor and Liberal parties converged: around the time when 'the end of ideology' – more precisely, the end of ideology of the left (Bell 1962: 17) – was all the rage; and some time in the 1970s or '80s. 'In the 1930s, '40s and '50s', she says, 'the ideological differences between the parties were far sharper.' This suggests that it was the 1960s that brought an end to what Menzies believed separated the parties, a 'real conflict of principles'. But in a passage immediately before this Brett claims that it has only been '[s]ince Menzies death' that the 'terms of conflict between Labor and the non-Labor parties shifted', with 'the two parties view of each other no longer as different as they were during the middle of this century.' Competition between the parties, Brett concludes, 'is now more about economic management skills than values and ideas' (1992, 35).

Many in these sorts of terms have described the party contest from 1983 to 1996, when Bob Hawke and then Paul Keating led Labor governments and Andrew Peacock, John Howard, John Hewson and then John Howard led the Opposition. And not all the pundits were academic social scientists. Jim McClelland, a former Whitlam minister, remarked in the early 1990s that the parties 'seemed increasingly indistinguishable' (cited in Appleton 2000, 204).² And in his memoirs, Peter Walsh, a Minister for Finance under Hawke, wrote: 'It can be argued that 1987 was last federal election that really mattered' – though Coalition governments, he conceded, 'would have been marginally less likely to allow green extremists, professional ethnics, the New Class and rent-seeking lawyers to inflict the economic damage they have, and more likely to carry labour reforms further' (1995, 167-68).

Of the social scientists, some welcomed the changes wrought by Labor, though few as enthusiastically as the editors of a book on *Hawke and Australian Public Policy* who praised the 'path breaking' Hawke government for 'markedly' improving 'the quality of public

policy debate', for dispensing with 'the rhetoric of Left and Right which had paralysed Labor politics for so long', and for seeking 'real solutions to real problems' (Stewart and Jennett 1990, 11). In one of the best-known accounts of Labor's apparent transformation, Dean Jaensch insisted that a Hawke-Keating 'hijack' had turned Labor into a party like the Liberals. For the first time, according to this story, Labor recognised 'the mixed economy and the existence and importance of a private sector'. In so doing, it had become a 'new party', a 'catch-all' party³ - "'Labor" in name only' (1989, 42, 154), willing to embrace policies of any kind in order to win office (1989, 20). The Liberal Party, 'however ungracefully', also changed - or had changed already (Jaensch is unclear about this). It accepted 'a mixed economy' as 'a fact of life' and the welfare state as something that was 'here to stay' (1989, 21, 154). The Nationals, too, fell into line by 'retaining a rhetorical commitment to free enterprise while supporting government intervention in practice' (1989, 154-55).⁴

From the left, accounts of the Hawke-Keating years have been distinctly less sanguine - partly, no doubt, because the picture of the parties positions on state intervention painted by Jaensch looks more like a portrait of the 1940s, a prospect such critics would have settled for happily, than a canvass representing the 1980s. For Michael Pusey, Canberra's Labor-sponsored 'economic rationalism' may have changed the 'traditional' features of 'the Australian federal apparatus' - a Coalition of the right versus a 'centralist' Labor party - 'for good' (1991, 30-31), not only by obliterating any real differences between the parties but by transforming the relationship of civil society to politics: civil society, he wants us to believe, became the object of politics instead of its subject (1991, 10, 224-25). For Peter Beilharz, Labor earned 'its managerial credentials', under Hawke and Keating, 'at the cost of emptying out the Labor tradition, even while constantly appealing to it'. To mix the metaphor: it 'dramatically increased' its access to 'the turnstiles of parliamentary power' only because it no longer had 'any purpose beyond holding the fort' (1994, 4). The verdict of Graham Maddox, halfway through Labor's long run, had been strikingly similar. In its 'anxiety' to 'occupy the "middle ground"' (1989, 103), and in what he thought was its 'futile attempt to win widespread non-sectional, electoral support' (1989, 136), Labor took 'typically Liberal initiatives' (1989, 103, 117, 123, 124, 128, 131); indeed, in its relations with the trade unions, it went even further 'than a Liberal government might have been able to' go (1989, 105). For Maddox, Labor under Hawke represented a 'retreat from two-party politics' itself (1989, ch. 5).⁵ In this respect, Maddox reached the same conclusion, from the left, as Katherine West from the right. 'In the name of consensus', she had argued, soon after Hawke came to office, a 'so-called Labor Government' was attempting a peaceful takeover of the Opposition' and had been 'finding the task unexpectedly uncomplicated' (1984, 1, 2). Maddox held Labor responsible for what he

called a 'retreat'; West had argued that the Liberals were to blame for what, in her view, was a 'revolution'.⁶

For others, party convergence dates not from Labor's time in office but from its period prior to that in Opposition. John Edwards, an economics advisor to Keating from 1991-1993, is not one of these; he argues that 'the economic program Labor was elected to carry out' in 1983, looks in retrospect 'like the fossilised remnant of traditional post-war Labor' (1996, 194). But in his best-selling book, published two years into the Keating prime ministership, Hugh Mackay - a social researcher whose insights into the public mood were incorporated regularly into Keating's speeches (Watson 2002, 330) - insists that it was in the post-Whitlam years, when Labor was in opposition, that a party contest organised around differences in policy and philosophy came to be replaced by a politics of pragmatism and personality. Mackay goes on to argue that as a result of the post-Whitlam transformation there developed a growing sense among voters that the two-party system had 'lost its way, or, perhaps lost its point'; and that, by the 'mid-1990s', the electoral cynicism this engendered was 'so high that it might well stimulate some demand for a redefinition of our political institutions' (1993: 169).

Mackay was not alone in decrying the state of political debate after Whitlam. Although many saw in Malcolm Fraser a man implementing a New Right vision (for example, Elliot 1982 and Simms 1982, ch. 8), or at least someone who 'represented significantly different policy directions in several key areas' (1979, 8; Head and Patience 1979), others did not. David Wells, for example, in a book for which Maddox wrote the Foreword, argued that following 'the fall of Whitlam', the 'great deal of time' spent by the parties criticising each other 'would not disguise their fundamental agreements' (1990, 7). For the New Right itself, the Fraser years were a huge disappointment. Despite promising to wind back Whitlamism, Fraser was judged by many on the right to have 'forgotten or ignored his own preaching' (Walsh 1979, 219) and to have pursued 'essentially Whitlam-esque policies' (Brian Buckley, cited in O'Brien 1985, 23). As an adviser to Fraser's Treasurer put it, 'most of the senior members of the coalition' approved of the 'general diagnosis but not the medicine' the government needed to take (Buckley 1991, 102).

