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### BOOK REVIEWS

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**What were they Thinking? The Politics of Ideas in Australia**, by James Walter with Todd Moore, UNSW Press, Sydney, 2010, 400 pp., \$39.95 (paperback), ISBN 9780868409719.

James Walter and Todd Moore have given us a lively, if partial, account of Australian political history in the twentieth century, and the ideas that shaped the politicians and intellectuals at the centre of that history.

Their focus is on social liberalism, the dominant political outlook of mainstream politicians and intellectuals for most of the century, and the challenges to it from both left and right. Social liberals wanted a strong capitalism, but rejected the

classical liberal view of a minimal state with the fate of individuals entirely contingent on their ability to compete. The most significant politician of the federation decade, Alfred Deakin, fought for tariffs to encourage manufacturing, regulation to ensure minimum wages and working conditions, and some limited welfare. Deakin's social liberalism provided much of the theoretical underpinning to the so-called "Australian settlement."

A constant theme is the debate within the political and intellectual elite over the proper role of the state in economic and social life. The Great Depression saw an attack on social liberalism from the right, but the end result was the disintegration of the anti-Labor parties during the Second World War. Menzies rebuilt anti-Labor politics by accepting welfare and Keynesian demand management, while opposing the strong state regulation of the economy proposed by Labor. The economic crisis of the mid-1970s saw the social liberal consensus of the post war era fracture, with both Labor and the Coalition adopting "market reform." The book ends, as it began, with Kevin Rudd's response to the Global Financial Crisis—channelling the rhetoric of social liberalism whilst continuing to enact a policy agenda little different from that of John Howard.

Walter sees "the fundamental determinant of political reasoning [as] economic", and economic crises as the cause of "every decisive shift in political thinking" (p. 336). As a Marxist, I found the focus on economic interests (and crises) refreshing. However, there are two other dimensions to the "problem of order" facing any ruling class (p. 302). War and strategic calculation have been a major element in shaping politics in Australia, yet while these form a significant descriptive element in the book, we get little sense of how elite thinkers have linked military preparations to the economic role of the state.

The second "problem of order" is containing working-class activism and class consciousness. Class is far from ignored in the book and is central to the best chapter, on the Great War and after. However it, too, is undertheorised.

Are these simply the criticisms of a reviewer with a different opinion? Perhaps, but I found the argument dealing with the early Commonwealth, in the book's foundational chapter, to be thin. This applies especially to the most significant turning point in Australian politics after 1901, the fusion of the free trade/anti-socialist and protectionist parties in 1909. These bitter enemies joined forces to fight Labor, and reconfigured the official political contest along class lines. In a book on political ideas, we get little sense of why fundamental principles such as free trade were surrendered.

Walter sees the generation of political ideas as a top-down process. The problem is that it is those at the bottom who feed, house and resist those at the top. A workable ruling-class ideology has to be able to both contain and combat that resistance. In this book, however, we get little sense of how elite thinkers approached the problem of containing working class militancy.

All that said, *What Were They Thinking?* is a book that is worth arguing with. It puts political and economic ideas into context, and tells a story of Australian politics more interesting than most.

Jack thought that since he was the leader of the choir, and can sing a C sharp that he should be chief. Why is Piggy not considered to be chief? Piggy was very smart, he had lots of ideas that all had been credited to Ralph. Ralph has the idea to make sure wherever they are is an island on an journey around the place, he takes Jack and Simon. Why is Jack unable to stab the piglet at the end of the chapter? Jack claims that he was looking for a place to stab it and the pig got away too fast. They would be more alert and they are full of fear, they think the beast is everywhere and being very careful in where they go. Jack says to his hunters: "Ralph thinks you're cowards, running away from the boya and the beast. And that's not all." Book Review of - What Were They Thinking: The Politics of Ideas in Australia by James Walter with Tod Moore. Altmetric. Altmetric. Marsh, I 2011 , 'Book Review of - What Were They Thinking: The Politics of Ideas in Australia by James Walter with Tod Moore' , Australian Journal of Public Administration, vol. 70, no. 1 , pp. 108-110 , doi: 10.1111/j.1467-8500.2011.00709\_3.x. Preview. PDF (What Were TheyThinking) What\_Were\_TheyT...pdf | Download (622kB) Available under University of Tasmania Standard License. Additional Information: The definitive published version is available online at: <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/>. Item Statistics: View statistics for this item. What Were They Thinking: 150 Years of Political Thinking in Australia. By James Walter. Start your free 30 days. Read preview. Book. Description. Challenging conventional ways of thinking about politics, this ambitious history of 20th-century Australian political thought explains how several of the most well-established Australian political ideas, such as franchise and the welfare state, came to be. By examining the impact of these ideas and the ways they have inspired individuals and movements from before the first prime minister, Edmund Barton, all the way to current incumbent Kevin Rudd, this robust study makes what often seems arcane or abstract come to life. History & Theory. History. What exactly did they think was going to happen? Related videos. 4:13. Boyfriend pretends to have died before proposing to partner. Daily Mail What Were They Thinking? 201K views Yesterday. 3:26. Tattoo Removal Treatment On A Lower Leg. Daily Mail What Were They Thinking? 151K views 20 September. 3:15. Wild pig injures two people during rampage. Daily Mail What Were They Thinking? 882K views 20 September. 0:29. Woman clings to tree to protect car from storm. Daily Mail What Were They Thinking? 582K views 19 September. 3:14.