INTRODUCTION: A DISSIDENT LIBERAL—A PRINCIPLED POLITICAL CAREER

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Introducing Peter Baume’s Political Writings and Selected Speeches (including his unpublished diaries)

Peter Erne Baume MD, AC, served in the Australian Senate from August 1974 until January 1991, representing the people of New South Wales as one of their initially 10 and then 12 senators. As a member of the Liberal Party, Baume was a dissident liberal, very much his own man, who often baulked at toeing the party line, and was not afraid of crossing the floor against his party colleagues. He was a highbrow classical intellectual of Jewish faith with professional training in medicine. He tended not to suffer fools gladly but equally was not elitist or aloof in his interactions with others and could be tolerant and empathetic in his demeanour. Like Max Weber, he regarded politics as a vocation, a special calling for those committed to serving the public interest throughout their lives;¹ and yet when he came to serve in the legislature and experienced the rough and tumble of political life he often despaired at the lack of principles, vision or even basic understanding of many of his party colleagues. He resented other politicians who ostensibly posed as leaders of the community yet who adopted positions on public policy based on next to no information and were simply prejudicial in making their minds up on issues of national importance (at one time referring

¹ See Baume (2000); and his speech later in this volume entitled ‘Four Careers’.
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to them as the ‘fat arses’ of the political system), Baume was in many ways ahead of his time but drew his inspiration from an earlier heyday of social liberalism. As a humanist, he was prepared publicly to champion unpopular causes or fight for issues that were seen as marginal but would become mainstream a generation later. But he was never solely the token bleeding heart; he could just as easily advocate tough issues that were unpalatable to the body politic, such as the need to ration increasingly expensive health services and begin a dialogue with the community about how rationing would be implemented.

He subsequently recalled, looking back on his career, that many of his views were ‘heterodox’ and that people ‘have not understood’ that he had ‘been a bit of a “Cassandra”’—a denigrated seer with the power of prophecy in politics. But some of his closest colleagues, like Steele Hall, went further and argued that people like Peter Baume found it hard to be in politics, and to live within its rigours and strictures.

Baume’s political career began when he was suddenly catapulted into the constitutional crisis of 1975; it was a daunting initiation and a baptism of fire for the professional idealist. He entered Parliament as a new senator after the double-dissolution general election of May 1974 forced on the Whitlam Labor Government by an obstructionist, hostile Senate. With increasing personal misgivings, he witnessed the traumatic events of the blocking of Supply in 1975, which led to the sacking of the Whitlam Government and the installation of a caretaker government led by Malcolm Fraser. As a new Opposition backbencher, he was not a major player in the unfolding crisis but neither was he an innocent bystander; he was an active participant who did not broadcast his reservations. Like the other ‘small-l’ Liberal senators in parliament at the time, he disagreed with the tactics but went along with the strategy of displacing a recently re-elected government. He then spent seven years in government with the Coalition, from 1975 to 1983, becoming sequentially a short-term minister in the portfolios of Aboriginal affairs, health, and education, serving a combined total of just two-and-a-half years in the ministry. For a man of many talents, his ministerial appointments were all too brief to make any lasting impact or legacy. After that, he spent a further seven years in opposition during the Labor era, under Prime Minister Bob Hawke, watching the Government’s economic reforms but mainly witnessing with increasing discontent the growing neoliberal radicalisation of his own side of politics. He became increasingly disillusioned with politics in general and especially the right-turn in the Federal Liberal Party, and in September 1990 he announced to the Senate that he would resign his seat in January 1991. He spent his post-political career as a professor of community medicine in New South Wales and was active in a number of health-related