Of course, it is not only Mackay who thinks of the Whitlam years as different. Maddox and Jaensch, as well as Beilharz, also regard them as different. For Maddox, 'the Whitlam governments of 1972 and 1974 had been the most Labor governments of all - at least they stood in a direct line of inheritance from the Curtin and Chifley governments of the 1940s' (Maddox, 1989, 137). Jaensch argues that far from being in the direct line of Curtin or Chifley, 'the parliamentary party' under Whitlam had accepted the demands of the electorate' and had 'moved well away from socialism and even from labourism'; indeed,

starting from its electoral low of 1966, Labor had made a 'significant movement towards a catch-all mode'. But in contrast to Hawke and Keating's commitment to 'electoralism', Whitlam's commitment was to 'social democracy' - an attempt 'to produce a public sector technocracy based on planning and social intervention' (1989, 92-3, 161-2). Beilharz, who confesses to being wary of fixating 'on the 1960s and 1970s' and of 'inflating this period in to a kind of golden age' (1994, 6), argues nonetheless that '[t]here remains about the Whitlam period an atmosphere of reform that can find no parallel in Hawkeism' - not in Hawke's push to 'deregulation' in economic policy or in his 'technocratic forms' of social policy (1986, 6).

Others, however, see the Whitlam years in very much the same way as these critics see the years of Keating or Hawke. 'The victory of the Liberal-Country parties' in 1975, wrote the former deputy leader Jim Cairns, 'was not a victory for an alternative to Labor; it was a victory for the prevailing hegemony made more certain by Labor's acknowledgment and acceptance of so much of it' (1976: 126). For Bob Catley and Bruce McFarlane (1974), Cairns himself was part of the problem.⁷ In their critique of Labor's 'social model' under Whitlam - a critique which Beilharz believes more accurately applies to Hawke's Accord (1994, 99) - Labor was to the Coalition as Tweedledum to Tweedledee; a guide prepared for London's *Financial Times* agreed that in 'basic philosophy' there was little difference' (Southern 1973, 17). A third voice from the left, James Walter, is kinder to Cairns but not to his successor. It was with the Whitlam Government's last budget, says Walter, that any real difference between the parties disappeared. Bill Hayden's 1975 budget 'saw the flowering of economic rationalism.' With it, he insists, politics 'was driven off the agenda.' Devoid, until Keating's election victory in 1993, of 'issues or principles', politics now 'could only be a battle for power' (Walter 1996, xiii).

But in terms of party convergence, an argument can be made that neither 1972 nor 1975 represents a fundamental break. Writing at the end of the 1970s, Brian Head and Allan Patience suggest that the 'party convergence thesis in its most persuasive form claims that both the Labor and Liberal parties have been changing in important ways since the 1940s, with Labor accepting moderate reformism within a "mixed" economy, and the Liberals accepting high levels of welfare expenditure and various forms of government control over the economy' (1979, 2). At the end of the Whitlam years, Ken Turner had articulated a more general claim - one with which students of Anthony Downs (1957) would have been long familiar - that '[p]arties in two-sided competition find 'me-tooism irresistible', a proposition he illustrated by noting that commentators had referred to 'Gortlam', in the late 1960s, and later to 'Gill Sneddlam'; Bill Snedden's 1974 program had been described as 'Whitlamism at half pace' (Turner 1976, 463; see also Hawker 1982, 1).

More recently, Rodney Smith has suggested that it was from 'the 1960s' that 'the parties replaced the original liberal egalitarian project of Australian politics with a liberal market project' (2001, 61). Earlier, Brugger and Jaensch had argued that 'even during the Chifley Government it was clear that the social liberal vision' shared by both sides of politics 'was receding' (1985, 39); not until 1970, when Don Dunstan came to office in South Australia, did 'the major elements of the social liberal thesis' re-emerge - though 'more clearly' in South Australia than at the national level, even with Whitlam (1985, 46, 51). It was under Chifley, and the concomitant rise of 'bastard Keynesianism', Jaensch and Brugger insist, that 'Australian politics became quite notorious' for 'elections in which political parties crudely displayed shopping lists in return for the popular "mandate"' (1985, 39, 43).⁸

These rather different views not only imply a fundamental convergence dating from the 1960s, if not a good deal earlier, but an equally fundamental - if quite different - convergence before that. Indeed, for Brugger and Jaensch, it is precisely because Liberal governments for so long 'saw no inconsistency' between social liberalism and the 'traditional Liberal Party doctrine' that the notion of Labor as the 'party of initiative' had to be 'qualified' (1985, 50; Mayer 1956, for the original critique of the 'initiative' and 'resistance' theme).

And however wistfully some might look back on the Menzies era as a time when 'political differences were profound' (McClelland cited in Appleton 2000, 193; see also Brett 1992, 35), others do not. Menzies, recalls one of his Labor opponents, was notable for 'magnifying small issues out of all proportion'. Labor lost the 1963 election, he adds, not on any great issue of principle but, on the contrary, because its parliamentary leader, Arthur Calwell, 'didn't want to discuss anything at all that was controversial'; like Beazley, as many would later say, Calwell felt 'the government would defeat itself' (Uren 1994, 143; in Calwell's own memoirs, the 1963 election passes without mention). Another opponent talks of Menzies 'comfortable armchair attitude towards governing the country', his 'cautious' economic management, and the lack of 'Labor pressure' on him to perform (Hayden 1996, 95-6). For James Jupp, the prosperity of the 1950s and 1960s 'muted the differences' between radicalism and conservatism; even before that, they 'rallied around increasingly tattered ritualistic banners labelled socialism, nationalism and equality on one side and empire, religion and enterprise on the other' (1982, 23).

Nor did those who committed their views to paper at the time necessarily see politics in the age of Menzies as a battle between two competing sets of principles. Writing towards the end of the Menzies years, historian Trevor Reese insisted that '[h]owever much the political parties might cultivate the notion that they represented conflicting ideologies, it was difficult to discern much practical difference between their policies' (1964, 217). In

relation to the economy, at least, Heinz Arndt was inclined to agree. For 'some decades', he observed, shortly after Menzies' retirement, 'the role of the government in the economy' had been 'a central issue in Australian politics'; but 'this phase', he added, was 'virtually over' (1968, 6; see also Rydon 1970, 40). In the mid-1950s, Leicester Webb had declared that 'the parties are in the main what the two-party system makes them ... a system which leaves party debate almost devoid of content and [which] at times results in a two-party conspiracy to avoid the real issues of national policy' (1954, 117).

