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**Kevin Rudd and the Labor Tradition: Economy, Technology and Social  
Diversity.**

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These are very early days in the Rudd Government's term of office to be commenting on its relationship to Labor tradition (understood here very broadly not as an essentialist list of Labor principles but in terms of the evolving ideology and policies of previous Labor governments and leaderships). That relationship is likely to become much clearer in subsequent years (as will the influence of international, including British, social democracy).<sup>1</sup> Consequently, this paper merely aims to make some initial comments regarding current continuities between the Rudd government and its Labor predecessors, as well as identifying some possible points of difference. It begins with an analysis of the Rudd government's underlying position on economic policy, then teases out some of the implications of issues ranging from new information technology to climate change before proceeding to a discussion of the Rudd government's position on social equity.

**Economic management and fiscal conservatism**

Given successful Liberal attacks on Labor's economic management credentials in previous elections, especially 2004, Rudd repeatedly stated that he was a fiscal conservative who would manage the Australian economy responsibly (*Parliamentary Debates*, Representatives, 10 May 2007, 129). Such claims may seem aberrations if compared with the more Keynesian policies pursued by the Curtin and Chifley governments (see further Battin 1997; Maddox and Battin 1979), or the early years of the Whitlam government. However, there are precedents. Prior to the ALP's adoption of Keynesian economics, the Scullin government (under pressure from overseas banks) introduced budgetary restraint during the Depression, including cutting public sector employees' wages by 20 per cent (Crisp 1977, 40-65). Furthermore, Bill Hayden (*Weekly Hansard*, Representatives, 19 August 1975, 53-4), the final Whitlam government Treasurer, had questioned Keynesian orthodoxies in his 1975 budget speech, arguing for a reduced deficit, public sector restraint and wage restraint (in the context of inflationary pressures).

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<sup>1</sup> The Hawke and Keating governments had a significant influence on the Blair Government (see further Scott 2000; Johnson and Tonkiss 2002; O'Reilly 2007). Various commentators have already noticed possible Blair influences on Rudd, including Rudd's 2020 Summit suggestion of one-stop childcare and health centres. Geoff Gallup (cited in Maiden and Kerr 2008), a long-term Blair friend, has argued that: 'In the 90s, most of the flow of ideas was going from the antipodes to the old country and in the late-90s, early 21st century the flow of ideas is going from the old country to the antipodes.' Rudd is also being influenced by the policies of Australian state Labor governments, for example, the idea of the 2020 summit seems to have been influenced by the 2020 Vision forums held by Craig Emerson when he was a Queensland Labor government minister, and which started as long ago as 1993 (Kerr 2008)

Paul Keating's embrace of fiscal rectitude in his so-called 'economic rationalism' was strong enough for Margaret Thatcher (1993, 505) to declare him 'refreshingly orthodox on finance' compared with British Labour. Keating's resulting efforts to reduce deficits and produce surpluses met with mixed success (see Edwards 1996, 528, 537). Keating (*Parliamentary Debates*, Representatives, 21 August 1990, 1153) boasted of his cuts to public spending in his 1990 Budget Speech, proudly declaring for example that 'Commonwealth spending is now at its lowest level as a proportion of GDP since 1974, and in three years will be down to the level of the 1950s'. Swan's use of budgetary targeting to means-test some benefits to wealthier taxpayers (Swan, *Parliamentary Debates* (Proof), Representatives, 13 May 2008, 39) is in this Keating tradition. In short, there are clear precedents for Rudd's, Swan's and Tanner's current efforts to restrain budgetary spending.

### **Labor and the market.**

Rudd's fiscal conservatism is reinforced by his underlying belief in the many benefits of markets, while recognising the need for government action in cases of market failure and arguing that Howard had taken free market policies too far. A Labor government would 'restore the balance and reclaim the centre ground' (Rudd 2006a) through embracing the market but also intervening when necessary and keeping a fair go in the labour market:

Social democrats believe in the market but we don't believe in market fundamentalism... We believe passionately in public goods such as education and health. We accept the reality of market failure, as we have seen.. with the failure to respond to global climate change....We don't... believe that human beings should be treated as any other economic commodity to be traded on the market, as the Prime Minister has demonstrated with his ... radical changes to the labour market. Above all, social democrats believe in a strong economy, but one where we still have a fair go for all, not just for some (Rudd 2006b, 12).

