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Chapter 6

GOUGH WHITLAM AND THE RE-IMAGINED CITIZEN-SUBJECT OF AUSTRALIAN SOCIAL DEMOCRACY¹

Carol Johnson

In a number of speeches, Gough Whitlam suggested that his concept of ‘positive equality’ sought to avoid the constitutional roadblocks encountered during the Curtin and Chifley years by bypassing much of the need for extensive government regulation (or resorts to nationalisation) and instead substituting the strategic provision of key government community services. However, this chapter suggests that Whitlam’s concept of ‘positive equality’ in fact involved a far more substantial transformation of the Australian Labor project. Whitlam was moving beyond traditional Labor conceptions of the citizen-subject as predominantly a white, male wage-earning head of household, with female dependents receiving citizenship

1 My thanks to Clare Parker for her research assistance. This chapter incorporates some material produced as part of a larger ARC-funded project (DP140100168) entitled: ‘Expanding equality: A historical perspective on developments and dilemmas in contemporary Australian social democracy.’

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entitlements largely at second-hand. Rather, he was re-imagining the citizen-subject in a far more gender and racially inclusive way. Furthermore, it was not just that the worker was no longer predominantly perceived as being male or white. At the same time, the class subject of social democracy was also being re-envisioned via a focus on educational opportunity. In short, Whitlam was re-envisioning the Australian social democratic project.

Gough Whitlam's plans for 'positive equality' lay at the heart of his government's policy agenda. Indeed he argued that pursuing policies based on 'positive equality' could bypass some of the constitutional barriers which Curtin and Chifley had encountered in their attempts to improve the social and economic circumstances of citizens – barriers which had prevented the establishment of a national health service as well as restricting government regulatory powers over the economy.² Whitlam knew those constitutional barriers well given that his father, Fred Whitlam, was a former Crown Solicitor and had been both a key draftsman and legal adviser for Chifley.³ However, Whitlam argued that 'the basic ends envisaged by Chifley could be achieved by other means'.⁴ There were alternative ways of achieving key aims ranging from equality of opportunity to providing necessary services and income security for those suffering hard economic times.⁵

2 See further Carol Johnson, 'Gough Whitlam and Labor Tradition', in *The Whitlam Legacy*, ed. Troy Bramston (Sydney: The Federation Press, 2013), 357–365.

3 Jenny Hocking, *Gough Whitlam: A Moment in History* (Melbourne: The Miegunyah Press, Melbourne University Publishing, 2008), 97, 126.

4 E G Whitlam, 'The Constitution versus Labor', Chifley Memorial Lecture, University of Melbourne, 14 August 1975, 1, accessed 9 September 2015, <http://pmtranscripts.dpmc.gov.au/release/transcript-3847>; see further Johnson, 'Gough Whitlam and Labor Tradition', 357–365; Carol Johnson, 'Social Harmony and Australian Labor: The Curtin and Chifley Governments' Plans for Australian Economic Development', *Australian Journal of Politics and History* 32, no. 1 (1986): 47–49.

5 Whitlam, 'The Constitution versus Labor', 4.

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In such statements, Whitlam depicted himself very much as an heir of Curtin and Chifley, albeit over two decades on. I have argued elsewhere that there were indeed key continuities and links between Whitlam's government and the governments of Curtin and Chifley in both social policy and in attitudes towards the private sector.⁶ In particular, those governments all believed in humanising and reforming rather than replacing capitalism. They believed that there were common interests between workers and many sectors of business, such as local manufacturing. However, the Curtin and Chifley and Whitlam governments also had their *bêtes noires* in terms of business – namely the banks in the case of the Chifley government and multinationals in the case of the Whitlam government.⁷

Nonetheless, in this chapter, I add to such previous analyses by arguing that it is also important to recognise the extent to which, while building on key aspects of the Curtin and Chifley tradition, Whitlam was also expanding Labor's concept of equality. That expansion of equality went beyond the forms of, and methods of delivery of, services that would be provided. More importantly, it involved the conception of whom the citizen-subject recipient of such services would be. In that respect, Whitlam was helping to transform and expand the conception of the citizen-subject of Australian social democracy.

Whitlam argued that his programme of 'positive equality' could achieve Curtin and Chifley's 'basic ends' without needing to change the Constitution to give governments new powers to regulate and control the economy, and without needing to resort to an attempted nationalisation when those powers weren't granted (as Chifley had in

6 See further Carol Johnson, *The Labor Legacy: Curtin, Chifley, Whitlam, Hawke* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1989).

7 See further Johnson, *The Labor Legacy*, 16, 24–27, 43–44, 55–61.

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regard to the banks).⁸ Rather, Whitlam argued that ‘positive equality’ could be achieved by further extending the provision of government services, beyond those conceived by his Labor predecessors. For example, a Whitlam government would set up new government service providers that would compete with the private sector, thereby forcing the private sector to improve its own performance in regard to the provision of much needed, and equitable, services.⁹

Nonetheless, Whitlam emphasised that positive equality would not involve a radical ‘equality of personal income’.¹⁰ The provision of government services would be used to *complement* private provision. It was therefore assumed that the private sector would still ‘play the greater part in providing employment and growth’.¹¹ Indeed, Whitlam repeatedly emphasised that the Labor government required a healthy and profitable private sector in order to provide full employment and in order to provide the revenue that would finance the government’s social programme.¹²

However, although Whitlam did not adequately acknowledge this, his conception of positive equality actually went much further than using other means to achieve traditional Labor ends. It went significantly beyond Curtin and Chifley’s agenda in that it extended the government’s policy focus to a range of groups who had not been central to the Curtin and Chifley government’s own conception of equality. Those groups ranged from women to migrant groups and

8 Johnson, ‘Social Harmony and Australian Labor’, 47–49.

9 Gough Whitlam, *The Whitlam Government, 1972–1975* (Ringwood: Viking, 1985), 215.

10 Whitlam, ‘The Constitution versus Labor’, 5.

11 Ibid.

12 E G Whitlam, Address to the Sydney Chamber of Commerce, Sydney, 28 February 1975, 1–6, accessed 9 September 2015, <http://pmtranscripts.dpnc.gov.au/sites/default/files/original/00003632.pdf>.