If the 'logic' of the two-party system were not reason enough for the absence of difference, one could always cite the 'settled policies' of the time. To have 'settled policies' meant that 'the main lines of extensive legislation' - including White Australia, compulsory arbitration, protection, national development, organised marketing of primary products, and social services - had been 'covered', leaving only questions of 'details, emphasis, pace and administration' (Miller 1954, 57; Miller and Jinks 1971, 56-7; also Taft and Walker 1958, 161-2). In *The End of Certainty*, Paul Kelly's widely cited history of the Hawke years, Kelly argues that the non-Labor parties (and, by implication, the Labor Party as well) 'administered the Australian Settlement' - a version on Miller's 'settled policies', which in turn represented an extension of Hancock's two 'basic policies' (1930, ch. IV) - from around 1909, the time of the non-Labor 'fusion', until the advent of the Hawke Government in 1983 (1992, 12). And, in an essay on Australia as a Benthamite society, Hugh Collins insists that electoral support in Australia is based on habit rather than any real understanding because, since the 'fusion', rival parties 'have been offering only slightly different brews of the same ideological ingredients' (1985, 154; also Loveday 1975, 141).

At the end of the Second World War, the Canberra correspondent for the *Sydney Morning Herald* had explained to an American audience that if 'a running narrative of Australian political history' contained 'little reference to clash between rival parties over essential principle' that was because 'there has been little such clash' (Gollan 1947, 115). And after the First World War, more than sixty years before the idea of a 'catch-all party' caught on, Vere Gordon Childe had noted that 'Labour Governments', far from ignoring the 'heterogeneity' of class interests, had 'followed a vacillating policy' as it tried to 'govern in the interests of all classes' (1923, 80).

Policy speeches

One way of testing conflicting claims about changes in party positions is to exam the leaders' policy speeches. Systematic examinations of precisely this kind has been undertaken by David Robertson (1987) for the period 1946 to 1980; by Ian McAllister and Rhonda Moore (1991), for the period 1946 to 1990; and by Ian Budge and his colleagues (Budge et al 2001) for the period 1946 to 1998. All of these studies focus on issue salience. Each represents an attempt to measure not only where the parties stood but also the amount of space they devoted to issues of particular types. And each attempts to do so in categorical, left-right, terms.

Robertson, who originally developed the approach, examined the policy speeches given by the Liberal, Country and Labor party leaders between 1946 and 1980. He coded the sentences or parts of sentences ('quasi-sentences') into 54 standard categories or issue-types, each of which he assigned to one of seven domains - foreign affairs, freedom and democracy, government, economy, welfare and quality of life, fabric of society, and social groups. He then factor-analysed the data. This he did in two steps: first, he took each domain in turn; second, he took, as variables themselves, the one or two most powerful factors in each domain.

The results are striking. First, the issues emphasised by one party were not usually emphasised by any other. The Liberals stood out for the weight they attached to military issues; the Country Party for their stress on internationalism, protectionism and productivity; and Labor for its emphasis on incentives, the regulation of capitalism and education. Of these issues, one had to do with welfare and quality of life; two concerned international relations; and four - more than half - related to the economy. The issues that were highlighted by all three parties were not only less numerous but less likely, on average, to fall within the economics domain: all three parties emphasised government authority, technology (an economic issue), national effort, labour groups, and agriculture and farmers (1987, 50; 459-66 for the coding frame). Second, in the domain of the economy, the factor that accounted for more of the variance than any other was best understood in 'classic Left/Right terms'. The variable that loaded on it most highly was 'economic orthodoxy'. It contrasted with 'specific economic goals' and 'the regulation of capitalism' (1987, 55-57). And, when the second-order factors were extracted, the first factor produced was 'a clear traditional, Left/Right dimension'. The variables that loaded on it most strongly - 'economic orthodoxy versus goals and regulations' (economy), 'education and social services' (welfare and quality of life) and 'labour groups versus agriculture and

farmers' (social groups) - represented 'wide-ranging differences between left and right' (1987, 63-64).

To see what shifts had occurred in this second-stage, and when, Robertson divided the elections into four groups: the three elections held between 1946 and 1951 and between 1954 and 1958, the five from 1961 to 1972, and the last four, held between 1974 and 1980. These divisions, he argued, 'broadly' coincided with 'political epochs' (1987, 68). What do the data tell us about where the parties stood in left-right terms and how they moved in relation to one another from the immediate post-war period to elections under Whitlam and Fraser? The first thing they suggest is that in every period each of the parties occupied its own issue space and maintained its own position in a very clearly demarcated, non-overlapping, ideological order: Labor furthest to the left, the Country Party furthest to the right, and the Liberals in between. The second inference to be drawn is that whatever the ideological convergence it was never linear, non-reversible or complete. Labor and the Liberals were furthest apart in the immediate post-war years, 1946-1951; but they were equally far apart in the period 1974-1980. The former was something most political historians would have anticipated; the latter, something that most would not. The periods of greatest convergence ran from 1954 through to 1972 - broadly, the period of the long boom. Even so, in Robertson's diagrammatic presentation of the data the two parties policy commitments remained perfectly distinct. A third conclusion that may be drawn has to do with how the convergences - or subsequent divergence - came about: Labor moving to the right (convergence) or to the left (divergence) was not necessarily the cause. In 1954-58, the parties moved closer together because Labor moved to the right and the Liberals to the left; in 1961-72, when they remain equidistant, both moved to the right; and in 1974-80, when they diverged again, Labor had moved slightly to the left while the Liberals had moved sharply to the left. To compare the positions of the parties in 1946-51 with their positions in 1974-80 is to discover the Liberal Party further to the right in 1974-80 than it had been in any other period of its post-war history, the Country Party as far to the right as ever, and the Labor Party only marginally to the right but of its 1961-72 position and to left of its 1954-58 position (1967, 70).

The second study, by McAllister and Moore, carries the analysis of policy speeches through to 1990.⁹ While it adopts a similar approach to that pioneered by Robertson, it throws a good deal more light on the subject by disaggregating the data. It does this by charting, for the first time, the mean left-right positions for Labor and the Liberals at each of the post-war elections. And it does it by mapping the results along two dimensions - one concerned with economic goals, the other with social goals. Economic goals cover 'economic individualism and corporatism' and includes 'socialism versus free enterprise', 'the rich versus the poor', and 'individualism versus collectivism'. Social goals cover

'internationalism and pluralism' and range from 'the promotion of peace and international cooperation as opposed to policies countering the subversion of communism' to 'the future composition and form of Australian society' (1991, 12-13).

The results? First, on the ten-point economic scale, running from left to right, the difference between Liberal and Labor exceeded one point in 1946; but it did not do so again until 1972.¹⁰ From 1972 to 1990, the difference between the two parties on the McAllister and Moore scale exceeded one point at every election bar one, the 1983 election. This suggests that in terms of party convergence around economic policy, the immediate post-war years had more in common with the rest of the pre-Whitlam period than Robertson's periodisation would lead one to suspect.

