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AUTHORSHIP AND THE PUBLIC SPEECH

TOBY MILLER

Abstract: At one level, this paper is a fairly straightforward analysis of speeches about industry training made by two business people on behalf of the state. As such, it can be situated within a constellation of relations described by the following formations: relations between and within business and government; the role of non-statutory public advisory bodies; and the nexus of economy and training. At a second level, the paper may be read as an attempt to address the techniques of speech writing within the public service and how these resonate with "famous names" to produce authored — and authorised — documents. And at a third level, what I am seeking is to advocate the use of discourse analysis in the study of Australian public policy, by positioning the speeches within a set of structuring forms of knowledge. I want particularly to argue for the dominance of neoclassical economics as a key logic determining the terms of truth within such speeches. This will be maintained both through a reading of these specific texts and a discussion of the context within which they were produced, circulated and consumed.

This paper is concerned with three speeches which were given by Brian Pickett and Trevor Prescott, members of the now-defunct National Training Council (NTC), in 1985. The council existed to advise the federal government on labour force training policies and programs via a tripartite structure which incorporated representatives of capital, labour and the state. It has been succeeded by a more formalised and coordinated version of the same: the National Board of Employment, Education and Training has been established on a statutory footing (in between, an Australian Council on Employment and Training was temporarily constituted). The new body's inclusion of education is an important advance, of which more later.

In addition to his role as a member of the

NTC, Pickett was also on the Kirby Committee of Inquiry into Labour Market Programs. The Kirby Committee recommended that the federal government set up a new system of structured vocational preparation for jobs outside the trades, jobs not covered by the apprenticeship system or professional credentialism. All of these duties were against Pickett's backdrop as a personnel manager with Email Australia. Prescott, deputy chair of the NTC and chair of the Technical and Further Education (TAFE) Research and Development Centre, ran a successful car fleet maintenance service. Both men exemplified the multifaceted status of capital, working as they were not only for their own businesses, but also for the reproduction of particular forms of social relations by expressing a "business perspective" as "industry persons". This perspective was presented in both consultative roles (advising government through the council) and coopted neocorporatist ones (making public statements under the banner of tripartism).

To give these speeches a context will help to indicate that they derive from somewhere quite other than the individual experience of "industry persons". They must rather be situated within a complex of economic crises, a series of international recessions since 1974 which have produced inflation, unemployment, unstable financial markets and commodity prices, trade conflicts and balance of payments problems (Head 1988, pp. 5-6). During this period, Australia has become marginalised in the global economy because of its reliance on export commodities with small value-added components (Higgott 1987, p. 9). And interestingly, our economic crises of the 1980s

have seen a concentrated critique of the local education system, followed by an obsessive reliance on it, which is identical to public policy responses to the depressions of the 1890s and 1930s (Bessant 1988, p. 19).

The current crisis has produced a form of corporatism, laid claim to by both Fraser and Hawke over the last decade and a half, in the sense that successive governments have sought the input of organised labour and capital into the development of policy. This is not so much a system as a direction (best developed under the present federal government) to organise simultaneously certain tendencies which might otherwise occur only sequentially under a pure market: a decline in unemployment and inflation, an orderly restructuring of industry and an increase in investment (Head 1988, pp. 18, 23).

Prescott's speech to a "Printing Industry Forum: Training — Focus on the Future", like the other two under discussion here, was produced in the period immediately following the release of the Kirby Report and — significantly — the government's announcement of its intention to construct an Australian Traineeship System (ATS).

The talk begins by praising the printing industry as one which "has always adjusted effectively". This is immediately linked to a preparedness to invest in training (Prescott 1985a, p. 1). Whilst a different form of politics would not unify labour and capital as "industry", because of their differing interests and practices, this formation presumes an axiomatic and indisputable unity. Prescott proceeds to mount an at least paradoxical argument that endeavours to combine two *prima facie* incommensurate positions: that training can only be entered into because of its return to capital *via* increased accumulation, but that capital must have a sense of corporate responsibility which transcends the drive towards profit and acknowledges the needs of the individual undergoing training (pp. 2-3). He calls on employers to enunciate their requirements clearly to training providers in order to ensure relevance, particularly in the developing areas outside the trades (pp. 4-5). There is, in this sense, a recognition of the move towards consumption capitalism and away from