Indigenous Australians and reflected the influence of new social movements in Australian politics.¹³ Furthermore, Whitlam was also reconceptualising the class subject of social democracy, not only in gender and ethnic terms, but also by placing even more emphasis on equality of opportunity, particularly educational opportunity. Consequently, it will be argued in what follows that Whitlam was not just adding on extra people to Labor's agenda, he was also, at least partially, reconceiving the identity of the citizen-subject whom government policies should be designed around.

Shifting the subject of social democracy

While traditional Labor ideology had emphasised some of the common interests between labour and capital, in terms of generating employment and growth for example, there had still been a significant emphasis on ensuring that workers were employed and that their wages were adequate to support themselves and their families. Indeed that was a central part of the construction of the class subject of Australian social democracy – the male working class wage earner whose interests had to be protected in order to prevent the worst forms of economic inequality. In particular, Curtin and Chifley were determined to ensure that the terrible conditions thousands of workers endured during the Great Depression never happened again. Chifley himself could 'well remember when, by their thousands, breadwinners, ill-clad and underfed, queued at factory gates seeking work'.¹⁴

13 Verity Burgmann, *Power and Protest: Movements for Change in Australian Society* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1993).

14 Ben Chifley, 'No Glittering Promises', Prime Minister's Policy Speech, broadcast 14 November 1949, in *Things Worth Fighting For, Speeches by Joseph Benedict Chifley* selected and arranged by A W Stargardt (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1953), 85.

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Chifley talked sympathetically of shopkeepers having to close their businesses and farmers being forced to sell their land during the Great Depression.¹⁵ However, the citizen around whom Chifley's key economic and social policy vision was primarily shaped was the male wage earner.

The Labour government has shaped all its financial and economic measures towards maintain full employment and it will continue to shape them so.

So far as it can humanly contrive, never again will the dole queues be seen in this country. Never again will competent workmen stand idle for months and years while limitless work remains to be done. Never again will young men drift hopelessly from town to town and from State to State, searching for the jobs which, in all this wide land, did not exist for them.¹⁶

By contrast, Whitlam was developing his policies in a very different historical period. Whitlam began from the premise that protecting working class employment and incomes was no longer the key challenge for Labor governments (no doubt partly as a result of the Long Boom and an inherent belief that Keynesian economic policy had ironed out capitalist cycles of boom and depression). Rather the key issue was government provision of community services. In an explanation of his conception of positive equality, Whitlam explained that:

what I call positive equality ... is based on this concept: increasingly a citizen's real standard of living, the health of himself and his family, his children's opportunity for education and self-improvement, his access to employment opportunities, his ability to enjoy the nation's resources for recreation and cultural

15 Ibid., 84.

16 Ibid., 75.

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activity, his ability to participate in the decisions and actions of the community, are determined not so much by his income but by the accessibility of the services which the community alone can provide and ensure. The quality of life depends less on the things which individuals obtain for themselves and can purchase for themselves from their personal incomes and depends more on the things which the community provides for all its members from the combined resources of the community.¹⁷

It was this understanding of ‘positive equality’ that underlay the Whitlam government’s introduction of major new social initiatives such as Medibank’s government-funded provision of health services; increases in pensions and benefits and increased government provision in areas such as education, housing and urban development.¹⁸

However, in the process Whitlam also began to reimagine the class project and class subject of Australian social democracy. It was not just that he placed an increased emphasis on the importance of blue and white-collar workers working together to create a better society.¹⁹ More importantly, there was no longer quite the same emphasis on a key part of a Labor government’s role being to provide employment (and a fair deal between labour and capital), backed up by a safety net for the wage earner and his family if he became unemployed, or was too ill or sick to work, or died. Rather the focus became even more on providing equal opportunity and a better deal between citizens

17 Whitlam, ‘The Constitution versus Labor’, 5.

18 For an overview of key social welfare reforms, see Grant Elliott and Adam Graycar, ‘Social Welfare’, in *From Whitlam to Fraser: Reform and Reaction in Australian Politics*, eds Allan Patience and Brian Head (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1979), 88–97.

19 See E G Whitlam, Speech to the National Conference of the Australian Council of Salaried and Professional Associations, Canberra, 21 October 1974, accessed 9 September 2015, <http://pmtranscripts.dpmc.gov.au/sites/default/files/original/00003423.pdf>.

and *state provision* (albeit with some redistributive aspects involved via taxes and government benefits and services).

Furthermore, despite the remnants of sexist language in the previous quotation, Whitlam was beginning to extend the previously gendered conception of who should be the primary citizen-subject of services, with significant implications for what form those services should take.