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3 See Khadra (2010: 192).
Peter Baume was born in January 1935 and enjoyed a relatively privileged upbringing in Sydney’s Northern Beaches. Of German–Jewish descent, his family has a long involvement and interest in politics. His grandfather, Frederick Baume, a lawyer by profession, was born in Dunedin, New Zealand. He served in the New Zealand Parliament, representing the progressive Liberal Party in the seat of Auckland from 1902 until his death in 1910. The New Zealand Liberal Party was a reformist ‘social liberal’ party interested in equality, public education and ameliorative social policies. Peter’s grandmother Rosetta was also a community activist and social campaigner. She established the Auckland Civic League in 1913, and was an early suffragette who stood for Parliament—the first to do so in New Zealand. A distant uncle named John Jacob Cohen was Speaker of the Legislative Assembly in New South Wales. Peter’s uncle Eric Baume (also named Frederick) was a prominent Sydney journalist, editor, broadcaster and author, who had a fascination with the proto-fascist New Guard movement in the 1930s. After Peter’s entry into politics, he was followed by his cousin, Michael Baume, who was Member for Macarthur in New South Wales and then became a federal senator from 1975 to 1983 as the Member for Macarthur and as a NSW senator from 1985 to 1996.

Peter Baume’s education and early career were devoted principally to medicine, attaining his initial qualifications from the University of Sydney, before further study in Sydney, the United Kingdom and the United States. In 1969 he received a Doctor of Medicine (MD) from the University of Sydney. He turned his attention to health policy issues and began a more active involvement in public life in the early 1970s, especially crystallised around the public health policies of the Whitlam Government and the introduction of Medibank. Having joined the Liberal Party in 1971, he initially stood for preselection in 1972 in the federal seat of Berowra (a northern suburb of Sydney, later supposedly one of Sydney’s most ‘bogan’ regions). Baume ultimately lost the contest (for which he was later thankful), along with other future luminaries of his generation, John Howard and Ian Macphee. Yet, the contest had whetted Baume’s appetite for politics and gained him the attention of John Carrick, the General Secretary of the NSW Branch of the Liberal Party. Carrick encouraged Baume to consider a political career in the Senate instead of in the lower house. Accordingly, Baume stood for preselection for the Liberal Party in New South Wales and was elected as a senator for that state at the double-dissolution election of 1974, winning the last spot on the list of elected senators, but only after waiting for weeks for counting.

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and preference allocation to confirm the final place. His maiden speech was more forgettable than a memorable pièce de résistance or work of artistic merit; it was laced with pure political partisanship, lambasting the performance of the Whitlam Government, which he charged with failing to look after the little man. He championed the power of the Senate to supervise lower house governments, complained about increasing unemployment, housing affordability and defence capabilities, and argued that the Coalition had a strong record on social welfare while indicating he opposed Medibank as a universal health insurance system. This was in striking contrast with his valedictory speech at the end of 1990, where his emphasis was on the endurance of the Senate as an institution in contrast with the fleeting presence of individual senators.

His first year in federal politics in 1974–75 was truly tumultuous. He watched as the Whitlam Government imploded and was finally dismissed, unable to secure passage of its Budget through the Senate. As a new senator, Baume seemed slow to realise the consequences of what was going on and that long-standing conventions were being broken for short-term opportunism. As his essay on the 1975 crisis reveals (which is part narrative diary and part contemporaneous reflection), he remained a bemused onlooker to the dramatic events of 1974–75, but along with his Coalition colleagues in the Senate he possessed a crucial vote. It was often reported that Baume was one of the ‘wavering senators’ who were looking to break ranks and allow the Supply Bills to pass, but while he had sincere misgivings, his resolve hardened during the crisis, especially after it was revealed that the mineral and energy minister Rex Connor had misled Parliament. Others who were reputedly wavering during late 1975 included Don Jessop, Kathryn Martin and Alan Missen.

Baume noted that during those terrible months of the second half of 1975, he kept a daily diary, recording his observations and views, and these notes then became the basis of his essay on the Dismissal contained in this monograph. He insists that these diary accounts were contemporaneous: there was no rewriting of history, no revisionism, no hagiography, no tempering of the record with the wisdom of hindsight. His primary document gives, among other things, an account of a newly elected if relatively unimportant backbench senator caught up in affairs of great moment.