The first Rudd Government budget clearly aimed to fund public goods such as education and health, to help struggling families and to provide necessary nation-building infrastructure investment for the future (Swan, *Parliamentary Debates* (Proof), Representatives, 13 May 2008, 39-42). However, Rudd has also reaffirmed that 'the new Australian Government is pro-market, pro-business and pro-globalisation' (Rudd, 2008c).

Rudd's view that markets have a major role to play in Labor policies once again has precedents in the Keating period. Keating (1993a) argued that Australia's energy 'flows from the genius and ambition of our people which the combination of liberal democracy and free markets alone can deliver', pursuing innovations such as financial deregulation and a national competition policy as a result. The emphasis on markets continued in the views of subsequent Labor leaders. So Beazley made a point of reassuring representatives of the business community that Labor was 'the firm that brought you ... healthy corporate profits year after year' and sold the vision of 'an Australia that was a real player in the push for free trade' (Beazley 1998).

Furthermore, for Latham (2003b, 10-11), the market was a cleansing force that would stop business excess and improve productivity: 'the corporate elite must be

made to compete against each other'. He criticised Howard for interfering with market mechanisms to support business mates.

Labor believes in competition and productivity. Our political opponents believe in business deals and preferment.... We believe in markets....The Liberals lean towards crony capitalism, a corporatist state in which some firms receive subsidies and special deals from government (Latham 2003a).

Like Latham, the Rudd government places great emphasis on the benefits of market competition. So, Wayne Swan's plan for dealing with banks that raised their interest rates above the reserve bank rate is to attempt to reduce bank charges on transferring mortgages, so that consumers could transfer their mortgages to banks with cheaper rates more easily — in other words, to use increased competition for consumers to keep rates down (Swan 2008). The Rudd government's controversial plan for dealing with petrol price increases is to force petrol companies to publicly post their prices in order to 'to bring maximum competition policy pressure onto petrol retailers across Australia, to get the best possible deal for working families' (Rudd and Bowen 2008). Rudd's ambitious plans for one-stop children's child-care and health centres envisaged that either some or all of the services would be provided by the private sector, in the belief that competition between providers would improve quality while bringing prices down (Karvelas 2008c). Rudd has stressed that the public service will be expected to compete with the private sector to determine who will provide government funded services (*Australian* 1 May 2008, 1).

Nonetheless, Rudd has critiqued excessive forms of neo-liberalism, claiming that Howard was 'the intellectual creature of Friedrich Hayek' and that Howard's neo-liberal agenda dismissed compassion, social justice and altruism for impeding the efficiency of free markets (Rudd 2006b; 2006a). Hawke and Keating had also warned against the extreme Thatcherite versions of free market politics that they believed Howard wanted to introduce (Hawke, *Weekly Hansard*, Representatives, 19 December 1991, 3775-3780; Keating 1996, 6).

### **Market failures: technology and climate change**

In particular, after a decade of the Howard government, the Rudd government is more explicit than the Keating government in acknowledging areas of market failure (see e.g. Commonwealth of Australia 1995, 23-4), especially in regard to information technology and climate change.

While the Keating government's *Creative Nation* policies were designed to facilitate the development of new information and cultural industries, Keating ministers also tended to argue that the growth of a new information economy necessitated market-oriented deregulation in areas such as banking and massively reduced the need for government ownership of physical capital (e.g. Beazley, cited in Riley 1995). By contrast, the Rudd government tends to use arguments about new information technology to justify government intervention, albeit in co-operation with the private sector. By the end of the Howard period, market failures in the information technology area, particularly the provision of Broadband, were becoming more apparent with Kim Beazley (2006) arguing that Australia needed nation-building economic strategies because: 'We don't have an information super highway — we've got an IT goat track.'

