

Clock-stoppers pining

Phillip Adams

THEY call themselves the neo-conservatives. Neo? What's neo about them? Neo means, as I understand it, new. And the only thing new about them is that they goose-step in Gucci jackboots.

It'd be more accurate to call them neanderthals. For despite some superficial gloss, their ideas are so ancient that they cry out for carbon dating. John Stone. Anthony McAdam. Hugh Morgan. Terry McCrann. Peter Coleman. Michael Barnard. Clyde Packer. Barry Humphries. Claudio Veliz. Peter Samuel. Richard Krygier. Babette Francis. Brian Buckley. Sam Lipski. Lachlan Chipman. John Carroll. Dozens of them. Not all well known to the general public, but forming a powerful coalition, a sort of Australian Inquisition dedicated to the destruction of the heresy of liberalism.

The blasphemies of bicentennial breast-beating must go. The demonic possession of trade unionism must be exorcised. The monstrous lie of multiculturalism must be torn from the mouths of the nation, along with the tongues that utter it. Our Inquisitors are as fiercely dedicated to the flag as their Spanish counterparts were to the crucifix and see it nailed to the flagpoles forever. But then, everything must be frozen in time — even the disciplines of grammar. Can't you hear the chants of Sister Leonie Kramer?

They're not so much conservatives as bloody embalmers. They want to put rouge on the cheeks of a dead Australia and tell us that it's breathing. They want to exhume Sir Robert as Prime Minister, or at least have him contribute to Cabinet meetings via the ouija board. While it's never stated, one feels that some of them would be far happier with a White Australia, an Australia without those cacophonous, confusing migrants from all over the place, an Australia where every child could be raised on a diet of A.A. Milne and Biggles books.

Conservatives have always been clock-stoppers and you get the feeling that ours would opt to freeze the pendulum and chill the chimes in the middle 1950s. Well, at least for Australia. They prefer the Russia of the Tsars and serfs and would like an America with happy Darkies singing spirituals in the cotton fields. Although they'd be more than delighted to have Reagan preside over the idyll. In short, they want the power and the weaponry and the profits that the future promises, surrealistically

combined with the unquestioning social obedience of the good old days.

God knows the Left in his country deserves a kick up the Khyber. Over the years their rhetoric has become stale, their ideas complacent. Indeed, there are a number of topics on the neo-conservative agenda that have to be taken seriously. The excesses of liberalism, quite clearly, have been as socially destructive as the rigid repressions of the Right. But the arrogance of the neo-conservatives makes a dialogue damn near impossible.

I'm delighted to say that I'm a frequent target in their journals (like the Institute of Public Affairs Review and Quadrant) and of their journalists in the Melbourne Age, the Melbourne Herald, the Bulletin, the Financial Review and The Australian. However, I find the tones of voice offensive. So pompous, patronising and humourless. And they're all too ready to employ any cheap debating trick in the process of vilification.

For example, in the current issue of Quadrant, Anthony McAdam attacks me at considerable length, rekindling the tired debate about Ronald Reagan's favourite film, *Rambo*. I am represented as a Stalin groupie. ("Adams has still not tumbled to what was painfully obvious to Muggerridge half a century ago.")

Just for the record, McAdam, I left the Communist Party in 1956 after Krushchev's revelations about Stalin and the invasion of Hungary. Since that time I've smuggled seditious literature into Moscow at considerable personal risk, have been involved with Soviet dissidents and helped smuggle a Soviet Jew, a leading writer and film-maker, from the USSR into Australia. (Together we tried to make a feature film on the monstrous cruelties of the Gulag.)

Last year I was widely vilified by the looney Left for disapproving (in my capacity as chairman of the Australian Film Commission) of what I regarded as an overly-flattering portrait of the Soviet Union in *The Human Face of Russia*. I've made frequent trips to Eastern Europe and have written with rage about Soviet hegemony in Prague and East Germany. In my involvement with Amnesty, I've never hesitated to detail the atrocities perpetrated by the KGB and the Soviet system of "psychiatry".

For a time I was working on a film on the Ustashi in Australia and Yugoslavia,



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where our searches led us to the inescapable conclusion that the organisation was KGB-backed. We abandoned the project after my family and I received an escalating number of death threats — given force by the frequent bomb attacks on the neighbouring Yugoslav embassy. I could go on and on. Suffice to say that it would be extremely unwise of me to return to the USSR. And it's dishonourable of McAdam and Co to characterise me as a Soviet sycophant.

In Quadrant McAdam emphasises his point with the irrelevant observation that "Muggerridge believes in God and Adams doesn't".

Mind you, the God of McAdam and Co is a conservative, probably a member of the Melbourne Club, and undoubtedly white. This is an article of faith, just as

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the Left believe that dolphins would support the ALP, or at very worst the Democrats.