His initial prominence in Federal Parliament came as a result of his deep interest in social policy issues and the importance of effective parliamentary scrutiny. He chaired the Senate Standing Committee on Social Welfare and produced a major report on the growing consumption of illicit drugs, called Drug Problems in Australia: An intoxicated society? (1977). He followed this with a pioneering study into the paucity of policy evaluation in government programs and the failure to report outputs or achievements to the Parliament. His two-volume report entitled Through a Glass Darkly: Evaluation in Australian health and welfare
services (1979) became an important milestone in the encouragement of better reporting of program performance by government agencies. At the time, Baume was aghast that Commonwealth agencies could secure budgetary resources for their intended programs but not report on progress and achievements, or evaluate the efficiency and effectiveness of their activities. Many senior public servants interested in better public policy outcomes welcomed his report as a wake-up call to the political executive to focus on results (not on how much inputs they expended) and take program evaluation seriously. He won many plaudits for his insistence on what now would be called evidence-based policy—again acting as a harbinger of future predispositions.

With the Fraser Government already enjoying the services of two ministers in the Senate from New South Wales (Senator Bob Cotton and Senator John Carrick, later Sir John), Baume’s progression into the ministry was slowed. Serving an apprenticeship as deputy senate whip from October 1977 and then government whip from February 1978 until the 1980 election, Baume was promoted to the front bench as an outer minister responsible for Aboriginal affairs. Life as a minister was hectic but not quite Hobbesian (‘solitary, poor, nasty, brutish and short’)—not least because he spent relatively little time in situ in three different portfolios. He served for just 19 months as Aboriginal affairs minister, three weeks as health minister in 1982 (but then a further three months more as acting minister after the dismissal of Michael Mackellar), and finally 11 months as education minister. When given the choice by Fraser between the portfolios of health and education in 1982, Baume quickly chose the latter, but his tenure was abruptly ended when the Fraser Government was defeated at the snap election of March 1983. Only in the last two portfolios was he a member of Fraser’s Cabinet, for approximately 12 months.

It was no accident that Fraser selected Peter Baume as his Minister for the Interests of Indigenous Australians. Baume was part of a key group within the Fraser Government advocating for the Government’s human rights agenda. As Fraser’s Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, Baume took up what was at the time a fringe issue in his party, arguing that a separate policy for Aboriginal people would benefit them in terms of social policy and human welfare. Baume was also tasked with formulating a long-overdue response to the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs’ report Aboriginal Health (1979) on the poor state of Aboriginal health in Australia. The task was a challenge for Baume, having to balance the states’ rights mantra of the Liberal Party with the low-priority status given to Indigenous affairs. Baume’s solution to maintain much of the existing status quo of cooperative federalism, with the states retaining responsibility for running Indigenous health services, was contentious as it disappointed advocates who had wanted a greater federal role. Yet there were victories: Baume secured the increased participation of Aboriginal
people in the design, delivery and evaluation of Indigenous health programs and a 15.3 per cent increase in funding for the Aboriginal affairs portfolio. During Baume’s time as minister, all Federal Government agencies adopted an administrative definition of Aboriginality based on descent, self-identification and community recognition.

Scandals claimed the ministerial careers of Michael Mackellar (Minister for Health) in the ‘colour television’ scandal and later John Moore, as the responsible Minister for Customs, who did not follow procedure to investigate his fellow minister and seemingly covered it up. As a result of these departures, Baume was sworn in first as health minister and then as education minister—both positions representing rapid promotions from his initial appointment. Baume’s promotions to health and education also saw his elevation into the Cabinet. As education minister, he also courted controversy. Baume took on the vexed question of education funding for non-government schools—known then as ‘state aid’. Baume promised to increase funding by 7 per cent for private schools in 1982 and a further 2.5 per cent in 1983. Poor private schools, mostly Catholic, were the beneficiary of these increases, which brought their funding base up to 40 per cent of a government school’s standard costs. Although he did not remain long in any of his ministerial positions, he was nevertheless passionate about the issues in his three portfolios.