Rudd built on this critique, slating Peter Costello for his over-reliance on the market to provide adequate Broadband and arguing that 'if you need the new infrastructure of the future given the realities of a small population and a massive continent...there is a key role for government in doing that'. However, he clarified that he was not necessarily talking about 'universal, public provision' but, as in the case of Labor's proposed broadband solution, joint ventures involving public-private partnerships, for example, in the case of broadband, Labor would put up half the finance (Rudd 2007b; Swan and Tanner 2007 ). Rudd (2007a) argued that Australian broadband lagged behind its international competitors. Businesses, educational institutions and hospitals could not gain the high speed broadband that they required to engage in national and international tendering processes, transfer vast quantities of information, provide information processing data services, exchange curriculum materials, or exchange medical images for long-distance diagnostics (Rudd and Gillard 2007a). Australian school children were missing out on the opportunities readily available to 'their rivals in South Korea, in Singapore, in the UK, in Germany, in France' which had high-speed fibre networks (Conroy 2007).

Providing access to high speed broadband is therefore seen as both a key economic issue and as a key equity issue. Tanya Plibersek (2007) emphasised regional inequality, arguing that country children were unable to download educational information as quickly as city kids. Rudd (2007a) argued that regional businesses were missing out in cities like Newcastle and Toowoomba. Labor also wished to ensure that children from poorer families had access to information technology and the resulting skills. During the election, Rudd promised to defer tax cuts to high income earners earning over \$180,000 annually in order to generate \$2.9 billion in savings that could be used to help poor families to purchase computers for their children, and thereby 'bridge the digital divide' (cited in Franklin 2008).

This was a somewhat more modest social agenda than during the Keating years when a new information cultural economy was seen as being closely interconnected with encouraging (and selling) cultural diversity (see further Johnson 2007, 130-131). Nonetheless, giving children access to computers and computing skills in schools had also been a priority of the Keating government (Commonwealth of Australia 1995, 57-9). The emphasis on overcoming regional inequality has clear precedents in Whitlam's (1969) views, although obviously the Whitlam government's focus on providing adequate regional infrastructure didn't include new information technology. Meanwhile, Latham had argued that the key social division was now between the information poor and the information rich (Latham 1998, xxv, xxix). A similar point about the digital divide had been made by former Labor government minister Barry Jones (1988), many years before and Peter Baldwin (1995, 29) had emphasised the need to overcome information inequality in a Keating government discussion paper on social welfare. The Keating government had also been concerned about ensuring Telstra overcame regional information inequality (Commonwealth of Australia 1995, 45-46).

Labor's plans for public-private partnerships may still hit problems, given that Telstra is hesitant about co-operating, especially given issues about access and charges for other carriers gaining access to Telstra's network. Telstra boss, Sol Trujillo, initially asserted that 'we are only going to participate in the things that we own and control' and reportedly mocked the government's joint ownership proposal as a 'kumbaya, holding hands' suggestion (*Australian*, 7 December 2007, p. 1). It is not unusual for public-private partnerships to encounter problems, in regard to government power and public accountability issues, as the Blair government found to

its cost (Flinders 2005). However, while previous federal Labor governments may not have embraced formal public-private partnerships so enthusiastically, previous federal Labor governments have been prepared to work closely with sections of industry, including the Curtin and Chifley governments with manufacturing industry during World War Two (see further Johnson 1986). Providing high speed Broadband fits into Labor's strategy of arguing that Australia can only compete in the global economy by following a high skill, high productivity agenda in a knowledge economy. However, for the moment the discussion will turn to another area that the Rudd government has identified as exhibiting market failure, namely climate change.

### **Climate Change.**

Former Labor governments didn't only introduce broad environmental measures designed to protect old-growth forests, restrict pollution, reduce CFCs and improve water security (e.g. Hawke 1989; Economou 2000, 281-299) — Hawke (1989, vi) also promised that Australia 'will be taking a lead in developing international conventions on climate change'. Hawke's major statement on the environment also acknowledged that 'many of our environmental problems arise because market prices do not reflect the full costs of various human activities' and that 'changes to prices' charges and taxes 'can have powerful, immediate effects on how people use resources' (Hawke 1989, 6). Nonetheless, previous Labor governments did not propose the more substantial transformation of the economy that is now perceived to be necessary (see e.g. Hawke 1989, 28-37).