a materially productive industrial structure, but of course this kind of language is not employed. In keeping with Prescott's function as an enunciator/lobbyist of capital-inflected state policy, he provides the requisite advertisement for traineeships. They "are not just another labour market program. Rather, they herald an entirely new training system" (p. 8). Of course, this new system must be constituted within the logic of partnership, of industrial unity, which was mentioned above: "The responsibility for training and retraining must be shouldered jointly by all parties: governments, employers and employees should all play their part" (p. 10). A collaborative model of mutual interest and action (semi-planned and negotiated, semi-self-interested) is the implicit driving force of this logic. In particular, the claim that employees will benefit from the ATS, and should therefore contribute towards its cost, is an implicit rejection or ignorance of the possibilities of a labour theory of value (p. 11). "The three parties are partners in training, locked in a cycle of mutual need" (pp. 12-13). At the same time, Prescott acknowledges divisions within these three fractions and positions the TAFE system as a vendor to capital: "it is offering a service. That service must be attuned to what the marketplace decrees" (p. 12).

Pickett's speech, to a conference on the hardware industry, displays similar concerns. It describes the NTC as "bringing the partners in industry together" (Pickett 1985, p. 2). Tripartism "mirrors the responsibility for training that the social partners share" (p. 9). The emphasis is on the NTC as a forum that formalises what is already there. An implicit functionalist streak is already emerging from both the talks, premised on putatively mutual interests and desires. This mystifies the debates and material conflicts going on between and within the so-called "social partners". It makes monoliths of each and of the relationships between them.

Once more, training must be developed and delivered in the direction dictated by capital. So training should be "more relevant for the enterprise and the individual" (p. 5), but the "private sector is the leading edge of technological innovation. It is best placed to address the training needs which it generates"

(p. 6). The meaning of "industry", a term used throughout these talks, becomes clearer at this point: at the level of the power and legitimacy to make and enunciate decisions, "industry" means "capital". But when it comes to funding the process, this responsibility lies with the now-familiar "partners" (p. 9). As with Prescott's printing speech, Pickett proselytises on behalf of traineeships, because they promise reduced youth wages and an "adaptable workforce" (p. 12).

Prescott's second speech addresses a conference on "The Changing Context of TAFE". Introducing himself as "an industry person", he provides further clarification of the term, *via* an implicit distantiating of "industry" and "labour"; the latter is required to mould itself to "the needs and realities of the marketplace", i.e. business (Prescott 1985b, p. 3). He proceeds to acknowledge that equitable public policy is a national priority, "But as an industry person, I have to place the greatest emphasis on efficiency" (p. 5).

He asserts that "TAFE needs to see industry as a consumer to be wooed and satisfied, not a captive user" (p. 6), is critical of "the education moguls" (p. 4) and maintains that "Overly academic approaches, with the attendant luxuries of time and minimal consequent responsibility, are inappropriate" (pp. 6-7). Similarly, "we must beware any attempt to pad out skills training courses with pseudo-relevant educational components" (p. 11). Of course, the way to avoid this is through "consumer sovereignty", "a fee-for-service method which would encourage greater responsiveness, putting TAFE more clearly in the marketplace" (p. 21). This signifies opposition to recurrent funding by the state for TAFE, in favour of a demand-driven structure. (The Department of Employment and Industrial Relations — DEIR — was pushing this line at the time and giving grants to business with which to purchase TAFE courses of its choice.) It also suggests that "civics" or "person-building" — the creation of a socially responsible citizen — is either irrelevant or will occur naturally through learning to be a docile worker. Skills are abilities tailored to jobs, and skills must be the basis of learning.