On losing office, Baume continued as the Shadow Minister for Education and Youth. He held this position until December 1984 when he was sidelined by Andrew Peacock, and given carriage of the status of women portfolio. After the surprise leadership change in 1985, the new opposition leader John Howard added community services to Baume’s existing responsibility for the status of women. Baume subsequently came to believe that Howard knew that he had not voted for him in the leadership ballot, but that the new leader wanted an articulate liberal voice in the Shadow Cabinet; Howard also later called on the Liberal Party to re-endorse Baume at his subsequent preselection. Against the wishes of many of his colleagues, Baume supported widening the coverage of equal employment opportunity (EEO) legislation. After fighting with his conservative colleagues on the issue, he resigned from the Shadow Cabinet on a point of principle (collective solidarity) on 26 March 1987, a month before the crucial vote on the legislation. He then duly crossed the floor of the Senate in April 1987 to vote with the Labor Government on a bill to extend EEO to Commonwealth statutory authorities—extending its reach into the wider public sector, a stance that won him many plaudits from women and social reformers.\(^5\)

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Once he resigned from the Shadow Cabinet, Baume was never to return and would spend the next four years again on the Opposition backbench (although he was offered a lower-level appointment by the next leader, John Hewson, in 1990, but by that time he had had enough and refused). By then he was becoming seriously disaffected with the ‘increasingly dominant radical conservatism of others’ in his party—especially the Howard backers and neoliberal ‘Dries’. Two of his close parliamentary colleagues, Ian Macphee and Chris Puplick, had by then been ousted from Parliament—Macphee in a bitter preselection fight against the New Right’s David Kemp, and Puplick lost his Senate seat for a second time at the 1990 election. Baume spent the final years in Parliament as an increasingly marginalised dissident within his own party. With little committee work to occupy him, he chose to join two parliamentary groups—one a liaison group for the prevention and treatment of AIDS, and a second championing the international work of Amnesty International. His work on AIDS with Neal Blewett and the then shadow minister Peter Shack fought against the rise of a scare campaign around AIDS both publicly and within his own party. The result was a bipartisan consensus that resulted in timely proactive interventions and mobilised a massive public awareness campaign, especially in the gay community. As a result of Baume’s and others’ work across the political divide, Australia was one of the few countries where AIDS did not become a partisan issue, which significantly improved patient outcomes and the overall public health of Australia. In recognition of his work, Baume was made a life governor of the Kirby Institute of the University of New South Wales in 2014, together with Neal Blewett.

Nevertheless, by 1990 Baume had made the decision to move on; and in a brief personal statement, he notified the Senate on 19 September 1990 that he would resign in the near future as he had been appointed as professor and head of the Department of Community Medicine at the University of New South Wales. His resignation took effect from 28 January 1991. While a professor at the University of New South Wales, he became the tenth Chancellor of The Australian National University in 1994, a position he held until 2005, when impaired hearing forced him to resign.

Becoming a Conviction Politician: Assembling social liberal principles and ideas

Peter Baume began his formal career in politics to do some good for his fellow citizens, not as an ideological protagonist or a conviction politician. He was a moderate Liberal with a rationalist bent and a policy interest in health and medical matters. Gradually, his parliamentary career and the party machinations
he experienced forged a more crusading politician to emerge and sharpened his principled positions. He was also influenced by other progressive voices in Parliament and among his close circles—for instance, his fellow moderate Liberal Forum members with whom he shared an abiding commitment, and from Labor’s side mentioning that Neal Blewett was particularly influential in Baume’s own stance on the decriminalisation of marijuana. By the early 1980s, his thinking was changing and becoming more nuanced, if at times unpredictable. He developed a social conscience and believed in collective responsibilities, and committed himself to helping those in less fortunate circumstances than others. Baume emerged as a ‘small-l’ liberal or liberal humanist, extolling the virtues of social liberalism—à la J.S. Mill, L.T. Hobhouse, T.H. Green and J.A. Hobson.\(^6\) In taking this position, he readily distanced himself from the Classical Liberals—the earlier liberal tradition associated with John Locke and Tom Paine that placed personal freedoms and private property over other considerations—and from the newly emerging neoliberalism drawing on Ayn Rand, Frederick von Hayek and Milton Friedman, and epitomised in the governments of Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan. He felt there was an important role for government in modern societies, not simply enforcing codes of law and order but also in building a civilising culture in the social order and developing human capital with investments in education for the benefit of future generations.