It is not clear whether all Labor Ministers are yet fully aware of the challenge which climate change poses to traditional modes of economic governance, but Penny Wong clearly is. In a speech informed by European Union policies, the Stern report and the ongoing work of Ross Garnaut, Wong argues that 'the message from the world's scientists is that for too long, we have failed to give a value to our climate' (Wong 2008b, 2). Consequently, the conventional economy, and conventional markets, will need to be substantially transformed with both costs and opportunities. Wong (2008b, 5) argues that 'the best way to drive emissions reductions is to use market based mechanisms' but in fact government action would shape and create a new Australian market of emissions trading that would also facilitate Australians participating in international carbon trading markets.

Achieving our goal of delivering deep cuts in emissions by the middle of the century means significant transformation in the way our communities and economy function.... it will help address the market failure that has contributed so profoundly to climate change....The introduction of emissions trading will constitute the most significant economic and structural reform undertaken in Australia since the trade liberalisation of the 1980s (Wong 2008b, 6).

It is a clever strategy to liken these reforms to market-based reforms that involved government deregulation and free market policies given that the government will be intervening significantly in how the market operates, albeit by shaping a new emissions trading market that contributes to global competitiveness. The consequent 'cost of carbon' is designed to change behaviour and decision-making (Wong 2008b, 6). Wong is explicit that the current problems result from market failure, just as the government has also had to commit 'to a range of other measures to address market

failure in the area of energy inefficiency' that will facilitate use of low emissions technologies (Wong 2008b, 10). The government's water plan also involves the government helping to establish and shape a market in water trading, with water licenses being sold by willing sellers to government in an attempt to return more water to the Murray (Wong 2008c, 14).

In short, government reforms in the area of climate change are particularly interesting because they both involve the use of market policies and a significant government role in shaping that market. They also involve major risks for Labor. Wong has highlighted the government's concern to be 'conscious of the effect' of any emissions trading scheme 'particularly on low income households' (cited in Wilkinson and Cubby 2008). The government faces opposition from those sections of business that oppose the changes, although business responses are not uniform — even within the fossil fuel industry (Wilkinson and Cubby 2008). Some sections of business will have new commercial opportunities opened up and some sections support change anyway given the dangers and costs to the national and international economy that have been highlighted by mainstream economists such as Stern (2006) and Garnaut (2008).

Climate change is also one of the areas where Rudd hopes that Australia will be able to play a mediating role between the developed and developing world, between the West and the East — a hope that was reinforced by Wong's role in the Bali Summit on climate change (*Herald Sun*, 15 December 2007).

### **Labor and Asia.**

Climate change may involve a newer policy area for Australia's attitudes towards Asia to be developed but there are still clear continuities in Labor's views. Rudd (2008b) has stated that his first interest in China was sparked as a teenager by watching Gough Whitlam's historic visit to a (then newly recognised) China. However, Labor's economic interest in Asia had long predated Whitlam. In 1947, the Labor government's Department of Post-War Reconstruction (1947) constructed Australia as a jumping-off point for access to lucrative Asian markets: 'Just as Australia was a springboard for General MacArthur's advance northward, so is this continent visualised by Australian, British, American and other manufacturers as a base for production and supply to the markets of India, Netherlands east Indies, Malaya, China, Asia and the Philippines'.

There are even more obvious links with Keating who stressed that world economic markets were about to be changed by the rise of Asia, especially China, and that Australia needed to improve the Asian language skills of its population (see e.g. Keating 1992a and 1994a). After he lost office, engaging Asia became both Keating's passion and a source of personal income. Keating (2001) emphasised the complementarities of the Australian and Chinese economy in areas from resources and manufacturing to services, including new fields like environmental technology. Seven years later, Rudd and Wong were to announce major Australian investment in climate change technology projects in China that were designed to help 'Australian climate change and water businesses get a start in the massive Chinese market' (Rudd and Wong 2008). Meanwhile, echoing Keating, Rudd emphasised the 'three pillars' on which the Australian economic relationship with China should be built: 'one is in the resources and energy and raw materials sector. The second is our respective markets for manufactured goods. And thirdly, critically for us, to broaden the economic relationship in the direction of financial services' (Rudd 2008f).

