

BEHIND REFORMS IN TAFE AND VOCATIONAL
EDUCATION : IN WHOSE INTEREST ?

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INTRODUCTION

As the Australian community heads uncertainly and haltingly towards the end of the twentieth century , the appeal of the past and the need to create myths from which to gain courage and fortitude is indeed tempting. Not only is the past being redefined and recreated to legitimate and justify policy actions but the notion of an energetic future is being collapsed into an integration of policy cliches associated with the year 2000. In the reforms of vocational education the year 2000 has achieved an iconoclastic status, which new policies being targetted towards closure at the beginning of the 21st century.

The current orthodoxy points to the economic success of Japan and Korea , with the assumption that because Samsung, a Korean firm trains 800 people per day and spends at the firm level 233,000 workdays per annum on training that if we adopt the formula of training and skills formation we will be OK. (David & Wheelwright 1989 p 124) The government, business , unions and a host of commentators argue that the Australian commitment to training is small and that sophisticated and well performing economies are characterised by sophisticated vocational training. Calls for the reform of vocational education and TAFE seem to integrate a cloning of the high performing manufacturing Asian tiger economies with the training programs of the diversified economies Western Europe. The message is train, train and train again and economic rewards will prevail !!!!!

In this paper I want to discuss the discourse associated with contemporary policy formation in vocational education and the reform of TAFE with a view to identifying the "regimes of truth" and "discourse reflective frames" on which the policy reforms are premised and in whose interests are the most likely to benefit from the current reforms. This paper intends to deconstruct elements of the debate by discussing the reforms in the context of some of the myths which have characterised the emergent debate in TAFE . In this way it is hoped that this paper will open up to scrutiny some of the "universal truths" about policy formation, and about the history , culture and context of TAFE 's present and future role in the Australian community.(Foucault 1977, Rein 1989)

MYTH: The problem is that TAFE and vocational education should

be more attuned to industry needs in the "real world" and this skills deficit is the cause of economic decline !

The general tone of this logic is not new. Vocationalism is a cyclic phenomena every time a recession occurs, the education system is viewed as deficient being blamed for equipping children poorly for the real world of work, teaching too many "soft" subjects and not having enough vocational content for "real jobs". (Watkins 1988, Blackmore 1990) Judy Bessant (1988) in describing how this rhetoric reappears, cites a 1930 copy of the Age newspaper which says;

"Schools were turning out a deplorably long list of misfits because the whole system was based on the employment of professions" (Age 6.9.30)

This quote has remarkable similarity with that of Paddy McGuinness in the Australian 1992 .

" Everyone knows it (TAFE) is not producing results... the

system has been allowed to fall into disrepute as more and more of its products have entered the workforce unable to do what employers expect of them."

(McGuinness 1992 p 2)

They both argue for a more practical and less theoretical base to learning and coincidentally this usually means that learning should be more congruent with industry. This "bushfire" is stoked along by Prime Minister Keating who says that, "the Australian vocational education system is weak" (Keating 1992 p 4) and John Dawkins arguing "at a time when international competitors are expanding emphasis on the training and vocational education Briefly incorporating the "backlash" politics of the new right the calls for change progress along familiar generic themes in the context of crisis.

*Educational Standards are falling and our workers are not as good as those overseas and therefore our industries are in trouble. (managers have generally escaped criticism until recently).

*Colleges are not in harmony with the "real" world of work and won't or can't teach contemporary skills that industry wants to secure business.

*Curriculum is inappropriate to needs of "modern" world or is not teaching the right things or is teaching too many "soft" or "mickey mouse" subjects which are "useless" in the real world . (see Ball 1990 & Seddon 1990 for discussion on the 'cultural restorationists', 'industry training lobbies' and the 'new progressivists')

*Producer capture. Teachers are seen as running the show and neglecting the needs of the community and industry . The implication is that teachers are either too radical or are incompetent being isolated from industry and need greater monitoring and control. Teacher unions are seen as unresponsive

and self serving. Right wing reformists argue for radical changes to the centralised employment conditions of TAFE teaching urging a freeing up of conditions to be more responsive to so called "market demands"(see Dale 1989, Angus 1991,)

*The commercial and economic health of the nation is threatened!!