Social liberalism for Baume was nuanced and flexible. It would often seem a grab bag of divergent contentious ideas, but was a platform that somehow made sense and informed his stances on divisive contemporary issues. Along with a handful of like-minded colleagues in the Parliament, he looked to his normative values and ethics to shape his opinions and provide some coherency to his positions on contentious social issues; and he was not afraid to speak out against the powerful, whether in society or in his own party. With the benefit of hindsight, it is clear that he was often more convinced of what he was against than what he was for, and many of his heterodox speeches begin from this premise. He made principled defences of refugees and asylum-seekers, Aborigines, gay people and AIDS sufferers, drug-users, the seriously ill or infirm, disaffected youth and the aged. Many of these marginal groups he thought of as victims of prejudice, discrimination, disadvantage, neglect, or all of the above. Accordingly, he saw his role was to speak up for the ‘little man’ who was ground down by the system. He also began to publicly champion some celebrated issues such as voluntary euthanasia, Aboriginal health, racism, drug liberalisation and, later, a non-discriminatory immigration policy. Conversely, he was not afraid to argue for collective rights against individuals who have transgressed, as in the case of his championing of war crimes legislation and exposing the infiltration of former Nazis into Australian society.

\(^6\) Sawer (2003).
In policy development, he preferred a Burkean orderly progression rather than radical shifts driven by ideology. Occasionally, he expressed some essentially libertarian sentiments about the sanctity of the freedom to make personal decisions and choices, and not be ruled by an overly regulatory ‘big brother state’. His support for drug law reform was another libertarian stance—unusual for a member of the medical profession. He was no economic rationalist but could contemplate controversial economic issues, as with his advocacy for rationing health services, prioritising care and his critique of overservicing by the health industry.

Baume’s most important contributions to public policy debates were his unconventional and at times maverick opinions given in a series of important speeches—self-composed and thoughtfully crafted and delivered mostly in the early to mid-1980s. He was a major dissident voice prepared to defend unpopular or controversial causes largely to sympathetic audiences, knowing but not actually caring that the national media and his conservative opponents would note his contrary opinions. In this collection, we have selected and included his most important speeches under three headings: his political philosophies and conviction-based adherence to ‘small-l’ social liberalism; his responses to the increasingly factionalised and dysfunctional Liberal Party and its hijacking by the neoliberal forces of the Right; and his contributions to contemporary policy debates hoping to introduce some greater reasonableness into the often ideological arguments. Here we read about the formation of his beliefs and those inspirational influences that helped form his political ideas, especially his view that politics was a noble cause dedicated to serving the greater good. We also read about the formation of a loose factional grouping of social liberals under the label the Liberal Forum, which had pretensions to being the intellectual vanguard of the Liberal Party. Finally, the collection includes his major policy speeches, in which he defends social policies, redistributive taxation, Aboriginal health policies and social provision, the plea for an official apology to Aboriginal Australia for the ‘Stolen Generations’ (more than a decade before it was actually delivered by Kevin Rudd in 2008), education about illicit drugs and euthanasia, and the removal of racial selection in immigration policy.

Factional Power Plays

As a backbencher, Baume had the time to record his observations of the factional power plays affecting his party in a daily diary. Political diaries from non-Labor parliamentarians in Australia are relatively rare. Baume’s diaries from various years in the 1980s are deposited in the library of The Australian National University, in Canberra. These political diaries offer a rare and important insider’s view of the political machinations at a key transition point in the
Liberal Party’s history. They recount the pressures politicians endure and the power plays that affect them and in which they act as combatants, but they also describe the human feelings of those who commit their lives to politics, the difficult journeys, the ‘what-ifs’, the betrayals and boredoms, the dog-eat-dog world of career politicians, and the disappointments at what can realistically be achieved in parliamentary terms. Baume’s diary entries are unvarnished, often brutal or unkind in their honesty, and full of minutiae indicating the pressures on and peripatetic lifestyle of serving politicians. They are part political observations of events and circumstance, part reflections and opinions about close colleagues, and part personal concerns with the dilemmas of family life as a busy politician. These diaries should be recommended reading for any budding politician intending to run for office, as they provide a valuable insight into the life that awaits them if they succeed. They have been tidied by these two authors but not edited or changed in any way or amended with the benefit of the wisdom of hindsight.