Rudd has repeatedly emphasised that the growth of China and India will transform the world economy and has emphasised the need for Australian children to be taught to be 'Asia literate' (Rudd, *Parliamentary Debates*, Representatives, 10 May 2007, p. 134). Rudd's perspective was reinforced at the 20020 summit, where Stephen Smith emphasised the importance of teaching Asian languages, stating that 'We have to make Australia's understanding of Asian literacy and Asian culture almost second nature to us' (*Advertiser*, 21 April 2008, 4).

### **Education.**

Broadband and climate change are seen as obvious examples of economic areas where government intervention is important, however, as indicated in earlier quotations, the government also believes that the state has a major role to play in improving education. While referring to the non-economic benefits of education, Gillard argues that education has a crucial economic role.

The issue of human capital has risen dramatically in public policy importance globally.... investing wisely in knowledge, skills and innovation is one of the best means available to ensure long-term prosperity, leading to both overall economic growth and to better education and work opportunities (Gillard 2008a).

Such arguments build on previous Labor policy. The Hawke and Keating governments had seen skills training and improving education system at all levels as crucial. In the words of the Keating Government: 'We can make no better investment than in the skills of Australians. In the international marketplace, we depend on nothing so much as their ideas, skills and knowledge' (Commonwealth of Australia 1994, 10). Improving education had been a crucial plank in Beazley's *Knowledge Nation* policies for the same reason, with Beazley (2001) arguing that 'I am convinced that the gold of the future is in the minds of our children'. Latham was also a strong advocate of improving education arguing that knowledge was increasingly 'a core factor of production' (Latham 1998, xxi, xix) and that, given the market couldn't be relied upon to provide public goods like education, training, research or development, this was an appropriate form of national government intervention in a globalised economy (Latham 2001, 30). Education would help poorer Australians climb his 'ladder of opportunity' (Latham 2004). McKenzie Wark (1999, 296) claimed that 'Latham sees education as the crossroads for all of the goals of the postindustrial Labor Party. It's the elevator to the light on the hill.' Gillard (2008c) also sees access to education as being crucial for equality of opportunity and social 'inclusion' — a concept highlighted by Blair but also anticipated by Paul Keating (1995) who claimed that 'the first principle of Australian government policy is inclusion' (see further Johnson and Tonkiss 2002).

The Labor arguments show clear similarities with ones put forward by Bill Clinton (1997) and Tony Blair (1994, 1998). They reflect social democratic adaptations of neo-liberal views on encouraging individual capacity/capability (Jayasuriya 2006, 36-56; Swan 2005, 14). However, there is also a long domestic Australian tradition of Labor seeing education as both a major economic resource and a (related) key to equity. Gough Whitlam was once asked what he understood by 'equality'. He replied: 'I want every kid to have a desk, with a lamp, and his own room to study' (cited in Freudenberg 1978, 82).

## Labor and the Unions.

The Rudd government owes a considerable debt to the unions given the role which the ACTU's campaign against Work Choices played in the defeat of the Howard Government. Labor's election campaign repeatedly emphasised that the Howard Government's industrial relations laws were extreme. Rudd's rhetoric was not as strong as Beazley's (*Parliamentary Debates*, Representatives, 3 November 2005, 10), who denounced Work Choices for reinstating a primal struggle with the Labor Party and labour movement fighting for mateship and the fair go against the 'rotten tory mob'. Nonetheless, Rudd went much further than Latham, who intentionally downplayed industrial relations in the 2004 campaign, partly influenced by his belief that the information society, and the aspirations of an ownership society, were undermining the traditional division between labour and capital (*Australian*, 21 September 2004; see further Johnson 2004, 536-8, 542-5). Like Latham though, and the ACTU, Rudd tended to use the phrase 'working families' rather than more explicit class rhetoric.<sup>2</sup> He argued that Work Choices and Howard's neo-liberalism generally revealed 'neo-liberalism's core philosophical dilemma', namely that 'it has no answer to the relentless march of market fundamentalism into the sanctum of the family itself' (Rudd, 2006d, p. 50), including its impact on work-life balance (Rudd 2006a).