Second, the only occasions on which the economic policies promised by Labor were clearly to the right of centre were in 1954 (when Dr Evatt's promises were slightly to the right of Menzies) and in 1980 (when Hayden was well to the right of Fraser). Liberal policies were set to appeal to the left of centre more often than Labor's policies were geared to the right. Indeed, before 1972, the Liberals stood to the left of centre (1949 and 1951; 1966 and 1969) more often than they stood on the right (1954 and 1958).¹¹ Third, the difference between the parties in 1984, 1987 and 1990, when the Liberal Party policies hit the extreme right of the scale, were greater than at any post-war election - save for one: the election in 1975, when Labor's policy put it at the extreme left of the scale (Bill Hayden's orthodox pre-election budget notwithstanding). Labor's economic policies were to the right, on average, of the policies it had adopted pre-1975; but the Liberals' policies were to the right of those it had espoused even after 1975 (1991, Fig. 2).¹²

On the social scale, the pattern was quite different. First, the ideological gap between Liberal and Labor was greater, typically, pre-Whitlam than post. The gaps in 1949 and in 1958 - when Labor's policies were on the extreme left of the scale and the Liberals' on the extreme right - were considerable; only in 1974 did any difference post-1972 come close to the difference detected in 1949. Second, whereas the parties economic policies were to the right of centre, on average, by less than one point (Labor) or just over one point (Liberal), on their social goals both parties were generally well to the right. Liberal policies generally were at the extreme right or close to it; the only exceptions were in 1946, 1984 and 1987. Labor's 1949 and 1958 policies were the only ones positioned on the left (1991, Fig. 1).

The third study, which also takes its bearings from Robertson, carries the story up to 1998. On Budge and Klingemann's left-right scale, favourable references to 'peaceful internationalism, welfare and government intervention' in the policy speeches are scored as 'left' and favourable references to 'strong defence, free enterprise and traditional

morality' as 'right' (2001, 21; 21-22, for a defence of the assumptions; 22, for a more detailed check-list). They also produce the mean scores for each of four components of the scale –a planned economy, a market economy, welfare and international peace. Like McAllister and Moore, they publish their results for each election (although the means for the four components are aggregated). And, in addition to their focus on the Labor and Liberal parties, they examine the policy speeches of the National Party and the Democratic Labor Party. (Results for the DLP, 1955-77, are confined to aggregate scores for the four components).

The data from four of the scale's components are displayed in Table 1.

They point to an emphasis on the market economy by Liberal and National Party leaders and an emphasis, though less marked, on welfare, the planned economy and international peace by leaders of the Labor Party. The pattern is evident not only for the period 1946-98, as a whole, but for the more recent period 1972-98.

Table 1: Mean percentage of all sentences or quasi-sentences in policy speeches on four policy stands, by party, 1946-1998

Party	Period	Planned economy	Market economy	Welfare	International peace
ALP	1946-98	4.59	1.67	10.54	1.92
Liberal	1946-98	0.90	16.27	5.23	0.58
National	1946-98	0.73	17.38	2.35	0.24
ALP	1972-98	3.22	1.99	12.39	1.06
Liberal	1972-98	0.74	16.31	5.52	0.74
National	1972-98	1.28	15.69	3.10	0.19
DLP	1955-77	2.92	5.87	5.34	0.75

Source: *Budge et al (2001, 233)*

What happens when one looks at all the measures, election by election, and weighs them up? According to Budge and Klingemann, the Liberals were on the right side of the line from 1946 to 1958 and from 1972 to 1998. (Indeed, the Liberal Party was generally to the right of both the British Conservatives and the United States Republicans). The high points, where the index reaches +40 (on a scale of +/-100) are the elections in 1951 and 1998; but 1955, 1958, and each of the elections from 1974 through to 1996 follow close

behind. The Country Party (National Party since 1983) is also on the right – often to the right of the Liberals in the earlier, pre-Whitlam, campaigns (1946, 1954, 1955 and 1966), but almost indistinguishable from the Liberals ever since (Budge and Klingemann 2001, 26-27, 29).

Until the 1980s, Labor's policies, on balance, almost always finished on the left of the ledger; the one exception was 1961 when Arthur Calwell's first policy speech – crafted in large part by a journalist from John Fairfax¹³ – crosses over, by the smallest of margins, to the right. In the 1980s, however, this line is crossed fairly regularly: in 1980, under Hayden; in 1983 and 1984, under Hawke; in 1996, under Keating; and in 1998, under Beazley (2001, 27, 29).

The gap between Labor and the Liberals was reasonably substantial between 1946 and 1961: something in the order of 35 to 60 points, where the theoretical maximum was 200 points. However, in 1963 (rather as Tom Uren recalls) and especially in 1966, Vietnam notwithstanding, the gap almost disappears; in 1966, the Liberals finish up slightly to the left of Labor. In 1969 and 1972, the gap widens again, reaching about 60 points in 1974 before falling back in 1977 to about 30 points and levelling out at around 20 points in 1980, 1983 and 1984. The next three elections – 1987, 1990 and 1993 – see the return of a wider gap of around 30 to 40 points. But in 1996 and 1998, again, the gap all but disappears.

Parties performances

The analysis of policy speeches, while important, is of course inherently limited. Policy speeches are not necessarily a reliable guide to what governments actually do; the idea that policy speeches exaggerate differences is not uncommon, but the reverse may also be true; consider, for example, Chifley's post-1946 battle for the banks (May 1968, 8) or Fraser's 1975 commitment to 'maintain Medibank' (Scotton and McDonald 1993, 236). Governments may finish up being frustrated by the Senate, the states or the High Court so that they cannot give effect to their promises. They may be elected on policies they have no real intention of implementing, or implement policies that were never really spelt out. Or they may find themselves 'mugged by reality', to coin a conservative phrase; 'Within ten days of winning government', John Edwards observes of Labor's 1983 victory, 'the Treasurer and the Minister for Finance were renouncing the promises on which they were elected – and with good reason' (1996, 198).

The first systematic attempt to pit party promises against performance was undertaken for the period 1928 to 1958, and subsequently extended to 1963, by Russell Barrett. His verdict: that Australian parties had done 'a remarkably good job of fulfilling their promises' (1963, 104). But, as Henry Mayer (1963) was quick to point out, the study lacked any criteria of 'fulfilment' and failed to differentiate minor promises from major ones. More importantly, for our purposes, it did not say - it never set out to show - whether the policies implemented by non-Labor governments were different from, or similar to, those implemented by Labor governments. Nor, in looking at performances of the parties in government, did it look beyond the promises they had made.