Women

As I have argued previously, the key citizen-subject of Australian social democracy up to and including the Curtin and Chifley governments tended to be the male wage-earner head of household, with women receiving benefits largely at second hand via their husbands, or directly if widowed.²⁰ Australian Labor was not alone in privileging such conceptions. The traditional focus on the male wage earner head of household was also a central part of the European social democratic tradition.²¹ The citizen-subject of Curtin and Chifley's postwar reconstruction was literally conceived of and depicted as a male wage-earning head of household in speeches and pamphlets on

20 See eg Carol Johnson, 'Whose Consensus? Women and the ALP', *Arena* 93, (1990): 85–104; Carol Johnson 'Incorporating Gender Equality: Tensions and Synergies in the Relationship Between Feminism and Australian Social Democracy', in *Feminism, Social Liberalism and Social Democracy in the Neo-Liberal Era*, ed. Anna Yeatman, Working Papers in the Human Rights and Public Life Program, Whitlam Institute, University of Western Sydney, No 1, June 2015, accessed 9 September 2015, http://www.whitlam.org/publications/human_rights_and_public_life. I have explored the heteronormative implications of such conceptions in Carol Johnson, 'From Morality to Equality: Labor's Sexuality Conundrum' (refereed paper presented at the Australian Political Studies Association Conference, University of Sydney, September 2014), accessed 9 September 2015, http://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=2440135.

21 For example, as Jean Quataert, amongst others, has pointed out, "European welfare-state provisions reproduced a normative gender model that reinforced the male breadwinner and female housewife/consumer model." Jean Quataert, 'Socialisms, Feminisms, and Agency: A Long View', *Journal of Modern History* 73, no. 3 (2001): 614.

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postwar reconstruction.²² For example, although Curtin supported women being employed to fill wartime manpower shortages, he also asserted that: ‘in this country where there is no great numerical disparity between the sexes most women will ultimately be absorbed in the home ... I agree that the natural urge for motherhood, husband and home is the great motivating force in a woman’s life.’²³

By contrast with his predecessors, Whitlam deplored the fact that Labor was ‘a male dominated Party in a male dominated Parliament in a male dominated society’.²⁴ However, he argued that it was not just parliamentary underrepresentation that needed to be addressed. Rather the very definition of the political needed to be transformed to cover the needs of women and the type of government services they required. In a statement that reflected the influence of women’s movement conceptions, Whitlam argued that:

women are insisting more and more that concerns of the home be the concerns of politics, the personal be political. Child care, family planning, housework and so on are now becoming issues for the political arena. To this extent, women are in the process of trying to re-define and to re-describe, the political.²⁵

22 See for example the housewife and children waving their (overallled) father off to work on the front cover of J B Chifley, ‘Social Security and Reconstruction’, Commonwealth Government Printer, c.1941, accessed 9 September 2015, digital.slv.vic.gov.au/dtl_publish/pdf/marc/38/2499355.html; See Johnson, *The Labor Legacy*, 36–37.

23 ‘Why this election is vital to women’, Question and Answers, John Curtin and Robert Menzies interviewed by Alice Jackson, *Australian Women’s Weekly*, 14 August 1943, 10.

24 E G Whitlam, ‘The Emancipation of Women’, Address to the YWCA Convention, University of Queensland, Brisbane, *Australian Government Digest*, 1 July 1973 – 30 September 1973, 1152.

25 E G Whitlam, Speech at the opening of the Women and Politics Conference, Canberra, 31 August 1975, 8, accessed 9 September 2015, <http://pmttranscripts.dpmc.gov.au/sites/default/files/original/00003874.pdf>. For the contrast with Curtin and Chifley see Johnson, *The Labor Legacy*, 20–21, 32–33.

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Consequently, Whitlam did not only seek to improve the position of women by introducing a single mothers' benefit, or by his government supporting equal pay measures in the public sphere of the economy, or encouraging women to stand for parliament, or supporting anti-discrimination measures. The Whitlam government also went on to provide government support for family planning, public service maternity leave and women's centres. He emphasised that the government wished to address the concerns of all women:

We are concerned about the problems facing all women in Australia, be they young or old, Aboriginal or newcomers, married or unmarried, English speaking or non-English speaking ... that has prompted us to fund women's refuges, women's health centres, rape crisis counselling centres, family planning centres and multi-purpose centres where the health, welfare, educational, training, workforce, legal, recreational and child-care needs of women can be met. We have removed the sales tax from the pill and for the first time in the history of Australia have recognised that supporting mothers form one of the largest groups below the poverty line and introduced a supporting mothers' benefit.²⁶

So the Whitlam government developed an impressive range of both services and benefits that were designed to attempt to meet women's needs. The citizen-subject was no longer so male-defined. In particular, the Whitlam government increased the opportunities for women to be economically independent, not just by increasing pay and job opportunities but also by providing a single mother's benefit that facilitated some women being able to leave dysfunctional relationships.²⁷

26 Whitlam, Speech at the opening of the Women and Politics Conference, 6.

27 Anna Bligh, *Through the Wall* (Sydney: HarperCollins, 2015), 45.

Sexuality

Admittedly, while the increasing inclusion of women potentially challenged the privileging of a male head of household as the primary citizen-subject around which government policy was designed, the Whitlam government did not go on to challenge the heteronormative assumptions that also underlay such conceptions of the heterosexual household (and citizenship) unit. A few brave Whitlam government MPs did raise early issues of gay and lesbian rights and entitlements.²⁸ However, as Graham Willett has noted ‘it is surprising that in its three full years of power’ the Whitlam government ‘failed to carry through any kind of homosexual law reform’.²⁹ Gender issues may have begun to be tackled but key issues of sexuality remained largely off the government’s policy agenda, including some heterosexual issues such as abortion law reform.³⁰

Regional inequality

The focus on services that *the community* could provide also saw Whitlam putting greater emphasis than his predecessors on regional inequality, an issue that is focused on in major depth in Lyndon Megarry’s chapter in this volume.³¹ Whitlam was famously concerned about the lack of basic services, including sewerage, that were not

28 See Johnson, ‘From Morality to Equality’, 3–6.

29 Graham Willett, *Living Out Loud: A History of Gay and Lesbian Activism in Australia* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 2000), 96.