I shall proceed shortly to locate these

speeches within a range of other concerns: economic context, corporatism, neoclassical economics and struggles over the relationship between education and training. But before doing so, I want to talk about the status of the speeches as texts, as objects of study, and the ways in which ideas of authorship can inform our knowledge about those texts. For authorship (locating responsibility for the text in the name appearing on its cover) tends to downgrade other forces shaping it. We are pushed to ignore the role of discourse, genre, publisher, readership and context. A concentration on authorship — and authorial intention in particular — says that the author forms a text individually and that the key (in fact the sole) "real" meaning of that text is contained in the author's imagination. Consequently, it is our task as readers to decipher what the author "really" meant. In the case of Prescott and Pickett, their pronouncements claim a number of disparate legitimising forces. As members of the NTC, they are disinterested units speaking in the national interest. Contradictorily, as "industry people" they claim personal experience and enlightened self-interest/possessive individualism as generators of authenticity. Yet the category "author" is laden with problems (see Barthes 1984, Foucault 1986).

In what sense did Pickett or Prescott "write" these texts? They were, of course, based on the product of the NTC's Secretariat, an arm of DEIR. As such, they represent a negotiated situation, a set of meanings produced out of conflicts between different departments and forms of knowledge. Middle-ranking bureaucrats created the content for these speeches, borrowing from a departmental rhetoric which both informed and derived from the council's logic on training matters. In reality, the NTC Secretariat published an "industry" person's "thoughts", following a departmental approval process. Pickett and Prescott would certainly have read drafts prior to accepting their speeches, and may indeed have proposed certain amendments. It would be misleading to imply that they were duped by public servants, that they either did not understand or did not concur with the positions which they enunciated. But it is similarly

misleading for them to be positioned as "authors", because this denies the actual process of production. Since the revelation that Larry Speakes invented "quotations" from Ronald Reagan, there should be greater public awareness of the dangers inherent in denying this kind of constructed authorship. The *Washington Post* (1988) was moved by that incident to editorialise thus: "For years, speeches that were never given were made to seem in the Congressional So-Called Record as if they had been. Ghosts write reams of prose purported to have originated with someone else". This matters. It matters because it is a process of mystification that distorts the role of bureaucracy in enunciating and creating a free-market doctrine (if not in authorising it). The anti-educationalist, *laissez-faire* rhetoric appearing under the names of Pickett and Prescott is part of a discursive system, a network of power, that has real material effects on education policies, programs and administrative arrangements, premised in part on incorporating a particular form of doctrine in public statements as tools of circulation and naturalisation. Suffice it to say that Prescott's speech was well-received at the printing industry symposium ("it's realistic", "he knows about the real world of business"). Conversely, a speech delivered at the same forum by a DEIR bureaucrat with a PhD was derogated ("not in the real world in Canberra", "he's too academic"). Both speeches were based on contributions by the same officer of DEIR/NTC; and written — as I indicate below — within a particular form of neoclassical discourse.

The NTC began before this period, but its charter reflects the type of corporatism outlined above, combined with a non-conflictual functionalist analysis referred to earlier. The council advised the federal government on developing, operating, promoting and funding training, its claim to legitimacy and expertise residing in its status as "a partnership" of unions, business and government (NTC 1985, p. iii). The list of full and deputy members of the council from 1982 to 1984 decomposes and informs this rhetoric: six representatives of small to medium-scale business enterprises, six business bureaucrats, four trade union

bureaucrats, three state bureaucrats, six federal bureaucrats and two TAFE bureaucrats. In terms of "grass-roots" experience of delivering, receiving and paying for training, such people are spectacularly underqualified (NTC 1985, pp. viii-x). They perform representational functions, standing for aggregated groups and peak bodies. Despite claims to being "an independent, tripartite, national body" (p. 54), the council effectively functioned to enunciate DEIR's free-market philosophy, favouring "competency-based training as opposed to time-serving" that would signal the needs of consumers to providers (pp. 57, 58). Similar notions of representativeness, partnership and cost-sharing in training also informed the planning of the Kirby Committee (CILMP 1985, pp. 110, 201). (This is, of course, mutual responsibility at the level of rhetoric. In 1987-88, the federal government provided \$670 million towards training, without any compulsory contribution by employers: Greenlees 1988.)

It is necessary to consider the economic doctrines which informed this rhetoric. The backdrop is of DEIR using its relationship with employers to articulate a market-oriented opposition to the civics curriculum favoured by the Department of Education and academic educationalists.