A more relevant study was to be completed, over twenty years later, by the economist Fred Gruen. What Gruen set out to discover was whether a change of party made a difference either to the volume of government expenditure or to the ways in which revenue was raised. To find out, he examined successive federal budgets - fourteen of them in all - brought down between 1970/71 and 1984/85: the first two introduced by the Coalition (McMahon), the next three by Labor (Whitlam), another seven by the Coalition (Fraser), and the last two by Labor (Hawke).

What did his analysis show? On the expenditure side, it shows that 'real total outlays grew considerably faster under Labor than non-Labor governments', with Fraser 'by far the most frugal' (1985, 39). Under both the Whitlam and the Hawke governments expenditure across a number of areas - including health, employment schemes, state grants for welfare housing, and culture and recreation (other than the Australian Broadcasting Corporation) - grew much more sharply than under either the McMahon or Fraser governments; industry assistance was the only area where non-Labor consistently outspent Labor (1985, 40-41). In four areas the Hawke government maintained the expenditure priorities of the Fraser government: urban and regional affairs, where Whitlam's programs continued to be run down; defence, though 'as one might expect on ideological grounds', Hawke was not as expansionary as Fraser; subsidies to first home owners, cut heavily by Whitlam, but under Fraser and Hawke allowed to grow; and social security where 'the sharp break' in growth rates post-Whitlam is evident in expenditure on age pensions, in assistance to widows and single parents and in benefits to the unemployed and sick - though, even under Hawke, Labor governments proved 'more generous than the non-Labor governments they succeed' (1985, 42-43).

On the revenue side, too, the analysis revealed substantial and continuing differences between Labor and non-Labor. 'Broadly', says Gruen, 'the McMahon government pursued mildly progressive tax policies, the Whitlam government strongly progressive tax policies.' Again, while the tax policies of the Fraser government 'were regressive (except

for taxpayers with children)', the policies pursued by the Hawke government were different from Fraser's and were 'nearer to Whitlam than to McMahon' (1985, 36).

In short, although no government other than Fraser's for a short time (1975 to 1977) controlled the Senate, different governments 'imprinted their own taxing and spending priorities on these budgets.' Moreover, he concluded, the different taxing and spending priorities were precisely 'what one would expect on the basis of the different groups supporting Labor and non-Labor respectively.' Spending on aged pensions and unemployment suggest 'a considerably greater egalitarian commitment on the part of Labor' than on the part of the Coalition. But the evidence also pointed to 'a longer-term movement away from egalitarian policies (1985, 47-48).

A critic of Gruen's cautions that governments often massage their budgets by moving spending 'off budget', by switching between payments made and taxes foregone, and by 'too-sided switches' so that both spending and revenue are raised. Even so, he concludes, 'I do not think my objections affect the generality of Gruen's conclusions' (Gittins 1985).

A more recent study, covering the years 1947 to 1987, attempts to extend the work on party programs as suggested by the policy speeches, to patterns of expenditure as revealed by the National Accounts (Klingemann, Hofferbert and Budge 1994). Unable to find a general correspondence, since the Menzies years, between changes in programmatic emphases and changes in spending priorities, as measured in left-right terms, Klingemann and his colleagues turned their attention to eight specific policy domains - defence, foreign affairs, the administration of justice, agriculture, welfare, housing, transportation and education. But here, too, they failed to find any 'strikingly obvious cases...where a change of party is clearly and consistently accompanied by a comparable shift in policy priority' (1994, 87-90).

If the 'agenda model' - the idea that 'variations in the overall agendas of parties... forecast similar variations in policy priorities' - does not work, they ask, does either the 'mandate model' - the hypothesis that governments, once elected, 'conform more to their own election programs than to the programs of parties that do not get into government' - or the 'ideology model', which predicts that governments 'follow more closely a policy reflecting long-term ideology than one reflecting current programmatic emphases'? (1994, 36). The answer is that they do. 'There is considerable programmatic structuring of policy', they report, 'but it works itself out in specific policy contexts rather than as a general left-right pattern'. In seven of the policy domains, either the mandate model or the ideology model 'provided a superior explanation to the simple agenda version'; the only domain where it did not was transportation (1994, 88-89, 93).

The models that do best, they note, are those that measure the 'congruence of policy to the individual and collective agendas of the major parties' and then add the impact of the party's being in or out of office. 'Positive mandates' – governments setting out to implement the policies on which they were elected – prove important in some areas: for the Liberals, in relation to defence and the administration of justice; for Labor, in relation to the administration of justice and education. But 'negative mandates' – forming policy priorities 'in seeming reaction to the policies of the opposition' – are more common: for Liberal governments, they surface in connection with Labor's programs on foreign affairs, the administration of justice and agriculture; for Labor governments, in reaction to the emphases Liberals' give welfare and defence (1994, 91).

While ideology is important, they argue, in relation to three domains – welfare, housing, and possibly education – it is not sufficiently important to render 'inconsequential the shifts and manoeuvres reflected in contemporary party election programs'. Nor is agenda congruence inconsequential; on the contrary, '[m]ost of the variation in policy priorities in postwar Australia reflects strong agreement across the two major parties' (1994, 91).

So much for Labor initiative and Liberal resistance? Not quite. In the welfare domain, there was 'virtual single party dominance' with Labor 'largely the driving force for welfare expansion.' Apart from a clear effect of alternation in office (a positive effect from Labor), when the Liberals were in office they responded with 'welfare shares congruent with Labor's most recent emphases on social justice'; but Labor in office headed 'in the direction opposite to that predicted by the most recent Liberal program.' In addition, Labor was 'the only party' whose programs counted in relation to education. This was not due exclusively to 'agenda or negative mandate congruence' (as it was with welfare) but to a 'positive mandate' (1994, 92). Beyond these areas, however, the 'politics of accommodation, whereby incumbent governments defer selectively to opposition policy priorities', was 'not much in evidence' (1994, 94).

Polled opinion

When Gruen embarked on his study of Australian budgets he believed 'that governments of different complexions' had 'very little freedom to manoeuvre'. Indeed, 'most people', he thought, believed like him 'in the Tweedledum–Tweedledee thesis'. His research convinced him that the thesis was false: that the parties were different and that the

differences could be conceptualised in ideological terms (1985, 47). But was his assumption that 'most people' shared his belief in the original thesis also false?

