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978-0-521-29133-0 - Ruling Class Ruling Culture: Studies of Conflict, Power and
Hegemony in Australian Life

Raewyn Connell

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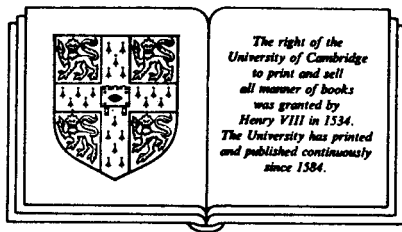
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RULING CLASS RULING CULTURE

*Studies of conflict, power and hegemony
in Australian life*

RAEWYN CONNELL



CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS

Cambridge

London New York New Rochelle

Melbourne Sydney

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CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS
Cambridge, New York, Melbourne, Madrid, Cape Town, Singapore,
São Paulo, Delhi, Dubai, Tokyo, Mexico City

Cambridge University Press
The Edinburgh Building, Cambridge CB2 8RU, UK

Published in the United States of America by Cambridge University Press, New York

www.cambridge.org
Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9780521291330

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First published 1977
Reprinted 1977, 1978, 1984, 1986
Re-issued 2010

A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Catalogue Card Number: 76-22981

ISBN 978-0-521-21392-9 Hardback
ISBN 978-0-521-29133-0 Paperback

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PREFACE

If there remained any lingering doubt about the class nature of Australian politics, the events of late 1975 must have resolved it. There is hardly a clearer case, in the recent history of the 'western democracies', of the way a threatened ruling class is able to mobilize fragments of state power, business connections, financial resources, and the legitimacy given them by the dominant culture, in a campaign to remove an offending government.

The Labor leadership itself immediately interpreted the coup of October–November as the product of a personal lust for power in the Liberal parliamentary leadership. This was an understandable reaction, but it is far from being an adequate analysis. The stock market, a sensitive if oblique indicator of the state of mind of capitalists, jumped 17 points on the day Whitlam was dismissed, and had previously twitched upwards at every rumour of trouble in the government. Fraser's parliamentary manoeuvre had only been made possible by the intransigence of conservative state governments in refusing to replace Senate vacancies with Labor nominees; Kerr's dismissal of Whitlam was made possible by the banks' refusal to extend temporary finance. As the essays in this book show, the moves of late 1975 were only the last in a series of attempts to mobilize ruling-class forces since the fragmentation of the early 1970s. This time, with the aid of the Governor-General appointed by Whitlam himself because of his respectability and moderation, they succeeded.

That says a lot for respectability and moderation. In fact the Whitlam government had been distinguished for just these traits. For all the ranting that was heard from the right about 'Canberra socialism', it had a most circumspect and modest programme of reform. Only a few redistributive measures had

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squeezed through the parliament, and nothing radical was in train. The government had managed to impose a partial wage freeze on the union movement, and was moving towards accommodations with mining and manufacturing capital. Within the spectrum of constitutional reformers in the Labor leadership, the more radical had been defeated or discredited in the year before the conservative constitutional coup. The threat of Labor was, by most standards, not a very terrifying one. But it seems that even the Whitlam brand of reform, committed to making capitalism a little more just and a good deal more efficient, is something that powerful sections of the Australian ruling class cannot stand for long.

The essays in this book will, I hope, go some way towards making these bizarre events intelligible by filling in their structural and cultural context. With the exception of Chapter 7, they have all been written over the last three years as products of a larger project that has attempted to grasp and analyse the class patterning of Australian society. In *Class Structure in Australian History* Terry Irving and I have given an account of the processes of class formation and class interaction in the past, and developed a theoretical framework to analyse it. The essays in this book take that history and theory as their point of departure for the analysis of contemporary politics and culture. They are written in the conviction that class analysis is fundamentally historical, that the present is intelligible as history and only in that light. They are also written in the conviction that theory is best developed in concrete analyses. A definite theory of class underlies the analyses presented here, but apart from the short introductory sketch it is not expounded separately.

The first part of this book sets out briefly the logic of class analysis, and explores the ways in which class questions have been treated in Australian social science. The second part brings together a number of studies of the ruling class in Australia, focussing on the recent history of its dual leadership. The third part steps back from politics and big business to examine consciousness and cultural processes, ending with a speculative chapter on the general pattern of hegemony in Australian life. This is the most important, and the most tentative, of these essays; for breaking through hegemony is both the most difficult and the least understood of the problems confronting Australian socialism.

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This is a collection of studies, not a comprehensive account of the class structure. Most obviously it does not tackle the relationship between sexual oppression and class structure, or the dynamics of the labour movement. Yet there is a consistency in its problems and approach. The collection is offered in the belief that an analysis of this kind is badly needed, both in constructing a sociology of Australian life and in working out plans for political and cultural action. The modest successes, hesitations, and defeats of reformism in the first half of the 1970s must not be dismissed, or bewailed, but studied and learned from. There is a lot of history still to come; we have only begun to fight.

11 November 1975

R. W. Connell

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Pam Connell, Terry Irving and Murray Goot have worked over these issues with me for a number of years, and their ideas, criticisms, and researches have shaped a great deal of this argument. Research by Martin Indyk was the inspiration for Chapter 5, as explained there. For critical comments on various chapters at different stages I am indebted to Ron Witton, Henry Mayer, George Munster, Tim Rowse, and the participants in a number of conferences listed below. For source material I am indebted to the secretaries of many of the companies discussed in Chapter 4, and the children and teenagers who took part in the surveys analysed in Chapters 7–9. Mary Pollard did the transcription of interviews in Chapter 7; Rebecca Jackson and Heather Williams did the typing and layout of the manuscript.

Some of these chapters have seen print in earlier versions: Chapter 3 as ‘Structure and structural change in the Australian ruling class’ in E. L. Wheelwright and K. Buckley, ed., *Essays in the Political Economy of Australian Capitalism*, vol. 1, Sydney, ANZ Book, 1975, 227–41; Chapter 5 as ‘Conflict in the Australian ruling class, 1970–1972’ in M. Richards and R. Witton, *The American Connexion*, Melbourne, Macmillan, 1976; Chapter 7 as ‘Class consciousness in childhood’ in the *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Sociology*, 1970, vol. 6, 87–99; Chapter 8 as ‘Class structure and personal socialisation’ in F. J. Hunt, ed., *Socialisation in Australia*, Sydney, Angus and Robertson, 1972, 38–66; Chapter 9 as ‘Myths media and the middle-class’, *New Journalist*, March–April 1974, no. 13, 16–20. For permission to reproduce material I am indebted to the publishers and editors of these publications. (All papers have however been rewritten, some extensively, for this book.) Chapters 3, 6 and 10 are based on papers given to the

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Acknowledgements

Sociological Association of Australia and New Zealand in 1973, 1974 and 1975; 2, to a seminar at the Australian National University in 1975; 4, to the Sydney class analysis conference in 1975; 5, to the ANZAAS congress in 1973; and 9, to the Media and Society conference in Adelaide in 1974.