As with most of the right wing school reform movements, little real evidence emerges to support the theory that schools and education are the reason for economic decline rather it becomes a "universal truth" just like the folklore of "dole bludgers" and "single mothers" as the pariah of economic success. (see Foucault 1977) There is also rather confused and contradictory appeals for national economic goals, national centralised training standards and an urgency to be more flexible to industry needs and "client groups" under the banner of devolution and empowerment.

MYTH :A national curriculum based on skills formation and competency based training (CBT) is what we need to achieve what industry needs !

The skills formation debate, originally devised by unions in the context of award restructuring, has enjoyed conditional support from large employer groups and has remained a fundamental platform in the conservative Business Council Of Australia (BCA) policy statements regarding education.(see ACTU/TDU 1987, Dawkins & Holding 1987, BCA 1989)

Clearly, there is significant benefit for business in being able to attribute the collapse of the Australia economic on the deficiencies of the Australian workforce rather than look critically at the performance of the Australian management of the structural inefficiencies in the Australian economy. CBT can be viewed as a means of assigning the characteristics of the workforce required by employers and represents an attempt to distort the supply side of the labour market. (see Kell 1992a) Ewer et al (1991) argue that skills formation has been distorted

as a policy agenda by the interests of business to fulfil long term strategic agendas associated with reducing worker's control of the workplace. Ewer firstly, argues that the approach adopted by the BCA and supported by DEET argues for an enterprise based focus on skills formation along the Japanese lines and neglects the system and industry wide German approach to skills development.

Training in this context is presented as a narrow operational skill confining its relevance to an enterprise. Training is viewed in a commodified context constructed in the context of training markets.(more of this later) These skills lack portability with a consequence that the potential for workers to seek employment outside that enterprise is limited. Secondly, Ewer argues that skills formation as represented by the private

sector uses notions of multi-skilling and workplace flexibility to combine and eliminate functions in the productive process which have proved sites of militancy in the productive process. He cites the example of maintenance trades, traditionally an area of militancy and attempts by peak employers to combine these functions with production work, an area where a limited career choice tends to limit resistance. Ewer argues that employers attitudes and views of skills formation incorporate attempts to reduce worker mobility and secure greater leverage in control of the worksite to distort the internal workings of the labour market.

Ewer's concern is that the conceptual framework presented by the BCA "takes on a more overt political flavour which is undoubtedly motivating employers". The policy view of DEET supporting a reliance on decentralised private providers also favours the agenda. However most important is the linkage with enterprise based bargaining and the notion of decentralised wage negotiations outside the arbitration and conciliation structures which have traditionally determined the Australian wage structure. The recent legislation introduced into NSW introduces the notion of an enterprise bargaining process for the total wage structure and concludes provision for bargaining to exclude unions as negotiating agents. Under the 1992 Industrial Relations Act in NSW, unless there is a dispute there is no compulsion to register the agreement. (Do I need to talk about this to Victorians and Tasmanians now ???)

Developments at the federal level also favour collective bargaining at the enterprise level but for only over award or extra provisions which must be registered with the Industrial Relations Commission. Both systems favour a fragmentation of the traditionally centralised wage system and represent an important development for employer groups in breaching the wage structure which has been a traditional irritation and rallying point for peak employer groups. Certainly the inspiration for the organisation of New Right wing groups such as the H.R. Nicholls Society comes from commemorating opponents of the centralised wage system. Under the guise of freeing up the system and the quest for more flexibility, employer groups are able, as demonstrated with recent attacks on youth wages, to erode wages and conditions such as penalty rates, 35 hour weeks and overtime allowances. In contrast little attention is paid to reforming structural inequalities within the economy and within enterprises, which advantage controlling groups.

The skills formation debates illustrate starkly how educational policy, which may appear neutral and value free incorporates policy frame discourses which disguises and obscures other agendas. Clearly ,the presentation and distortion of the skills formation debate by business masks a "strategic selectivity" (Jessop 1990) which concerns securing greater control over the

workplace and undermining the autonomy of workers. The agenda concerning the restructuring of vocational training and education

has been co-opted and utilised as a tool in more universal economic and social struggles.

MYTH : The workplace is the best place for training !