Table 2: Left-Right perceptions of parties by median respondent, 1984-2001

	1984#	1987	1996	1998	2001
Liberal	7.0 (3.79)	7.0 (3.66)	7.0 (2.36)	7.0 (2.51)	7.0 (2.59)
National	7.0 (4.18)	7.0 (4.20)	7.0 (2.50)	7.0 (2.59)	7.0 (2.56)
One Nation	na	na	na	7.0 (3.79)	6.0 (3.76)
Democrats	na	na	5.0 (1.79)	5.0 (1.96)	5.0 (1.99)
Labor	5.0 (3.40)	5.0 (3.79)	4.0 (2.34)	4.0 (2.36)	5.0 (2.36)
Greens	na	na	4.0 (2.42)	4.0 (2.37)	4.0 (2.41)
Self	6.0 (4.91)	6.0 (6.25)	5.0 (2.01)	5.0 (1.96)	5.0 (1.98)
Scale	1-10	1-10	0-10	0-10	0-10
mid-point	5.5	5.5	5.0	5.0	5.0
Total	(1830)	(1825)	(1795)	(1897)	(2010)

Numbers in brackets represent the standard deviation.

Respondents 1987 recall na: not asked

Question: 'In political matters, people talk about the "left" and the "right". Generally speaking, where would you place your views on the scale? And where would you place the political parties [Liberal, Labor, National] on the left-right scale?' (1987)

'Now thinking back to the last Federal election in 1984, when Labor was led by Mr Hawke and the Liberals by Mr Peacock, where would you have placed your views on the left right scale in that election? And where would you have placed the political parties [Liberal, Labor, National] on the scale in the 1984 election?' (1984)

'In politics, people sometimes talk about the "left" and the "right". Where would you place yourself on a scale from 0 to 10, where 0 means the left and 10 means the right? Using the same scale, where would you place each of the Federal political parties [Liberal Party, Labor Party (ALP), National Party, Australian Democrats, One Nation and Greens]?' (1996, 1998, 2001)

Source: *McAllister and Mughan (1987); Jones, et al (1996); Bean, et al (1998, 2001).*

Surveys of electoral opinion suggest that it was. Asked, in a series of Australian Election Study (AES) surveys, conducted between 1987 and 2001, where they would place the parties on a left-right scale, the median respondent consistently placed the Liberal and National parties to the right and put Labor either on the left (1996, 1998) or in the centre - alongside the Australian Democrats (1987, 2001). On a ten or eleven point scale, the gap between the Coalition and Labor in recent years has been between two and three points (Table 2).¹⁴

One may object, of course, that the terms 'left' and 'right' mean little to most respondents - that survey questions of this kind, far from picking up respondents' own views of the parties merely elicit the answers for which respondents think interviewers are looking. No doubt, there is something in this. In his surveys of the Australian electorate, Don Aitkin discovered that while most respondents, in 1979, expressed perfectly sensible views about which parties were 'furthest to the left' or 'furthest to the right' and, in 1967, were able to categorise themselves as either 'left', 'right' or 'centre', they had no use for these terms themselves. When asked whether they ever thought of the parties 'as being on the left, the centre, or the right in politics' more than two-thirds of those interviewed in 1967 and again in 1969 said they 'didn't think of the parties that way' (1982, 73-75, for 1967 and 1969; 389 for 1979).

But even if few voters think of the parties as ideologically distinct, surveys suggest that respondents do think it matters which party wins. And far from falling since the 1960s, as the arguments for convergence would lead one to expect, the proportion saying (at least until very recently) that the outcome of an election matters has actually increased. In interviews conducted by Aitkin in 1967 and 1969, nearly two-thirds of respondents (59 per cent in 1967; 65 per cent in 1969) said they 'usually' (1967) cared 'a good deal' which party won. Figures from Australian Nationwide Opinion Polls suggest that the outcome of the 'It's Time' campaign in 1972 was even more widely anticipated: three-quarters (75 per cent) of its respondents said they cared 'a great deal' or at least 'quite a lot' which party won. In no subsequent election for which we have data - and we have data for each of the contests since 1987 - has the proportion of respondents caring a 'good deal' fallen below the 1969 figure; and up until the most recent election the figures were substantially above that (Table 3).

If voters think it matters who wins, one might expect them to think of the parties as importantly different rather than essentially the same. And, indeed, this appears to be the case. The proportion of respondents who think it matters a 'good deal' which party wins is not very different to the proportion who think there are at least 'some' party differences.

Table 3: How much respondents care which party wins, 1967-2001 (percentages)

	Good deal	Not very much	Not at all	No response	n
1967	59	39	na	2	(2054)
1969	65	35	na	1	(1873)
1972	75*	21	3	1	(na)
1987	77	21	na	2	(1825)
1993	82	15	2	1	(3023)
1996	74	21	4	1	(1795)
1998	73	22	4	1	(1897)
2001	64	28	7	2	(1987)

*Includes 'a great deal' (44%) and 'quite a lot' (31%)

Questions: 'Would you say you usually care a good deal which party wins a general election or that you don't care very much?' (1967)

'How much do you personally care which party wins the federal election on December 2. Do you care a great deal, quite a lot, not very much or not at all?' (1972)

'Would you say you cared a good deal which party won the Federal election or that you did not care very much which party won?' (1969, 1987, 1993, 1996, 1998, 2001)

Sources: Aitkin (1982, 388, for 1967; 379, for 1969); ANOP (1972, 17);

McAllister and Mughan (1987); McAllister, et al (1990);

Jones, et al (1993, 1996); Bean, et al (1998, 2001).

But voters are discerning; more discerning, possibly, than some of the commentators.

Across those periods for which we have records - the second half of 1940s, the second half of the 1960s, most of the 1970s and each of the elections since 1993 - the proportion of respondents who report a 'good deal' of difference between the parties increases or diminishes with the issues at hand.¹⁵

Table 4: Perceived differences between the parties, 1946-2001 (percentages)

	Good deal	Some	Not much	No difference	DK/No response	n
1946	46	na	na	na	9	(2000)
1948	46	na	26	22	8	(na)
1967	30	21	38	na	11	(2054)
1969	38	27	30	na	5	(1873)
1972*	29	31	17	21	2	(1000)
1973	30	40	na	22	8	(na)
1979	38	26	32	na	4	(2016)
1993	43	39	15	2	1	(3023)
1996	30	44	22	3	1	(1795)
1998	29	46	21	3	1	(1897)
2001	24	44	26	5	2	(1987)

* Melbourne and Sydney only

Questions: 'Do you think it makes a great deal of difference or only a little difference which political party is in power in Australia?' (1946)

'What difference do you think it makes which party governs this country - do you think it makes a great deal of difference, a little difference or no difference?' (1948)

'In general, would you say there was a good deal of difference between the parties, some difference or not much difference?' (1967, 1969, 1979)

'Some people say that a change of government, that is, from Liberal to Labor, would make a big difference to the way the country is run. Others say it will make very little difference. In your opinion, would a change of government from Liberal to Labor make a big difference, some difference, a little difference, not really any difference at all to the way the country is run?' (1972)

'Thinking of the previous Liberal-Country Party government, how different do you think present Labor Party policies are? Do you think they are very different, quite different, or essentially the same?' (1973)

'Considering everything the Labor Party and the Liberal Party stand for, would you say there is a good deal of difference between the parties, some differences between the parties, not much difference between the parties, no difference between the parties?' (1993, 1996, 1998, 2001)

Sources: *Australian Public Opinion Polls Nos. 375-381, Sept- Oct 1946 and 548-558, Oct - Nov 1948*; Aitkin (1982, 361, 373, 384); Irving Saulwick and Associates for the Age, 4 July 1972; ANOP (1973, 11); Jones, et al (1993, 1996); Bean, et al (1998, 2001).