30 See eg Ann Game and Rosemary Pringle, ‘Women and Class in Australia: Feminism and the Labor Government’, in *Critical Essays in Australian Politics*, ed. Graeme Duncan (Melbourne: Edward Arnold, 1978), 114. Though note that a wide range of issues were raised in The Royal Commission on Human Relationships – see Michelle Arrow’s chapter in this volume – and two Labor members, David McKenzie and Tony Lamb, had unsuccessfully introduced a private members’ bill to decriminalise abortion in the ACT.

31 See further Lyndon Megarry’s chapter in this volume.

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being adequately provided in some outer suburbs of major cities as well as being concerned with the provision of services in regional towns and rural areas.³² In his 1972 policy speech, Whitlam had lamented that where people lived was still having a major impact on their opportunities and quality of life.

Increasingly, a citizen's opportunities for education and self-improvement, his access to employment opportunities, his ability to enjoy the nation's resources for recreation and culture, his ability to participate in the decisions and actions of the community are determined not by his income, not by the hours he works, but by where he lives.³³

Whitlam's initiative in regard to establishing the Department of Urban and Regional Development (DURD) was particularly important in this regard, with DURD seeing itself as having major responsibilities in regard not just to the provision of community services but also in regard to facilitating employment opportunities in regional areas, though that often proved to be difficult given the government's lack of control over private industry investment.³⁴ The Australian Assistance Plan, along with the related focus on regionalisation and decentralisation, was meant to encourage community involvement.³⁵

32 For information regarding sewers, see 'Whitlam and Western Sydney', The Whitlam Institute, accessed 25 June 2015, http://www.whitlam.org/gough_whitlam/Western_Sydney.

33 Gough Whitlam, 1972 Labor Election Policy Speech, Blacktown, NSW, 13 November 1972, accessed 9 September 2015, <http://electionspeeches.moadoph.gov.au/speeches/1972-gough-whitlam>.

34 Johnson, *Labor Legacy*, 67.

35 Johnson, *Labor Legacy*, 66–67; see further Melanie Oppenheimer et al's chapter in this volume.

Education and equality of opportunity

Educational opportunity was central to Whitlam's plans for positive equality and he placed far more emphasis on education than his predecessors. The Chifley government had provided some federal government support for kindergartens and universities but, as Stuart Macintyre points out, tended to avoid secondary education (partly for its religious and states' rights implications). Education in general was not central to Curtin and Chifley's plans for postwar reconstruction, although the Commonwealth Reconstruction Training scheme did facilitate vocational training for ex-service people, including at university level.³⁶ By contrast, Whitlam argued that providing a high quality government-funded education was central to his idea of positive equality, which had as its underpinning 'the classic liberal idea of the career open to the talents – equality of opportunity in a vastly expanded form'.³⁷ Indeed, Whitlam once responded to a question regarding what he understood by 'equality' by replying: 'I want every kid to have a desk, with a lamp, and his own room to study'.³⁸ Education therefore played a central role in Whitlam's initial programme for government. Indeed education (rather than, for example, transforming existing class or economic structures) was conceived as the 'primary instrument' for increasing equality.

In my policy speech last November I promised that education would be the most rapidly growing sector of public spending under a Labor Government. We see it as the primary instrument

36 Stuart Macintyre, *Australia's Boldest Experiment: War and Reconstruction in the 1940s* (Sydney: New South Publishing, 2015), 146–147, 213–217.

37 Whitlam, 'The Constitution versus Labor', 5.

38 Cited in Graham Freudenberg, *A Certain Grandeur: Gough Whitlam in Politics* (Melbourne: Sun, 1978), 82.

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for improving the quality of life of our people and promoting equality of opportunity for our children.³⁹

In order to ensure that full educational opportunity was achieved, the government had to tackle inequalities in education, to ensure that there were no 'elitist, regional, sectarian or other discriminatory grounds' impacting on outcomes.⁴⁰ It was a view that saw educational disadvantage as a key factor contributing to inequality.

We are determined that education will no longer be used as a weapon to perpetuate privilege, inequality and division. We are determined that every child who embarks on his secondary education this year shall have the same opportunity as any other child of completing that education and advancing further.⁴¹

Significantly, the focus on 'advancing further' implied that improving equality of opportunity might also involve substantially increasing the number of children who gained professional qualifications and left their working class origins behind.

Ethnic and racial equality

Educational inequality was also seen as playing a major role in cementing patterns of ethnic disadvantage. Whitlam acknowledged the educational and other 'deprivations and disadvantages and the handicaps of migrant children in particular in a great number of inner suburbs around Sydney and Melbourne'.⁴² Consequently, educational

39 E G Whitlam, 'The National Government's Role in Education', Speech At The Opening Of The M B Flood Science Block of St Patrick's College, Prospect Vale, Tasmania, 18 March 1973, 1, accessed 9 September 2015, <http://pmtranscripts.dpmc.gov.au/sites/default/files/original/00002853.pdf>.

40 Ibid., 2.

41 Ibid.

42 E G Whitlam, *Commonwealth Parliamentary Debates*, House of Representatives, 29 November 1973, 4077.

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equality had an important role to play in creating a more equal, multicultural and multiracial society.