Neoclassical economics here functions as a discursive tactic. Its logical foundation rests on the basic unit of the person. This unit is constructed as a Benthamite utilitarian that operates from self-interest, a rational maximiser whose actions spread from the individual to all economic organisations, making for a long-term equilibrium between supply and demand that forms a perfect market. As Borins has recently noted in the Canadian context, "the notion of self-interested utility-maximising rational choice... has vigorously entered general discourse, even if it goes by other names" (Borins 1988, p. 13). I want to argue here that the prominence of this logic, its status as "common sense", is to be understood not by its claim to an absolute truth, but to the specific conditions which have led to this mode of producing and circulating knowledge (Burton & Carlen 1979, p. 19). What is needed here is an appreciation of "technologies of representation" (McHoul 1987, p. 2). Such an

appreciation encourages us to look at the particular truth-effect of particular axioms and practices; in other words, to see that the realism of a particular form of knowledge will always be constituted within its own rules of evidence and method. Neoclassical economics now becomes a narrative method, to be considered not merely by its own rules (i.e. the theoretical rigour of an imagined market) but also by other rules (e.g. rules which render the human subject a possible member of a class, a gender or an ethnic group before it is a consumer).

As a first step, we need to consider the reification and anthropomorphisation of "the economy". Historically, popular public references to "the economy" as a subject, with needs and desires, derive from the Great Depression (Emmison 1983, p. 140). Attention was drawn away from discussing relations between producers and consumers of goods (an industrial relations discourse of the popular newspapers which was in fact dissonant with conventional economics) and onto relations between different material products of labour, with a similar shift from use-value to exchange-value. The discursive commodities "the economy" and "the market", themselves now valorised signs, became transformed into agents with their own needs (Emmison pp. 144-5). With the crisis of the 1930s and the popularisation of Keynes, "the economy" entered into popular knowledge.

Keynesianism was discredited in the 1970s, supplanted as a dominant discourse first by monetarism and then by neoclassical economics. The latter "asserts that *market* forces typically unleash growth, innovation and efficiency, whereas *governmental* regulations and expenditures impede growth, stifle productivity and entrepreneurship and generate inefficiencies in both the private and public sectors" (Head 1988, p. 2). There are echoes here of the Pickett insistence on the private sector as the epicentre of innovation, a product of competition. But Pickett and his "real author" were following on from the conversion of a whole range of professional economists in universities, governments, banks etc. (A recent study of 215 members of the federal government's Senior Executive Service indicates the currency of this logic: 42% favour less state

provision of services and "more individual initiative" in the economy and 52% support deregulation of the labour market: Pusey 1988, p. 21).

Milgate and Eatwell maintain that economic theory is frequently constitutive of political and popular discourses, rather than the obverse (1988, p. 215). And it is clearly the case that entering into the logics of the imaginary market manufactures its own particular rules of what can and cannot be said. It is interesting to note the comments of the 1987 Nobel Laureate in Economics, Robert Solow, in response to criticism of his practice of parodying the neoclassical school instead of debating it on "technical" grounds: "Suppose someone sits down where you are sitting right now and announces that he is Napoleon Bonaparte. The last thing I want to do with him is to get involved in a discussion of cavalry tactics at the battle of Austerlitz... Now... [the neoclassicists] like nothing better than to get drawn into technical discussions because you have tacitly gone along with their fundamental assumptions" (E. Marshall, 1988, pp. 8-9). In other words, a "respected" economist is simply not in the same world of language as these people; but their doctrine is nevertheless applied as a revealed truth, not a contested logic, both by most professional economists in Australia and in the discourse of the speeches under review. The dominance of market knowledges is such that speech-writers and journalists conventionally query trade union power, but not big business power; that they propose reductions in government activity and neglect the positive role that might be played by increases in state services (Maddox & Hagan 1987, p. 34).