Given the numbers of people who go into politics, political diaries all too infrequently see the light of day. When they do appear, they are often invaluable to political scientists and historians wanting a first-hand account of the times, conflicts, impressions and so on. Peter Baume’s diary entries reflect an era in which the Federal and NSW branches of the Liberal Party had hit on hard times. Riven by ideological divisions at the federal level, and increasingly open factional warfare in the NSW branch, the 1980s represented an era of transformation for the Liberal Party at both levels of the party. Baume was one of the leading lights of the ‘Wets’, along with Robert Hill, Alan Missen, Ian Macphee, Chris Puplick, Steele Hall and a much younger George Brandis, as the historical tide of ‘small-l’ liberalism was fast receding. His dissident views often put him at loggerheads with his more mainstream party colleagues. Indeed, some Australian Labor Party (ALP) politicians felt that Baume was a decent parliamentarian who would sit more comfortably in their party with his views on social justice (although he would baulk at the party discipline and union dominance).

The Liberal Party has always sought to deny the existence of factions within the party because it is a key point of differentiation from the ALP and goes to the core of the Liberals’ philosophical self-identity as a party of independent-minded representatives. However, by the mid-1980s, groupings within the Liberal Party, both nationally and within some state branches, started to form that went beyond personality cliques. Most of these groupings would never take on the discipline and rigidity of factions in the ALP, but they provided important organising and strategising opportunities for Liberal members during this time. Baume’s political career, and membership of two of these groups, illustrates the difference between the organisation and operation of moderate factions at the federal and NSW division levels.
At the NSW level, Baume was a member of the inner circle of the powerful faction known prosaically at the time as the Liberal Forum Group (‘the Group’, or at times the ‘Black Ankle’), which coalesced into a political force in New South Wales in 1984.\(^7\) Baume was also a founding member of the Liberal Forum at the federal level, which was an informal association of moderate Liberal members in Canberra. The Federal Liberal Forum, originally a clandestine group within the broad church of the larger Liberal Party, was officially formed in February 1985 and was irreverently named by its members the ‘Black Hand’ (from which Baume’s self-mocking nickname for the NSW branch—the ‘Black Ankle’—originated). Baume’s account of the formation and aims of the Liberal Forum reveals the growing alienation and dislocation that he and other moderate Liberals felt in the party room: Baume wrote that with the formation of the Liberal Forum it was for many social liberals ‘the first opportunity to be part of a sympathetic, collegial group pursuing compatible ideological goals’.

The formation of the Liberal Forum Group in New South Wales was a response to the rise of a grab bag collection of radicals on the right, including the Australian League of Rights, the Citizens’ Electoral Council and the Captive Nations Lobby and Conservative Christians, which were seeking to establish new branches of the Liberal Party in the electoral wastelands of western Sydney. These right-wing infiltrators were known as ‘The Uglies’ by the traditional North Shore Liberal establishment.\(^8\) Led by Lyenko Urbanchich and a young David Clarke, ‘The Uglies’ exploited the Liberal Party’s undemocratic voting rules, which gave all branches equal status despite membership numbers in an attempt to gain more power within the State Council during the late 1970s.\(^9\) The tactics of Urbanchich’s group, and later the rise of the ‘New Right’ with its emphasis on neoliberal economics and (often, but not always) nationalistic social agenda, represented a major incursion into the urbane social liberal agenda that had dominated the NSW division of the Liberal Party from its earliest days as a more free-market and free-trade oriented political party. The effect of these aggressive new tactics spurred moderate voices in New South Wales, such as Baume, to increasingly engage in factional behaviour and the formation of the Group.