There is no possibility of the children of migrants in those circumstances achieving an equal opportunity in life in their new country unless the Commonwealth provides the resources to get more teachers, particularly specially trained teachers, and better accommodation and better equipment in the schools.⁴³

Whitlam's support for ethnic and racial equality already indicated a shift from conceptions of equality as largely revolving around a wage earner who was not only male but predominantly white. It built on the Chifley government's support for postwar immigration, which had seen immigration move beyond the Anglo-Celtic to incorporate other Europeans, but with the significant difference that Whitlam was proud of his role in ending the White Australia policy that the Curtin and Chifley governments had still upheld.⁴⁴ Whitlam (and his immigration minister Al Grassby) also had a much less integrationist conception of the role of migrants in Australian society than the Curtin and Chifley governments, and of former immigration minister and Whitlam's predecessor as Labor leader, Arthur Calwell.⁴⁵

43 Ibid.

44 See Gough Whitlam, *The Whitlam Government, 1972–75* (Ringwood: Viking, 1985), 489–493. Although Chifley in due course supported self-government for Asian countries, see eg “We must not refuse Asia the right to self-government”, in Chifley, *Things Worth Fighting For*, 372–381. Nonetheless, he had made it clear that the solution to improving the standard of living of Asian people lay in improving the economic and social conditions of life in those countries, rather than in allowing people from those countries to migrate to Australia. Chifley claimed that he did not consider whites to be superior to Asians. However, he also justified the forced repatriation of Asians who had been offered sanctuary in Australia during the war. J B Chifley, ‘Report to the Nation’ broadcasts, reproduced in *Digest of Decisions and Announcements and Important Speeches by the Prime Minister (the Right Hon. J.B. Chifley)*, no. 144, 15 April 1949 to 12 June 1949. National Archives of Australia: B5459, 144, speech no. 38, 14–15.

45 See Macintyre, *Australia's Boldest Experiment*.

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Whitlam argued that migrants should be ‘able to be integrated – not assimilated – economically and socially. We do not want everybody to be the same as everybody else, but we do want everybody to fit into the community. That is the difference between assimilation and integration’.⁴⁶ It was a very different argument from Chifley’s endorsement of the White Australia policy. Chifley claimed that that policy had been instituted on economic rather than racial grounds (to avoid unscrupulous employers using cheap Asian labour to drive Australian wages down). Indeed he argued that ‘one of the earliest national ideals of Australia was to establish a nation of high living standards and equal opportunity for all’ and the only way to do this was to prevent the potential exploitation of cheap Asian labour – a policy he claimed was instituted ‘for economic, not racial’ reasons.⁴⁷ Nonetheless, despite such claims, he also argued that ‘this country was, and is aware, that sooner or later, trouble and misery result when people of different races, living standards, cultures and historical backgrounds, live side by side in the same community’.⁴⁸

Whitlam’s view was diametrically opposed to that position, emphasising the importance of removing any forms of racial discrimination and ensuring racial equality:

One of the crucial ways in which we must improve our global reputation is to apply our aspirations for equality at home to our relations with the peoples of the world as a whole. Just as we have embarked on a determined campaign to restore the

46 Whitlam’s speech at the Opening Ceremony of the Citizenship Convention, Canberra, 18 January 1966, accessed 14 September 2015, http://cem.uws.edu.au/R/IY3CF5VNQ9DR939QN3SEALEF3TYHGV3GK326IIX1LENPD5HTHT-00425?func=results&set_entry=000002&set_number=000060&base=GEN01-EGW01.

47 Chifley, ‘Report to the Nation’ broadcasts, speech no. 38, 14.

48 Ibid.

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Australian Aborigines to their rightful place in Australian society, so we have an obligation to remove methodically from Australia's laws and practices all racially discriminatory provisions and from international activities any hint or suggestion that we favour policies, decrees or resolutions that seek to differentiate between peoples on the basis of the colour of their skin. As an island nation of predominantly European inhabitants situated on the edge of Asia, we cannot afford the stigma of racialism.⁴⁹

(Significantly, the Whitlam government's Racial Discrimination Act was subsequently to play a major role in the first Mabo judgement, by 'underpinning native title').⁵⁰

As already indicated, Whitlam believed that the foundation for building a racially diverse, non-discriminatory society rested on ending discrimination against, and improving the standard of living of, Indigenous Australians.

The Labor Government has many plans and many ambitions for the Australian people. But if there is one ambition we place above all others, if there is one achievement for which I hope we will be remembered, if there is one cause for which I hope future historians will salute us, it is this: That the Government I lead removed a stain from our national honour and gave justice and equality to the Aboriginal people.⁵¹

Whitlam's arguments here also marked a significant departure from the Curtin and Chifley governments on indigenous issues. The

49 E G Whitlam, *Commonwealth Parliamentary Debates*, House of Representatives, 24 May 1973: 2649.

50 See Tim Soutphommasane, 'The Whitlam Government and the Racial Discrimination Act,' Occasional Paper, Whitlam Legacy Series, Whitlam Institute, Western Sydney University, vol. 5 (March 2016), 7, accessed 5 May 2016, https://www.whitlam.org/__data/assets/pdf_file/0011/1044785/The_Whitlam_Government_and_the_Racial_Discriminatio_Act_Whitlam_Legacy_5.pdf

51 E G Whitlam, Speech at the Opening of a National Seminar on Aboriginal Arts, ANU, Canberra, 21 May 1973, 1, accessed 9 September 2015, <http://pmtranscripts.dpmc.gov.au/sites/default/files/original/00002932.pdf>.