Nonetheless, given the Liberal's fear campaign against trade union domination of the Labor front bench, Rudd and Gillard distanced themselves from particularly militant elements in the trade union movement, even ensuring that some controversial union leaders lost their ALP membership (Gillard 2007). Rudd and Gillard attempted to reassure business by retaining restrictions on unions' right of entry (including particularly onerous provisions in the building industry), on secondary boycott provisions and on taking industrial action, including prohibiting pattern bargaining (Rudd and Gillard 2007b). Since the government was elected, it has also used its emphasis on combating inflation to justify calls for wage restraint (Rudd 2008d).

None of these moves are without past Labor precedents. The Curtin and Chifley, Whitlam, Hawke and Keating governments all called for wage restraint at various times and praised wage increases tied to productivity increases (see e.g. *Weekly Hansard*, House of Representatives, 19 August 1975, 52; Johnson 1989, 28-30, 72-5, 98-100). Indeed, Keating boasted of his government's record of increasing profits by restraining wages: 'Corporate profits before tax and interest over the last decade were much higher than in the 1970s ..... Wage restraint was a major factor in lifting the corporate profit share in GDP at factor cost to high levels around 17 per cent, after it had fallen to a low of 12.4 per cent in the September quarter 1982' (Keating 1993b, 27). It is also not unprecedented for Labor governments to take on what are constructed as rogue unions. The Chifley government's strikebreaking actions against the miners' union, and the Hawke government's actions against the pilots' union would be cases in point.

Paul Kelly (2007, p. 2) suggested that Rudd's election victory speech statement that he wished to move beyond the old battles between labour and business rejected past Labor ideology. However, Rudd's statement evoked Bob Hawke's efforts to forge a consensus based on common interests between labour and capital (Hawke in Cook ed. 1984, 66; see further Johnson 1989, 102-103), as well as a long tradition of Labor leaders emphasising the shared interests of workers and business in

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<sup>2</sup> Kathy Muir will provide a detailed analysis of the origins of this term in a forthcoming book on the union campaign to be published by UNSW Press.

economic prosperity, economic growth and high employment (see further Johnson 1989). Kevin Reynolds, one of the aforementioned militant unionists, has said he is waiting for when the union movement 'wakes up to Julia Gillard because she is an imposter' (cited in Lewis 2008). However, history suggests that, far from being an imposter, there are clear continuities between Gillard's positions and those of previous Labor ministers. Nonetheless, the Rudd government is going much further than its predecessors in its banning of pattern bargaining and the degree to which wage increases are tied to enterprise level productivity considerations, rather than cost of living increases. Admittedly, Gillard (2008b) has hinted at Hawke-Keating style arguments regarding social wage compensations for real wage cuts (but without the safeguard of an Accord process).

## **Social issues**

Rudd's use of the term 'working families' reflected his caution regarding more explicit mention of women's issues, not just class. Indeed, Labor was extremely cautious in the lead-up to the 2007 election when it came to dealing with issues of gender, race, ethnicity, religious difference or sexuality — a caution reflected in its handling of issues ranging from the Northern Territory intervention to same-sex marriage. Rudd had implied prior to becoming leader that Labor needed to avoid becoming involved in Howard's culture wars given that Howard's 'radioactive language' of social exclusion was aimed at 'distracting the body politic' (Rudd 2006c, 29). Interestingly, Rudd's comments imply not just a fear of being 'wedged' but also a suggestion that issues of race, gender or sexuality are of second order importance and also not central to Howard's programme.

Rudd's strategy was so 'small target', that for the first time in many elections, the Labor Party didn't even produce a women's policy (Sawer forthcoming 2008?). At the same time, Rudd managed to appear more progressive on social issues than Howard by evoking an image of compassion and through his own persona, for example, of being a modern man, married to a successful businesswoman, who spoke Mandarin and had a Chinese-Australian son-in-law. The prominent position of women such as deputy Prime-Minister Julia Gillard, Jenny Macklin, Tanya Plibersek and national campaign spokesperson, Penny Wong, also sent its own message to the electorate.