The executive director of the New Zealand Business Roundtable and a former officer of Australia's Industries Assistance Commission knows that Keynesianism is not a theory because it is tied to "the circumstances of the 1930s" (i.e. it is anchored in material history). He also knows that unfettered markets lead to social equality and that "the first duty of the economist-adviser is to be a seeker of truth", "increasing knowledge" and correcting "wrong ideas", "errors" and "mistakes" (Kerr 1988, pp. 2, 10, 12, 14). Similarly, Australian

Statistician and ex-Secretary of the Department of Finance, Ian Castles, fancies "scientific economics" (Castles 1987, p. 44). The claim is to an absolute, transcendental, technical truth, with no history and no politics either to its object of study or to itself as a regime of knowledge.

The dominance of neoclassicism resulted from a gradual and contested shift within a number of institutions from Keynesianism, as indicated above. The Commonwealth Treasury has been a key point of articulation for dogmas transmitted at university, ensuring a gradual spread of interest in relative prices as determinants in the allocation of resources (Whitwell 1987, pp. 9, 11). The Whitlam Government was a key moment in the spread of economists through other government departments, a trend which has developed since (Warhurst 1982, pp. 4-5).

Castles is very keen to indicate the disinterested practices of bureaucratic economists in his protests that the Treasury has not been run by people from ruling class backgrounds (1987, pp. 39-40). But the survey which I alluded to earlier demonstrates a close correlation between ruling class background and opposition to state participation in the economy (and *vice versa*). Senior officers of the Treasury were four times more likely to have attended expensive fee-paying schools than representatives of other departments surveyed. And the spread of neoclassical economics is indicated by the fact that 54% of the entire group surveyed had degrees in economics, business or accounting (Pusey 1988, p. 22). There is precious little room for alternative paradigms here. It is significant that *Australian Business* has reported this survey's findings about support for the market but ignored its data on class (Davis 1988, p. 125).

Proponents of neoclassical "science" neglect the fact that their faith in unfettered markets is based on metaphysics rather than history, because no such total market has ever existed (Higgott 1987, pp. 18-19). In particular, the data supporting notions of rational calculating actors and entities are thin on the ground (Borins 1988, p. 24). Of course, there remain differences within and between different

fractions of departments (Painter & Carey 1979, p. 11). As representatives of fractions of capital with different interests (for example, farmers and manufacturers argue over tariffs) it could hardly be otherwise. But the key point here is the overall rhetorical effect of a broad market logic on instruments for popularising neoclassical economics, as in the speeches under review.

This has been especially crucial in discursive distinctions between "education" and "training" and the struggles between their institutional bearers. I have already shown how the NTC fought a battle for other public sector training bodies to offer courses in line with the requirements of business, rather than any concentration on a core curriculum dedicated to such concepts as personal development, social responsibility, or generalised pedagogic notions of citizen-building. The Kirby Committee did "not consider it useful to make a distinction between education and training" (CILMP 1985, p. 49).

Such positions inform the entire shift in power relations between the Canberra bureaucracy and actual deliverers of post-secondary and tertiary education services. The demise of the Commonwealth Tertiary Education Commission (CTEC), announced in late 1987, resulted from the pressure from DEIR and others *via* arguments founded on the same premises as Kirby's. Just as funds that DEIR gave to business to purchase courses from TAFE had increased from \$0.6m in 1981 to \$12.1m in 1984, so lines of force were being redrawn discursively and administratively. CTEC was effectively excluded from providing a broad social perspective to the development of traineeships. DEIR "advocated a narrow job-specific approach and had a reputation for regarding students as 'units of labour'" (N. Marshall 1988, p. 26).

It may well have used NTC vocalists in just the same way, as units of labour enunciating the interests of capital within a universalist discourse of "science". The precise significance of such speeches is twofold. In the first place, they illustrate broader theoretical and public policy trends to do with economic and corporatist fashions. And secondly, they are a method of popularising a dogma without the

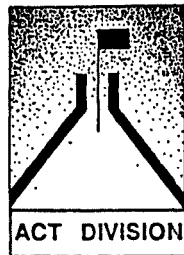
attendant negativity of any association with the bureaucracy or academia, lending a valuable service towards populist notions of the market in general and the need for business-oriented

training in particular. Clearly, the origins of these speeches lay in DEIR distillations of neoclassicism, not in the names that "authorised" them.

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