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failed 1944 fourteen powers referendum had included an extension of federal jurisdiction over Aboriginal people.⁵² Nonetheless as Stuart Macintyre argues, despite H C Coombs best efforts Aboriginal Australians ‘were barely noticed’ in plans for post-war reconstruction.⁵³ Indeed, Aboriginal people were often not eligible for new social security and welfare benefits that were introduced under complex, and often contradictory, policies that restricted benefits to those Aboriginal people who showed evidence that they were ‘developed’, in other words that they exhibited a significant degree of assimilation.⁵⁴

In other words, citizen identity had been conceived around a white Australian norm and values and Aboriginal Australians had to demonstrate their similarity to that norm to receive benefits. By contrast Whitlam argued that it was important that indigenous people retain their own identity as well as being fully-fledged members of Australian society.

My Government intends to restore to the Aboriginal people of Australia the power to make their own decisions about their way of life within the Australian community. We know that most Aboriginal Australians are proud of their heritage, of their long history and of the traditions and culture which have been handed down to them. We know that most of them, in all parts of Australia, want to preserve their identity as distinctive groups within an Australian society which respects and honours that identity.⁵⁵

52 Macintyre, *Australia's Boldest Experiment*, 311.

53 Ibid., 473.

54 See John Murphy, ‘Conditional Inclusion: Aborigines and Welfare Rights in Australia, 1900–47’, *Australian Historical Studies* 44, no. 2 (2013): 223–235.

55 Whitlam, Speech at the Opening of a National Seminar on Aboriginal Arts, 1.

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Whitlam also made it clear that his government's commitment to improving the position of Aboriginal people was based on a determination to ensure 'that the long record of injustice, repression, neglect, the record that has marked our treatment of the Aboriginal people for two centuries of white civilisation on this continent, will be brought to an end'.⁵⁶ It was definitely not just an attempt to improve Australia's reputation and image overseas given that 'We regard the Aboriginals' rights and dignity as more important than the white man's reputation'.⁵⁷ The Whitlam government's programme for tackling Indigenous disadvantage met with mixed success despite a substantial increase in funding and major advances being made in areas such as land rights, including handing back land to the Gurindgi people and introducing the first land rights bill to parliament (which failed to pass before the government was dismissed but influenced subsequent Fraser government legislation).⁵⁸ Nonetheless, despite the problems encountered, the above statements by Whitlam clearly involve a further decentering of the white citizen-subject. Furthermore, Whitlam was also decentering the construction of the worker as white and Anglo-Celtic, telling the Building Workers' Industrial Conference to remember all the government had 'done for migrants, who are such a significant proportion of your membership'.⁵⁹

In other words, here again, Whitlam wasn't just adding on extra people and issues to Labor's agenda, he was at least partially

56 Ibid.

57 Ibid.

58 See the analysis by Lorna Lippman, 'The Aborigines', in *From Whitlam to Fraser: Reform and Reaction in Australian Politics*, eds Allan Patience and Brian Head (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1979), 172–181.

59 E G Whitlam, Speech to the Annual Conference of the Building Workers' Industrial Union, Sydney, 5 August 1974, 17, accessed 9 September 2015, <http://pmtranscripts.dpmc.gov.au/sites/default/files/original/00003341.pdf>.

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reconceiving the identity of the citizen-subject whom Labor policies should be designed around.⁶⁰ Whitlam had therefore significantly expanded conceptions of equality beyond social democracy's traditional focus on the (white, male) working class. However, what were the implications of Whitlam's conception of 'positive equality' for the advancement of traditional working class interests via industrial relations agendas?

Industrial relations

Whitlam's aforementioned support for equal pay for women, along with his recognition that 'the majority of poor people in Australia are women, including mothers – many of them single or deserted mothers', reveals that his government was concerned to ensure adequate incomes for those constructed as disadvantaged.⁶¹ However, as problems of stagflation, with the combination of inflation and stagnation (including high rates of unemployment), began to undermine the Long Boom and the Keynesian certainties on which his government had come into office, some of his 'positive equality' arguments were increasingly used to urge wage restraint.⁶²

Whitlam had been aware of rising unemployment as an issue at the time of his 1972 policy speech – but claimed that economic planning

60 This was also reflected in the Whitlam government's ratification of major international human rights treaties. On the implications for human rights law in Australia, see further, Michael Kirby, 'Whitlam as Internationalist,' University of Western Sydney Whitlam Lecture, 25 February 2010, accessed 5 May 2016, https://www.whitlam.org/__data/assets/pdf_file/0010/123211/SPEECH_-_WHITLAM_LECTURE_-_25_FEBRUARY_2010.pdf.

61 E G Whitlam, Speech at the International Women's Day Reception, Melbourne, 8 March 1975, 3–4, accessed 9 September 2015, <http://pmtranscripts.dpmc.gov.au/sites/default/files/original/00003643.pdf>.

62 See E G Whitlam, *Commonwealth Parliamentary Debates*, House of Representatives, 12 November 1974, 3631–3632.

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in cooperation with business could tackle it by achieving growth rates of 6–7 per cent.⁶³ He was aware that inflation was a problem but thought that establishing a Prices Justification Tribunal would be able to tackle price rises and also lead to wage restraint and better cooperation between unions and industry given that workers would feel that it was not only employees whose income was being regulated. In Whitlam's words:

We will exert our powers against prices. We will establish a Prices Justification Tribunal not only because inflation will be the major economic problem facing Australia over the next three years but because industrial cooperation and good-will is being undermined by the conviction among employees that the price of labour alone is subject to regulation and restraint.⁶⁴

However, as his time in office progressed, Whitlam became increasingly concerned that wage rises were outpacing price rises by excessive amounts, thereby contributing to inflation. Whitlam argued that the fact that 'average minimum award rates have risen by 55% and average earnings by 45% over the past two years – while the cost of living, as measured by the CPI, increased by 32% in the same period', indicated that there had been a redistribution 'of the national wealth in favour of the majority'.⁶⁵ Similarly he claimed that there had been a 26% rise in real income for pensioners.⁶⁶ He therefore argued that the time had now come for employees to exercise wage restraint. Whitlam emphasised the interdependence of the government and private sector in terms of the need for adequate levels of economic

63 Gough Whitlam, 1972 Labor Election Policy Speech.

64 Ibid.

65 E G Whitlam, Prime Minister's Curtin Memorial Lecture, ANU, Canberra, 29 October 1975, 9, accessed 9 September 2015, <http://pmtranscripts.dpmc.gov.au/sites/default/files/original/00003943.pdf>.