However, Labor has become somewhat less cautious since its resounding victory. Wayne Swan reflected this development when he gave a speech celebrating Mick Young, the former shearer, union boss and Whitlam Minister. Swan argued that Young's life indicated the flaw underlying Howard's culture wars' attempts to wedge off blue collar voters:

Mick's life exposes the lie at the heart of the culture war waged by the previous government — that blue-collar Australians have no interest in culture and lack compassion and empathy for others. That culture war was essentially about looking down on working families and sneering at their talents and abilities. It was a shameful episode in our history. Thankfully, one now ended (cited in Maiden, 2008).

Since the election, Rudd has asserted that his government is in the progressive tradition which 'at our absolute best' is 'a movement of hard heads and soft hearts'. (Rudd 2008c) He has re-asserted the government's support for a fair go and equal

opportunity: ‘The new Australian Government is also implementing a fairness agenda aimed at maximising equality of opportunity for every individual to pursue their life opportunities to the fullest — as well as providing a proper safety net for all without undermining individual incentive’ (Rudd 2008c). The emphasis on incentive does reflect the now common social democratic emphasis internationally on encouraging individual capability (Jayasuriya 2006, 36). However, it also draws on the Keating government’s support for the concept of ‘reciprocal obligation’ and welfare to work policies (Keating 1994b, 116).

The Government has also taken a much more explicit position on some issues of race since the election. Rudd’s apology to the Stolen Generations was in a direct line from Keating’s (1992b) Redfern Park speech, acknowledging the great wrongs that had been done to children stolen from their families, and that the policies of removal had often been racially based. The speech sought a new reconciliation with Australia’s indigenous peoples, recognising past wrongs and then working together to ensure that the gap between indigenous and non-indigenous Australians was closed. Both Rudd’s and Keating’s speech asked contemporary non-indigenous Australians to empathise with indigenous Australians by imagining what it would have been like if this had happened to them (*Parliamentary Debates*, Representatives, 13 February 2008, 170-1; Keating 1992b, 230-31 ).

However, there was a significant difference that revealed a post-Howard legacy of Labor caution on issues of race. Whereas Keating had explicitly acknowledged the role of non-indigenous Australians in general, Rudd was extremely careful to be only apologising on behalf of Australian governments and their policies; an approach designed to try to reduce the impact of a possible white backlash given Howard’s repeated assertions that the current generation of non-indigenous people should not accept responsibility for the actions of previous generations (*Parliamentary Debates*, Representatives, 30 October 1996, 6158). The speech also side-stepped providing compensation for the Stolen Generations, while committing the government to increased funding and resources for early childhood indigenous education. The latter, while extremely worthwhile, smacked a little of Howard’s strategy of practical reconciliation, whereby health and education services that non-indigenous Australians would see merely as their entitlements as citizens were branded as being part of a reconciliation process. Labor also continues to be cautious about distancing itself too far from the Howard Government’s highly controversial Northern Territory intervention (although an assessment report is pending).

Nonetheless, the Rudd government has indicated that it will move away from what it sees as the excesses of the Howard government on immigration issues which resulted in the Pacific Solution, Vivian Solon and Cornelia Rau cases, extraordinary powers for the minister and social divisiveness (Evans 2008). Immigration Minister, Chris Evans has reaffirmed that ‘immigration is central to the nation’s sense of identity; how Australia develops, manages and implements its immigration policies and citizenship program directly reflects what we value as a people, and how we think of ourselves as a nation. Australia is a country of migrants’ (Evans 2008).

Since the election, Rudd has also made a clear statement supporting equal opportunity for women, and not just through the symbolic step of appointing the first female Governor General.

Our core organising principle as a Government is equality of opportunity.... we are a Government which prides itself on being blind

to gender, blind to economic background, blind to social background, blind to race, blind to sexuality (Rudd 2008a).

Rudd went on to promise equality of opportunity for all Australians and a commitment to improving the lives of women, including improving their work lives by abolishing the negative impacts of Work Choices and facilitating flexible working arrangements for parents of pre-school children (Rudd 2008a). Much of his statement could have been made by Keating. However, the reference to non-discriminatory 'blindness' also raises significant issues. On the one hand it reflects Rudd's pride in being an equal opportunity government 'of all the talents' (Rudd 2008a), on the other hand it could reveal a meritocratic blindness to the significance of entrenched patterns of disadvantage. There is sometimes an implicit assumption that we are 'past' the old divisiveness now and in a post-gender, post-race period, with the advent of the Rudd government.