This sort of view is expressed by the Chief Executive of Mc Donald's, a multinational restaurant chain, Mr Peter Ritchie responding to a question on whether TAFE should be an initial trainer, commented:

"No. In fact one of the important things I am saying today is that we have to recognise that almost any job is training . I am almost going to make the statement that if you are in a job you are in training and that's stretching the point a bit but I am saying it that way to make a point . Get them into work and and they are getting experience and being trained." (World Today ABC Radio 2.6.92)

However such proposal are not offered in isolation to other workplace issues discussed by Ewer. After proposing this radical solution, Ritchie claimed that that a de-regulatory approach to youth wages offered a solution to youth unemployment. The response to TV host Paul Lyneham's cynicism towards this proposal , exposes a New Right doctrinaire position. Ritchie said : "What I said Paul was governments, politicians and industrial commissions, unions would just get the hell out of the way and let young people and their employers get their own deals that we would solve the youth unemployment problem quickly. " (ABC TV 7.30 Report 2.6.92)

This direction is coincidentally accelerated by the proposals in the Carmichael Report (ESFC 1992) which encourage the diversification of vocational education models away from system based vocational models to enterprise based arrangements which incorporate varying degrees of 'off the job' and 'on the job' training with individual colleges. In fact Carmichael optimistically views social change as originating from the workplace as the result of team management in newly reconstructed work arrangements (Carmichael 1992) This is an astonishing deterministic view which not only neglects the type of thesis developed by Thompson (1969) , Edwards (1979) and Watkins (1987) regarding the biased nature of innovation in the workplace but also ignores the fact that team management is not constructed in a vacuum outside the biases associated with gender, race, ability, ethnicity and age. I am sure women striving for equal pay, maternity leave , provision of childcare, anti-sexual harrassment practises etc in the work place will find this reconstruction of labour history by Carmichael totally inadequate.

Dale's (1990) analysis of Technical and Vocational Education

Initiatives (TVEI) work experience projects found such liaisons between schools and industry "ad hoc" and lacking in consistency with many schools finding industry unwilling to participate. In fact, Dale found that the greatest difficulty in a depressed economy was a supply problem with industry participants and that most schemes were the product of a "network" of contacts rather than a conscious and consistent policy by employers. In terms of the "experience" of the students Dale comments that students were placed into an artificial teacher and manager supervisor relationship rather than in proximity to worker representatives. This relationship with authority shaped their experience. Whilst most students surveyed enjoyed work experience, the negative experiences of others did not aid a transition from school to work or clarified career direction. Instead, negative experiences resulted from exposure by many students to the sets of social relations and labour processes which characterised alienating work practices, such as sex role stereotyping, sexual harassment, trivial work, as well as deliberate instances of humiliation directed at participating students.

Most students' participation was confined to routine and/ or boring operations but perhaps the most disturbing aspect of the TVEI research was the extent to which work experience facilitated and conformed to the stratification, segmentation and inequalities of the labour market. Dale cites examples where gender relationships in work experience programs reflected a domestic, servile and subordinated role for women, an experience which Dale argues does not contribute to a policy of equal opportunities. (Dale 1990)

The danger that the experiences of TVEI work experiences might be replicated in skills centres and the joint TAFE/industry arrangements proposed by Carmichael's ESFC, whereby the anarchistic tendencies of the market are likely to confront and contradict equity policies nurtured in the education sector, should be viewed with extreme caution.

MYTH: Vocational education needs to be organised and funded nationally !

On 21 July 1992, a day before a Canberra youth employment summit, Prime Minister Keating announced a final agreement for the establishment of a national approach to vocational education and the resolution between the states of the impasse which had existed since the "One Nation" statement. After five months of protracted negotiations and two special Premier's meetings, Keating spoke of the agreement saying:

"We have the agreement of the states in a truly historic agreement which will change the nature of vocational education in

Australia for ever and will give at least half of the school leavers in this country a third route to education and training commonwealth virtually knew very little about TAFE or about the training and vocational education part and we have come from the position where we have been a government topping up state funds in TAFE to now doing under the One Nation proposal through this mechanism to build a truly a national training authority where the states manage the operation of most of the TAFE system; where national policy is set by ministerial council and where funding both state and commonwealth is paid into a national training authority to be funded by interstate training authorities. " (ABC Radio 21.7.92)