66 Ibid., 9–10.

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growth to fund the government's programmes. Consequently there was a 'need to raise profitability in the private sector', and Whitlam cited his long history of supporting such a position.⁶⁷

Increasingly, Whitlam put forward arguments designed to reduce wage claims and counter inflation, marshalling the concept of positive equality to support wage restraint.⁶⁸

An increased wage alone is not going to ensure that a worker's children will receive a proper education. An increased wage will not guarantee that worker's family access to high quality medical and hospital care at a reasonable cost. An increased wage will not grant him adequate transport, roads, child-care facilities, recreation outlets and the like. It will not even necessarily guarantee him proper housing, particularly if he lives in a city with rampant inflation in land prices. The provision of adequate services and opportunities of this kind must depend on broad community action; and that means government action.⁶⁹

Whitlam went on to argue that that was precisely why his government had been directing its public spending towards ensuring that there were schools, teachers, health services, doctors and low income housing close to where people lived, especially in those suburbs where the provision of basic services had been ignored by successive conservative governments.⁷⁰

67 Whitlam, Address to the Sydney Chamber of Commerce, 1.

68 See E G Whitlam, *Commonwealth Parliamentary Debates*, House of Representatives, 12 November 1974: 3362; *Special Report on Australian Labor Party Conference, Terrigal, NSW, February 3-7 1975* (Canberra: International Public Relations Pty Ltd, 1975), 5-6.

69 E G Whitlam, Address to the Second National Convention of the Industrial Relations Society, Chevron Hotel, Surfers Paradise, 29 June 1974, 8, accessed 9 September 2015, <http://pmtranscripts.dpmc.gov.au/sites/default/files/original/00003308.pdf>.

70 Ibid.

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In short, as he had long argued, the key to reducing inequality lay in the provision of government services rather than in providing substantial wage increases.

Our policies and programs have been directed towards reducing and eventually eradicating inequalities in our society while at the same time maintaining a healthy pattern of efficient economic growth. At this point I would like particularly to emphasise our efforts to create a more equal society. The achievement of equality means much more than simply providing higher wages and salaries. It means providing a range of community services to satisfy the reasonable needs of all citizens and to create reasonable opportunities for all citizens. This in turn means the creation of the best community services that the country can afford. It is no coincidence that in our first 18 months in office we have concentrated so much of our efforts in the fields of education, health and urban and regional development⁷¹

Whitlam's conception of positive equality then, was being increasingly used as a bargaining chip to support wage restraint in an argument that actually prefigured Hawke and Keating's Accord strategy of providing a 'social wage' in partial lieu of wage increases.⁷² Ironically Hawke was President of the ACTU during the period of the Whitlam government, and Whitlam argued that one of the greatest failures of his government was its failure 'to persuade unions and their advocates before the arbitration tribunals that persons on awards were benefiting more from our upgrading of community services than they ever could from increases in their paypackets'.⁷³ However, Whitlam did at least argue for wage indexation to keep

71 Whitlam, Address to the Second National Convention of the Industrial Relations Society, 7.

72 See E G Whitlam, *Commonwealth Parliamentary Debates*, House of Representatives, 12 November 1974: 3362.

73 Whitlam, *The Whitlam Government*, 743.

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pace with inflation rather than, like the Hawke and Keating governments, eventually supporting real wage cuts.⁷⁴ Curtin and Chifley had also pursued industrial harmony and had been prepared to advocate wage restraint in the process however, unlike Whitlam, they did not formulate the arguments regarding community services being provided in lieu of wage increases quite as explicitly.⁷⁵

While many of those government and community services were highly beneficial ones that substantially improved peoples' quality of life, there was also a potential downside to such arguments. The focus increasingly shifted from the Labor Party's role being to provide employment and a better deal between labour and capital, to the focus being even more on providing equal opportunity *and a better deal between citizens and state provision*. Eventually such Labor arguments were to unintentionally fuel support for neoliberal arguments that the source of exploitation of ordinary people lay not in the labour market but in government ripping off ordinary taxpayers' money in order to support so-called elite, politically correct, special interests. The focus on education also fed into accusations of elitism. It is an argument that I have termed elsewhere, the 'state based' theory of exploitation.⁷⁶

It was also a neoliberal and socially conservative accusation that John Howard was only too happy to exploit against Paul Keating.⁷⁷

74 Whitlam, Address to the Second National Convention of the Industrial Relations Society, 14.

75 Johnson, *The Labor Legacy*, 30–35.

76 Carol Johnson, *Governing Change: From Keating to Howard*, revised ed. (Perth: Australian Scholarly Network, 2007), 180.