Such a belief can have implications for representation of both disadvantaged groups and advocacy organisations. For example, female participation in the Australia 2020 summit was only substantially increased by the Summit organisers after an outcry over the low percentage of women selected to be Session Chairs (Karvelas 2008b). While many outstanding individuals, no doubt often with histories of political involvement, were invited to the summit, it is noticeable that they were invited as the 'best and brightest brains' and that 'in their own right rather than as institutional representatives from any particular organisation' (Australian Government 2008). In other words, advocacy groups were not specifically invited. Admittedly, Rudd does not display Latham's (2003b, 91, 18-21) thinly veiled contempt for 'elitist', special interest, social movements and advocacy groups. Nonetheless, Rudd's meritocratic approach, with its emphasis on expert technical solutions to problems, may indicate an even more technocratic approach to social and economic issues than that of earlier Labor governments (Catley and MacFarlane 1974 and 1975).

Furthermore, there is additional evidence of ongoing caution on social issues. Another legacy of the Howard period, and a concern not to go too far and alienate social conservatives, can be seen in the issue of sexuality. Attorney General Robert McClelland (2008b) has announced the Rudd government's intention to remove most discrimination against same-sex couples in areas from superannuation, to taxation and medicare, following the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission's (HEREOC 2007) identification of 58 pieces of discriminatory federal legislation (later revised by a government audit to be around 100 pieces). However, while the government seems prepared to introduce some forms of recognition of children in same-sex families, for example in regard to inheriting superannuation or workers compensation payments, it is not clear how far the government is prepared to go in terms of family law issues, adoption or Assisted Reproductive technology. Above all, the government still opposes same-sex marriage. It has also blocked the ACT government's attempts to introduce civil unions/partnerships that incorporate public ceremonies, arguing that they 'mimic marriage' (McClelland 2008a) — an old Howard government objection.

Labor's stand on civil unions and same-sex marriage seems to be designed to reassure the religious right, given claims of Labor assurances to the Australian Christian Lobby (Maley 2007). However, Labor's opposition to officially recognised ceremonies risks reinforcing views that homosexual relationships are second-rate, even shameful and should stay out of the public eye. Making same-sex marriage unlawful is also highly controversial given, for example, the US Supreme Court's

declaration (when overturning 1960s US state legislation banning interracial marriage) that marriage is ‘one of the basic civil rights of man [sic]’ (Gerstmann 2004, 200). The government’s position is also a clear indicator of the limits set by Rudd’s Christian-influenced social conservatism. Admittedly that conservatism is clearly not as restrictive as Howard’s, for example Rudd’s social justice style Christianity (Rudd 2006c) comes to the fore on issues such as race. Unlike Howard, Rudd has supported the removal of most forms of discrimination against same-sex couples, thereby going further than previous Labor governments. Rudd (2006c, 26, 28) also sees his social-justice style Christianity as being in a longstanding Labor tradition that includes Andrew Fisher and Ben Chifley.

### **Conclusion**

Although it is still early days, this paper has identified a number of apparent continuities between the Rudd government and its Labor predecessors. However, one would not want to over-emphasise similarities. All Labor governments develop their own approaches to policy, including mechanisms of delivery, in response to the different practical and ideological contexts that they face. All are influenced by developments in international social democracy (while sometimes punching above their weight in terms of their influence on overseas governments). The Rudd government is already being more conservative than its Labor predecessors in areas such as industrial relations, while developing new Labor policies in areas such as climate change. There are also some signs that Howard’s victory over Keating’s ‘Big Picture’ approach, has made the government cautious in its social agendas than its immediate Labor predecessor — a caution that may be reinforced by Rudd’s own form of social conservatism in some cases. Nonetheless, those commentators during the 2007 election campaign who depicted Rudd as merely Howard-lite and a me-too politician, seem to have missed that a Rudd government will still be very much in the (evolving but continuing) Labor tradition.

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