This resolution represents an ongoing reformist discourse relating to the relationship between the Australian states and the Commonwealth Government over a wide range of administrative, political and economic issues. Framed in the economic rationalist context of the need for a more efficiency in smaller public sector, state and federal relations have been formulated in terms of eliminating duplication and waste and achieving national uniform standards to meet national economic targets. Significant emphasis was also placed on resolving the notion of "fiscal imbalance" where revenue raised by the federal government was predominantly spent by the state governments on services. From the perspective of the commonwealth, attempts were being made to reduce the spending and public debt by renegotiating various projects and programs. The quest for national uniform standards initially related to the reform of the infrastructure systems of the waterfront and the rail networks but as progress slowed the potential for reform in these areas vocational education emerged as a policy centre piece in the new federalism. The theoretical underpinnings of the new federalism were centred around the view of reformation in public administration formed by Wilenski aimed towards improvements in "efficiency" and "equity". As suggested by Apelt & Lingard (1990) and Yeatman (1991) this is a balancing act between the demands of market oriented New Right cuts to the state sector and the principles of equity to services traditionally viewed as Labor principles. It is interesting to

examine the construction of these policy frames and the dilemmas they have created in TAFE.

In the case of TAFE, Education Employment and Training Minister Mr Kim Beazley described the establishment of The Australian National Training Authority (ANTA) in the familiar rationalist rhetoric of new federalism saying;

"It is historic because it's the state and commonwealth getting together in an appropriate format, appropriate to our federal system setting for the first time a national training authority, a national training agenda and body which is going to be

responsible for standards over the years with a joint commonwealth state funding arrangement, with the commonwealth committing itself to triennial funding and substantial growth and the states committing themselves to a maintenance." (ABC Radio AM 22.7.92)

Beazley describing these landmark developments was careful to place TAFE in the context of a market structure with other private training providers saying :

"So out of this will come real opportunities for our young people in the vocational education and training area. Not just in TAFEs but we are also we are going to give this body authority with the states agreement to enter into an interest in the private training market as well" (ABC Radio AM 22.7.92)

The role of the private sector and industry in these reforms was seen as "absolutely critical" by Beazley who not unsurprisingly hoped that industry "would come on board and help run the thing". (ABC Radio AM 22.7.92) The new arrangements for TAFE were proposed as operating at two distinct levels with separate and potentially contradictory objectives. These initiatives emphasised a centralised standard of vocational education to meet national economic goals and at a user and student level a diversity of options.

The administrative arrangements feature the same potential for fragmentation that Ewer (1991) observed in skills formation.

Whilst there is an appearance of reform and growth in TAFE with \$721 million being committed to the public sector in TAFE, the creation of the new national board suggests a system which will operate in the same fashion as the Manpower Services Commission (MSC) in the U.K. operating on a privatised agency model.

The ANTA board will be determining the priorities and resource allocation but with the significant industry participation promised by Beazley, has the potential to distort the reform agenda in favour of selective interests. Indeed the national reforms represents a huge coup for business interests because after 1995 the 20% additional "growth funds" will be distributed outside TAFE within the private training market. Similar training boards to disperse funds have been established at the state level creating a vehicle for the disintegration of the state TAFE systems and the redirection of public funds to private providers. Is this a case of private gain and public poverty !!

Yeatman argues that the new federalism and its emphasis on efficiency and economic goals disguises a redirection of public policy she says:

" The important point is that the redirection of public policy does not involve the reduction of state intervention or control over people's lives , but rather a reorientation from public to private purposes." (Yeatman 1991 p 3)

Clearly the reforms and the policy frame constructed under the new federalism of the Labor party represent a retreat away from a role of the state in vocational and further education underpinned by common educational goals towards a fragmented arrangement conforming to the priorities and needs of large corporate interest. This trend follows the observations of (Knight et al 1991) that the consensus under which policy is formulated is narrowed at the central focus and features a displacement of other matters at the periphery. The focus is not individual needs of students and workers but the requirement to meet standardised so called national goals which have been determined within an exclusive elite group of individuals. The assumption of this policy construction is that individual and industry goals will be identical, an assumption which is at variance with the history of work.

MYTH: Privatised training will empower students with a broader range of choices !

Subsequent to the policy initiatives of the government in June , The leader of the Opposition Dr John Hewson announced a series of measures at a Liberal Party Conference in Sydney convened to market the opposition's "Fightback ! " document. The Opposition's proposals attempted to counter the initiatives in covered the terrain occupied by Keating in calling for a youth summit and

concentrated on the notion of a youth wage. In direct contradiction to the Liberal's market rhetoric Dr Hewson announced a \$3.00 youth wage level as the policy centrepiece, a move which cause significant uproar in the community. Within the week the Opposition was forced to release other elements of its policy to distract from the divisive aspects of the youth wage. The principle points of the oppositions plan represented a replication of New Right policies with the use of vouchers in vocational education. Using the rhetoric of choice and empowerment , Dr David Kemp spoke of the Oppositions policies:

" The voucher is an entitlement for the provision of a good or service and it is exercised by the individual, So it means that an unemployed person can make a decision as to the kind of training that they need and that suits their particular requirements and obtain that from either a TAFE College or a private provider or a perhaps some other organisation or a voluntary organisation which is are providing some training services that unemployed people think they need. It is a way of empowering them to get the sort of skills that they want." (ABC Radio 13.7.92)

The introduction of vouchers and user pays systems as the focal point for funding vocational education introduces the notion of education as a commodity, to be purchased. As Bates (1991) suggests this represents a redefinition of education from a

cultural activity which constitutes a process of social formation to that which which is the exchange of a "product". Bates argues that in the terms of the New Right lexicon that "community is simply the aggregation of individual decisions made via markets of one kind or another" and that cultural concerns are viewed as inimical to the rights of individual choice (Bates 1991 p 7). In this way education becomes viewed not as a social or community activity but as a commodity to be exchanged in an array of markets. This connects vocational education as the acquisition of certain skills and attributes which will permit rights of passage and entry to the labour market. The emphasis is on acquiring what (Kenway 1992 et al) term "really useful knowledge" as a personal investment in the guaranteeing entry into the labour market and facilitates the distortion of educational offerings to those of a technology based curriculum.

The voucher system also facilitates a further redefinition of the training market which acts to threaten TAFE's status as a public education system. Kemp talks of where vouchers may be "cashed in" :

"They could be offered by TAFE Colleges. They could be offered by private providers, they could encourage other educational institutions to come in and offer courses."

(ABC Radio 13.7.92)

Both the Labor government and the Liberal opposition, have embraced policy which positions TAFE as a participant in a competitive training market which consists of many providers. In this way there is similarity between both parties but there are also significant differences which the voucher issue highlights. Paul Byrne, National TAFE Teacher Union Representative questioned the ability of a "demand" driven system to reach national targets as people "run around with vouchers looking for short term training course". He also argues that such a market based system is open to abuse, with the potential for employers, in a depressed labour market to encourage employees to cash their vouchers in on courses with dubious value and quality with the employer to secure jobs. (ABC Radio 13.7.92)

Paradoxically, whilst arguing about "level playing fields" and "choice", what the Opposition's policy does is to actually give employer based training options a distinct advantage. If the attractions of possible employment may be attached to training,

as suggested by Byrne, then quality of training becomes a periphery concern. The voucher system also facilitates the legitimization of employer based training programs, placing them on an equal status with TAFE yet there is little differentiation of relative merits of the public and private providers. Bates describes this dilemma as:

"The playing field is anything but level. Lack of appropriate

information , lack of understanding of the value or suitability of differing options, Lack of mobility are among the more serious constraints of choice."

(Bates 1991 p11)

Clearly the proposed voucher scheme , a cornerstone in the New Right policy formation is not neutral and value free administrative reform but a scheme which legitimates private and sectional interests at the possible expense of the notion of a viable public education system capable of providing vocational education. Whilst both major parties have initiated policies which favour business , the current opposition policies have the potential to impoverish and fragment one of the few public institution capable of delivering national training policy. The privatisation of training mooted as a more efficient form of training is not supported by evidence obtained form a number of overseas studies. Davis (1988) suggests that the agency type training developed in the UK has been characterised by exploitation by employers using subsidies to offer a combination poor wages and unsupervised inappropriate training which lacked portability. (Davis 1988 p154) Donahue (1989) in a study of Job Training Partnership Act which privatised training in the US concluded that training programs for the unemployed allocated on competitive tender , selected participants who would generally guarantee satisfaction of the outcomes intended and not those in most need of employment programs nor disadvantaged groups. The programs, according to Donahue, exhibited biases against the poorly educated , racial and ethnic minorities and women and reinforced segmented and stratified workforce arrangements.

MYTH : TAFE should service industries needs !