The records suggest two high points: 1948, when bank nationalisation was prominently positioned on the government's agenda; and 1993, when there were well publicised differences between the parties over industrial relations, health care and a goods and services tax. The low points are almost as widely scattered: 1967, 1972 and 1973, years which include the election of Whitlam; and 1996, 1998 and, the lowest point of all, 2001, with the Coalition under Howard opposed unsuccessfully by Labor under Keating and Beazley (Table 4).

While key issues of policy most easily explain the highs and lows, a party can be thought to make a difference even where its policy position is the same. Voters may reckon that although two parties stand for the same things, one party is more likely to bring them about. At the last election, for instance, a much larger proportion of respondents were prepared to trust Howard and the Liberals than Beazley and Labor on the *Tampa* and the war on terror - notwithstanding Beazley's efforts to ensure that there was almost no difference between Labor's policies and those of the Coalition (Goot 2002b, Table 6.5).

Either way, it is difficult to infer from any of these data that the differences voters see now - or since Hawke, or Fraser, or Whitam - are very different to the differences they saw sometime earlier in the post-war years.

Conclusions

The idea that the parties have converged is not new; it gets rediscovered regularly. This is not surprising. Parties continually disappoint their supporters, retaining too much of what their predecessors bequeathed them and putting their own stamp on the nation's affairs too lightly when they leave. At other times, convergence can be a matter for celebration; Donald Horne, for example, describes views on race as 'a kind of open conspiracy among the main political parties - an eternally vigilant liberal democratic conspiracy' (2001, 98). Certainly, few defenders of the faith would complain that a 'real' Labor Party should still be committed to a White Australia.

More often, however, convergence occasions complaint. In a world where parties do change, the complaint that they have converged is partly a matter of criteria, partly a

matter of confusion and partly a consequence of an implicit essentialism. Clearly, Manne is correct in thinking that there was very little, if anything, to separate Labor from the Coalition at the last election on either their policies towards asylum seekers or their commitment to the war on terror. But while he is entitled to single out these policies, it does not follow that the parties' views on a host of other issues were equally indistinguishable; he, himself, conceded at least one 'interesting difference' between the parties - on the economy, no less. What anyone makes, on balance, of the difference between Labor and the Coalition across the board is another matter; but the elevation of one or two criteria - often unannounced and rarely defended - at the expense of everything else represents a political judgement not simply an analytical one. So, too, of course, is the particular balance that is struck. Indeed, the very notion that one should arrive at some sort of balance is, among other things, a political one; some students of politics (for example, Gruen and Grattan 1993, 263ff, on the Hawke years) abjure such a thing.

The matter of confusion hinges on the difference between parties moving position and parties moving either closer together or further apart. Nowhere is it better illustrated than in the claims that because Labor and the Coalition might be said to share a new economic paradigm - most recently, neo-liberalism or economic rationalism - the economic policies of the two sides must have converged. An argument of this kind confuses the question of whether the two sides share the same views about the economy with the quite separate question of whether their convergence on economic policy is new - or is really of much longer standing, though organised in its previous form around social liberalism, the mixed economy and the welfare state. This point needs to be grasped if one is to do justice to what writers on party competition were saying about the 'narcissism of small differences', to borrow Freud's phrase, in the 1940s and 'fifties.

The third reason why convergence keeps being rediscovered has to do with the assumption that those who embrace a particular paradigm are all of piece; on this view, once you attach a particular label to a party's political, economic or social orientation, everything you need to know about the party's policies pretty well follows. So, in answering the question of whether the major parties have embraced neo-liberalism many imagine that they have also answered question of whether differences in the way the parties interpret, limit and apply the new paradigm are possible. If the answer is no, politics itself can be said to have disappeared. But there is no reason to believe that the range of practices possible within neo-liberalism is any narrower than it is within social democracy. It is no secret that social democracy was - and is - a many splendid thing (see, for example, Connell 1969, 370). Neo-liberalism, too, may be clothed in different garbs. As a self-declared 'bleeding heart' carefully notes, the 'pointy heads' who worked with Hawke and Keating, though 'essentially economic liberals' themselves, were happy to

defy 'the dogma.' They 'rebuilt a system of national health care; created a sophisticated social safety net out of the family allowance supplements (FAS), unemployment benefits, pharmaceutical benefits, benefits for the aged; through HECS enabled all young people to get the education and training they needed; and through accords with the trade union movement traded all these arrangements in the interests of social justice for wage restraint'. These were 'just as much articles of faith' for them 'as deregulated financial markets and a floating dollar' (Watson 2002, 88-89). Those who fail to grasp this point can never understand why neo-liberals of a rather different stripe insist that there is still much work to be done.

Attempts to track policy shifts in the post-war period, and with it party convergence or divergence, have taken two forms. One has involved the analysis of policy speeches along a single left-right dimension – in a 'post-ideological age', a remarkably robust measure as it turns out. The other has involved both the analysis of government spending priorities, where the unit of analysis is the quantum of public outlays across various sectors rather than the precise ends to which they have been put; and decisions made by governments about the rates of direct tax, as applied to different classes of taxpayers, rather than changes to the rates of indirect tax or company tax.

Analyses of the leaders' policy speeches suggest some very general conclusions and some more specific ones. At the most general level, Labor's policy rhetoric has almost always been to the left of the Coalition's. Ideological conversion has occurred, but it has not been linear, not been occasioned always by Labor moving to the right, and only rarely been anything like complete. Until the 1980s, Labor was on the left, in some absolute as well as relative sense, and the Coalition on the right. Since then it has quite often found itself on the right with the Coalition. In terms of specific areas the picture is more complex. The work of McAllister and Moore suggests that a sharp distinction needs to be drawn between economic and social policy, with Labor's low emphasis on a market economy (even in the period since 1972), and its relatively high emphasis on welfare and international peace, putting it on the left, and its 'social policy' positions almost always putting it on the right.