77 See eg John Howard, Leader of the Opposition, The Role of Government: A Modern Liberal Approach, Headland Speech, Parliament House, Canberra, June 1994, accessed 5 May 2016, <http://australianpolitics.com/1995/06/06/john-howard-headland-speech-role-of-govt.html>; John Howard, Leader of the Opposition, Politics and Patriotism: A Reflection on the National Identity Debate, Wednesday, 13 December 1995, Grand Hyatt Hotel, Melbourne, accessed 5 May 2016, <http://australianpolitics.com/1995/12/13/national-identity-howard-headland-speech.html>.

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Howard explicitly stated that the seeds of this development began in the Whitlam period.

The old left-right divide ... has been increasingly replaced by differences on environmental matters as well as on so-called socially progressive issues. This process was only just beginning when the Whitlam government came to office but has gathered pace since. In recent years it has placed a particular strain on the ALP, as it has exposed sharp divisions of opinion between its traditional blue-collar worker base, often quite socially conservative, and the new, inner-urban, tertiary-educated class that inhabits the socially progressive wing of the Labor Party.⁷⁸

Some subsequent Labor politicians at least partially endorsed Howard's depiction of a central dilemma for Labor. For example, former Rudd government Minister Lindsay Tanner also argued that there was an increasing split between suburban voters and inner-city tertiary-educated ones:

There is a core dilemma here which there is no solution for Labor – two fairly distinct constituencies that were comfortably in alliance from Gough Whitlam's time through to the early 90s have diverged for a range of reasons and Labor's ability to hold together those very different constituencies has just got harder and harder.⁷⁹

Conclusion

Arguments that Labor faces a split in the so-called Whitlam coalition between working class issues and progressive social movement equality issues have now become commonplace on both the left and

78 John Howard, 'The Architect of our Country as We Know It', Inquirer, *Weekend Australian*, 20–21 September 2014, 18. Excerpt from his book on Menzies.

79 George Megalogenis, "Tanner Breaks his Silence: Even I would have Lost my Seat to the Greens", *Australian*, 28 April 2011, 3.

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the right, as the comments cited from both Howard and Tanner above indicate. However, it is disputable how much that is due to demographic change and how much it is due to subsequent Labor governments failing to adequately defend a more inclusive Labor narrative from neoliberal attacks. Significantly, Whitlam's narrative of 'positive equality' had sought to meld together a coalition of electoral interests. It had also strongly opposed arguments that supporters of more progressive issues were elitist. For example, Whitlam did not see supporting gender or racial or ethnic equality as an issue that belonged to a tertiary-educated elite. On the contrary, he emphasised that the working class included women and migrants. Indeed, they were often among the most economically disadvantaged groups in Australian society.⁸⁰ Therefore in his view, such issues were not opposed to working class issues, they were part of them. Furthermore, in his view 'behind the pragmatism of the unions there is a deep idealism which is the ultimate source of our strength' including a belief in building 'a more just and decent society'.⁸¹ Consequently, Whitlam saw himself as extending traditional conceptions of equality in ways that were more genuinely inclusive of all Australians and would benefit traditional Labor voters. It has been argued here that, in the process, Whitlam was not just adding on extra people, he was (at least partially) reconceiving the identity of the citizen-subject whom the policies should be designed around. Nonetheless, there were potential tensions involved in a process in which community services

80 E G Whitlam, Speech to the ACTU Congress, Melbourne, 18 September 1975, 23, Australian Archives (NSW) CRS M 165, folder 3, also available at <http://cem.uws.edu.au>; Whitlam, Speech to the Building Workers' Industrial Union, 1, 15, 17.

81 Whitlam, Speech to the ACTU Congress, 23; Whitlam, Speech to the Building Workers' Industrial Union, 1-2.

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(for diverse groups) were offered in partial lieu of wage increases and in which a focus on educational equality of opportunity encouraged people to leave the working class, via upward social mobility, rather than constructing the working class as the iconic citizen-subject of social democracy.

Furthermore, the process of inclusion and incorporation was not complete. For example, there are numerous feminist critiques that note the limitations of Whitlam's policies in respect to women, as well as their genuine advances.⁸² Tensions and dilemmas remained. Indeed as Australia's economic problems worsened, it is noticeable that some projected expenditures on female-related services were among the first to be cut (such as childcare); the Whitlam government had not given sufficient concern to the impacts of tariff cuts on female dominated industries such as TCF (Textiles, Clothing, Footwear); the government's NEAT (national employment and training) scheme increasingly prioritised male unemployment instead of trying to open up opportunities for women.⁸³ Arguably community services primarily affecting women were also considered to be less important when trying to negotiate wage restraint with a male dominated union movement.⁸⁴ The Long Boom had given rise to conceptions that continued economic growth would fund a major expansion in the government's provision of community services. By the end of Whitlam's period in office, those certainties were being sorely tested.

82 Game and Pringle, 'Women and Class in Australia,' 114–115, 128; Sarah Dowse, 'The Women's Movement's Fandango with the State', in *Women, Social Welfare and the State*, ed. Bettina Cass and Cora Baldock (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1990), 206–210; Johnson, 'Whose Consensus', 94–96.

83 Draws on Dowse, Game and Pringle. See Johnson, 'Whose Consensus', 94–95.

84 Johnson, 'Whose Consensus', 96.

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In short, older agendas regarding the relationship between (male dominated) labour and capital therefore were arguably still prioritised when it came to the economic crunch given that the economic was still conceived in fairly conventional terms. Nonetheless one should not overlook the significance of the Whitlam government's attempts to reimagine the subject of Australian social democracy in more inclusive forms that went beyond the focus on the white, indeed predominantly Anglo-Celtic, male wage-earner head of household. Both Australia and the Australian Labor Party would never quite be the same again.