In the same issue of *Quadrant* that barbecues me, there's the most astonishing piece on the loony Moonies. On balance, the author seems to endorse Il Sun Moon, the self-appointed Korean messiah, for his generous financial support of neo-conservative and New Right causes. Whatever else might be wrong with the Korean Christ he's a solid reliable anti-communist.

And that's something I find disturbing about the group - their reluctance to distance themselves from the most rabid individuals and ratbag organisations. As long as you're anti-com, anti-gay, anti-feminist, anti-multicultural, anti-land rights, anti-

union and anti-greenie you're fine with us.

Come to think of it, that's the way for the homosexuals to redeem themselves. To emerge as Gays against Gorbachev.

I'm also characterised as virulently anti-American. Despite the fact that I've written and lectured endlessly on the "exuberance, vitality and creativity of that extraordinary people" ... of their "generosity of spirit". It's just that I'm a little anxious about the present regime whose political cosmology seems as crude, cruel and inflammatory as that of Stone, McAdam, Krygier, Chipman and Co.

As far as McAdam and Co are concerned, Stalin still runs Russia. Yet if one was to suggest that even a vestige of the Third Reich lingered in the West German Government, I'm sure you'd be vigorously pooh-poohed. They embrace the White House line on South Africa, on Nicaragua, and laud the arguments of William F. Buckley and Norman Podhoretz. Yet they can endorse the ratbaggery of a Premier Joh and when it suits them, a Festival of Light. It seems the neo-Cs are into Whitehouses, Washington or Mary.

What's their taste in art, I wonder? Presumably they regard every one after the Dutch masters as decadent. And you get the feeling that they regret the passing of the Humber. And if a neo-conservative had a juke box, it'd be stacked with blasts from the past, like *There'll Always Be An England* and *The Road to Mandalay*.

Quadrant is so packed with anachronistic attitudes it's a wonder it isn't hand-illuminated on parchment by tonsured monks. As well as revealing my undercover work for the KGB, there's the shocking revelation that E.M. Forster was a poofster - which means that we can give a thumbs down to *Passage to India* and *Howard's End*. The Catholic Church is also taken to task for daring to suggest revisions to Australia's foreign policy. The neos, bless their hearts, are forever chanting "the Russians are coming" and want to see concrete bunkers on every headland.

The thing I find most appalling about our neo-conservatives is their indifference, their lack of compassion. The quicker Australia's Aborigines succumb to alcohol, leprosy and glaucoma the better. And AIDS can't kill off our poofsters quickly enough. (A recent essay in *Quadrant* seemed to salute the arrival of this dread disease, seeing it as a sort of myxomatosis for the immoral.) And the poor and the unemployed are regarded as human refuse. The worse the social problem, the tougher the neo-Cs talk, which boils

down to an almost mystical reliance on the so-called "free market forces". Privatisation isn't so much a policy as a religious obsession.

For people who pride themselves on pragmatism, the neo-conservatives or New Right are remarkably superstitious. That's why the Australian flag, incorporating the Union Jack, must remain a fixture. Even though the British flag has, as I explained in a recent column, undergone a score of changes in the past few centuries. To fiddle with the flag would be as inexcusable a piece of symbolism as, for example, giving Ayers Rock to the Abos.

The only union John Stone likes is the Union Jack. In endless comments and essays, Stone salutes the flag like an up-market Alf Garnett. Given Stone's iconographic obsessions, it's a wonder he allowed the Government to tamper with the currency, didn't denounce decimalisation as subversive. Can't you see the young John Stone standing in a school playground, hand on heart, chanting "I shall love God and my country, I shall serve the King and cheerfully obey my parents, teachers and the laws" before assuming the heavy mantle of ink monitor.

I'll acknowledge that the Left can be soppy, sloppy and self-indulgent. That it needs to rethink old attitudes in the light of changing circumstances. But as you read the outpourings of the neo-conservatives you realise that you're dealing with the politics of hate. Leaving aside Hugh Morgan and Barry Humphries who can, from time to time, be amusing, our conservatives are the most implacable of people, proud to be cold of eye and hard of heart. There is venom and vitriol in their collective voice and the only thing they'll be sentimental about is the wretched flag. Never the wretched of our community.

No, there's nothing neo about our conservatives. Far, far more than the leftists they detest, they're yesterday's men whose ice-age intellects and petrified opinions are all too chillingly familiar.

The admirable Ambrose Bierce once defined the Conservative as "a statesman who is enamoured of existing evils, as distinguished from a Liberal, who wishes to replace them with others". Albert Hubbard defined their orthodoxy as "that peculiar condition where the patient can neither eliminate an old idea or absorb a new one". And in a letter to Lafayette, Thomas Jefferson wrote "the sickly, weakly, timid man fears the people, and is a Tory by nature".

I'm not sure whether our neo-Cs fear the people. They behave as if they loathe them.