Expenditure patterns and patterns of revenue-raising under McMahon, Whitlam, Fraser and Hawke (the first two budgets at least) point to continuing differences of the kind one might expect in a party system shaped by the parties' traditional ideologies and support groups; but the long-term trend seemed to be towards convergence. An updated version of Gruen's analysis, one that takes us through the Hawke, Keating and Howard years, is badly needed.¹⁶ So, too, is one which is more comprehensive – one that looks more closely at the patterns of expenditure in distributive terms, at the concept of revenue more

broadly cast, and at other values (to do with all manner of rights, the environment, and so on) captured by neither one side of the budget nor the other.

Meanwhile, the views of the punters, so to speak, seem closer to those of the policy analysts than to those of the pundits. Respondents in national surveys do not report any clear narrowing in the ideological differences between the parties - at least, since the election of the Hawke government; as much as they ever have since the mid-1960s, they continue to think it matters who wins; and, even though the last election represented a new post-war low, no more than a third of respondents think that when it comes to what the parties stand for there is not much difference.

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Endnotes

¹ The editors of the corresponding volume on the Labor Party concede 'there is evidence aplenty about non-Labor's capacity to redraw the political map' (Faulkner and Macintyre 2001, xxiv). For Connell and Irving, it makes some sense to talk about Labor 'initiative', non-Labor 'resistance' during the period of 'ruling class resistance to working class mobilisation', in the period 1910-1930; but '[w]hen the ruling class re-organisation of the 1940s got under way, the tactical initiative in party conflict generally passed to the conservative parties' (1992, 218 note 18).

² In a newspaper column written in 1988 he noted that, as Treasurer, Keating prided himself on being able to handle a market system much better than anyone on the Liberal side (reprinted in McClelland 1989, 33).

³ It is arguable that Labor had been a 'catch-all' party, 'trying to hold [its] working -class clientele and at the same trying to embrace a variety of other clienteles' (Kirchheimer 1966, 185) long before this (cf. Goot 1994, 153). For a critique of Jaensch, focused on the notion of 'catch-all', see Smith (1994, 76-77).

⁴ This is very like the account of party convergence given by Patience and Head (1979), see below, though their piece does not figure in his references. In any event, Jaensch's line has never been consistent. Later he was to argue that the "'theory of convergence'" applied 'to only one bloc of the party system.' Labor 'had moved to the Centre - in fact to a social liberal ideology.' The Democrats, not normally considered in the convergence literature, 'had moved to a Left/environmentalism ideology'. While the Liberal Party 'had reversed its drive, and shifted firmly to the Right' (1994, 231). In the early years of the Hawke Government, Jaensch had found it difficult to characterise the ways in which the main parties had ever been different, see Jaensch (1986, 29-32). Writing with Bill Brugger at the beginning of the Hawke prime ministership, he appeared to see 'signs' of a 'sustained revival of social liberalism' in place of market liberalism. This, readers were assured, 'would be more in line with the predilections of the present leaders of the ALP' (Brugger and Jaensch 1985, 51).

⁵ But compare his subsequent view in which Labor is still castigated for disowning 'socialism' but praised for implementing policies 'central to any democratic socialist program' (1996, 17).

⁶ For an attempt to argue for something 'in between' left-wing and right-wing critics of Hawke, in the context of a Labor tradition, see Johnson (1989, ch. 8).

⁷ The critique of Cairns in *Tweedledum to Tweedledee* is missed by his biographer; see Strangio (2002).

⁸ David Butler also described, as distinctively Australian, the way politicians 'devalued the currency of ideals' and assumed each elector was 'an accountant totting up a hypothetical balance sheet' (1973, 119).

⁹ Note, however, that the speeches reproduced in their book have been edited for length, cut so that the 'positive' aspects of each speech are emphasised, and reorganized to match their coding categories. This makes it difficult to use the material for any other purpose. To glimpse the consequence of their decision, among others, to 'focus on the most relevant and pertinent [sic] parts' of each speech (1991, xiii), compare their version of Chifley's 1949 policy speech (1991, 33-39) or of Hawke's 1983 policy speech with the complete texts in Stargardt (1953/1952, 73-85) and Hawke (1984, 11-39). Chifley's latest biographer, who appears not have read the 1946 policy speech, either as delivered by Chifley or presented by McAllister and Moore, offers a quite misleading catalogue of issues Chifley is said not to have addressed (see, Day 2001, 433).

¹⁰ A. F. Davies and Geoffrey Searle may have been right when they argued, on the eve of the Split, that the 'extent to which the state should participate in economic life - by direct ownership and by operating direct controls over the private sector of the economy - remains the major and very important distinction between the parties today' (1954, 12). But if that was the extent of the difference, it may not have been swamped by all the non-differences in this sort of coding of the policy speeches.

¹¹ Contrast the account in Brown (1995, 118) of the post-election mood: 'The role of government was perceived to be shifting from the "roaring free-enterprise lion of 1949" to "the polite socialist guardian of 1959."'

¹² For a more nuanced analysis of the 'rhetorical contest' in relation to social welfare, post- 1972 - one that argues for rightward convergence, with the Coalition providing 'a set of arguments that matched Labor's welfare policy better than Labor's own rhetoric' - see Smith (1994, 76).

¹³ In October 1961, the managing director of the *Sydney Morning Herald*, R.A.G. Henderson, who 'in effect' was to become 'Calwell's campaign manager', asked Maxwell Newton, managing editor of the *Australian Financial Review*, to help the academic economist H.P. Brown, write Calwell's policy speech; the two had already combined in 1958 to help with Evatt's policy speech. He also got Lou Leck, assistant general manager, to help prepare Calwell's speeches and other statements. 'Henderson was particularly concerned that Labor's policies should be financially responsible, and throughout the campaign the thrust of Leck's and Newton's rhetoric was also directed towards a more constructive economic approach and a stronger defence policy' (Souter 1981, 380-81). In his memoirs, Calwell says that it was 'mainly' the help that he received from 'this unexpected quarter' that made him 'confident' of unseating the Menzies Government (1972, 204). A rightward inflection of Labor's position, in 1958, is reported by Budge and Klingemann (2001, 27); a rightward inflection on economic policy, but a strongly leftward move on social policy is reported by McAllister and Moore (1991, 13-14).

¹⁴ Table 2 updates and corrects the data in Goot (2002a, Table 1.13).

¹⁵ Head and Patience (1979, 1, 8), who insist on averaging the 1967 and 1969 data, note that 'only' 34 per cent of voters saw a 'good deal' of difference between the parties, at a time when the debate over Vietnam was at its height. But it is not clear what proportion of respondents might reasonably be expected to see a 'good deal' of difference between the parties when, in the eyes of the authors themselves, there was little else to distinguish them.

¹⁶ For brief notes, covering expenditures under Hawke for three more budgets, 1985/86-1987/88 (estimates), not covered by Gruen, and the view that Hawke's tax policies were 'slightly more progressive' than Fraser's, see Head (1989, 503-5).