The current political view of TAFE's role has been collapsed into a rhetoric associated with "industry needs", a trend which has accelerated by the federal government's willingness to appoint corporate business executives to the major policy making bodies. (AEC 1991) The assumption that TAFE's role is to service industry requirements has subordinated other important roles that TAFE occupies as an education and training provider. The view articulated by policy makers is that the emphasis on participation which accompanied the post Kangan (ACOTAFE 1974) era is no longer appropriate and that there is a new language associated with productivity, efficiency and economic goals. As Kenway (1990) and Yeatman (1987) say this has subordinated other wider views of education associated with social formation and the notion of the common good. eg multi-cultural education adult literacy . This is particularly prevalent in reforms of TAFE as the agendas have been framed in the context of a masculinised metal trades manufacturing model which is ironically shrinking in contrast to the rapid development of service industries. Whilst TAFE has not failed to actively move into the new service industries the policy constructions show a bias towards these

masculinised views of legitimate work and knowledge. This is evident in the TAFE promotional material which generally exhibits promotions of highly technological and mechanised occupations whilst other fields of study not associated with the "real" needs of industry are consigned to a status of "hobby courses". This neglects areas of strong growth in short vocational courses in TAFE in the last 20 years. (O'Connor 1991)

Major problems exist in these mythical views of TAFE. Firstly the definition of industry is narrow and conservative, favouring the

interests of corporate multi-national businesses. Small business traditionally a partner in TAFE has been marginalised in the recent policy forums. This narrow definition of business and commerce excludes emergent growth areas in ecology, human services in the caring professions and fails to question the viability and sustainability of older industries. The paucity of this homogenous view of industry incorporated in policy formation is also challenged by Mc Eachern (1991) who argues that industry and commerce has contradictory and diverse interests. This conflict of interests will manifest itself in the training agenda as it does elsewhere.

Australian industry does not have an employer based training ethos and have tended to utilise the state funded TAFE system to train workers. Recent attempts under the training Guarantee Levy Act to increase employer funded training have actually created a new area of tax avoidance with the flexibility of the Act being exploited to provide weekend retreats for "harassed" executives rather than address other wider organisational needs. Perhaps the ultimate irony is that those successful liaisons between TAFE and manufacturing industry have exposed the need for the types of courses in literacy, numeracy, communications and general studies which have been labelled as "soft" in the rationalist framework.

The policy debate has been framed within a hegemonic context which is vaguely termed "industry needs" assuming that corporate businesses imperatives and the needs of community are congruent. It is a view which offers a view of society which neglects needs and values outside those of the narrow interpretations of business and commerce. This view collapses the diverse and complex role which TAFE has occupied as an institution of social formation into a reductionist view of servicing special interests associated with global multinational capital. As Porter (1992) has recently observed the notion of citizenship and common good outside that of individual agency in a market context are totally absent. She says:

"Indeed the issue of whether the 'inner man or woman' might just still exist and need consideration is completely off the policy and political agenda" (Porter 1992 p 14)

CONCLUSION

The policy debate surrounding TAFE and vocational education has been constructed around a series of myths which have assumed the quality of "universal truths" and have largely been unquestioned. The issues have created the image of national policies providing a unifying capacity that will facilitate social solidarity. On the contrary the policies of both political parties, through the creation of artificial training markets, have the potential to fragment the social institutions associated with education and training. Not only are the systems of training becoming fragmented, disjointed and isolated in "Balkanised" enclaves but the influence of these policies is impacting on the workplace. (Kell 1992b) The rhetoric of national uniform systems based approaches to training is contradicted by an emphasis on enterprise level training by employer and some union groups, a trend which facilitates conservative interests in substituting the centralised award based wage fixing mechanisms with individual enterprise agreements.

These policies incorporate a distorted notion of the common good associated with the individualised needs of markets. The assumption, particularly in the brave new world of "Fightback!" is that market forces will facilitate the social formation and the cohesion necessary for national recovery. It is clearly an assumption which views individual agency outside a collective sense and towards a view of people as purely individualistically motivated consumers (Gorz 1989, Kenway et al 1992). It collapses policy from a notion of common values to that of purely individual value and represents a departure from the policy

consensus which typified the post war era. Indeed the new message of the Liberal/National Party in "Fightback!" is a long way from the announcements of Robert Menzies in the 1949 election: "There are certain public enterprises of a monopoly kind, not suited to competitive enterprise and not requiring the stimulus of competitive selling, which we willingly accept as government responsibility. The public interest must prevail." (Crisp 1977 p 251)

This plea for national unity echoing from the past mythical era of Australian prosperity is perhaps the type of call to arms which requires a renewed enthusiasm. It is perhaps the only framework in which a truly democratic vocational education system can be developed and sustained that will provide cohesion, unity and common purpose.

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