The Group’s success as a faction lay in its deliberate decision to eschew discussion of policy and NSW party leadership in order to lessen the chances of the formation of sub-factions and dilution of its overall political efficacy. Indeed, Baume’s reflections on the activities of the group were businesslike in tone. Thus, in New South Wales, the Group became a powerful bloc through the skilful deployment of raw numbers and the unceasing management of branches. When Baume was a member of the Group, its power as a faction was only

\(^{7}\) Hancock (2007: 238).

\(^{8}\) Hancock (2007: 164).

\(^{9}\) Hancock (2007: 160).
starting to assert itself, but it had a number of significant wins, which included maintaining Baume’s position in a winnable seat in the Senate in 1987 (with the additional help of John Howard). The faction was also successful for a while in blocking the ambitions of the hardline right-winger Bronwyn Bishop (whom Baume in his diaries seemed to loathe with a passion bordering on paranoia). By the mid-1990s, nothing could be achieved without negotiation with the Group. Yet the conflict between the Group and ‘The Uglies’ (later to become known by the moniker ‘the Taliban’) would lead to the escalation of infighting and increasing factionalisation of the NSW branch, which would set the tone of political relations at the state and federal levels until this day.

Although the Group as a formalised faction was specifically intended to manage preselections and internal party appointments within the NSW Branch of the Liberal Party, the Liberal Forum, in contrast, especially from Baume’s point of view, was both an ideas group and a forum to discuss the faction’s tactical position. A key reason why the Liberal Forum manifested itself differently to the Group at the federal level was a result of widespread disapproval of factions within the Liberal Party and the lack of infrastructure to enable factions to flourish. NSW politicians who might be heavily engaged in factional or factional-like contests at the state level had no natural home when they arrived in Canberra. This was in stark contrast with the ALP, whose factions at the state and federal levels virtually fed into each other. Moreover, as the Liberal Party was the dominant national political party during the long years of the postwar boom, the need for factions was not readily apparent. Differences in policy preferences could be managed effectively by the existing structures within the Liberal Party. However, as the postwar Bretton-Woods settlement broke down from the mid-1970s onwards, and the business-as-usual approach was no longer an option for Australia, the Liberal Party was forced to consider which new policy framework would guide the relationship between citizens, markets and the state into the future. So, at stake at the federal level were not preselections or positions within the Cabinet (as they were in the ALP); the main battleground was now focused on ideas and the future direction of the Liberal Party.

For Baume, the Liberal Forum’s role was to ‘counter the arguments and intellectual dominance achieved by the conservative and libertarian elements within the party’ and in Australia’s intellectual debate more generally. Baume and his fellow factional members were defenders of Fraser’s legacy, particularly in public administration and social affairs, although many would have concurred with the view that by 1983 the rudderless Fraser Government probably deserved to lose at the March election. The Wets had been slow to recognise the gradual ‘drying out’ of the Liberal Party since Billy Snedden—a leading ‘trendy’ within
the Liberal Party—had lost the leadership in 1975.\textsuperscript{10} Baume’s diary records a meeting at his home where the NSW group decided to back Fraser—and thereby ensured his victory. Given the dominance of Fraser as prime minister and the heavy impact that the 1983 defeat had on Dry members, much of the process had happened quietly. It was only after the 1984 election, when a slew of retirements from the party saw the return of many more Dry members into the opposition parties, that the shift in the party’s outlook was readily apparent to social liberals like Baume.

Contemporaneous news reporting tended to suggest a level of political organisation on the part of the Wets, which as Baume’s diary reveals, was simply not there. The Liberal Forum was less well organised than its forerunner, the Dries, had been during the later years of the Fraser Government.\textsuperscript{11} Baume and his fellow travellers were largely an ad hoc political grouping that met fairly infrequently every six to eight weeks. Baume’s diary also reveals the growing importance of today’s Senator George Brandis to the formation and workings of the Liberal Forum and its tactical organisation, alongside Tom Harley (Alfred Deakin’s great-grandson) and Yvonne Thompson. Before he became a party stalwart and factional warhorse, the young Brandis, then an idealistic promoter of social liberalism and an important factional tactician, would cut his political teeth fighting a rearguard action against the incoming tide of neoliberal economics and a muscular social conservatism that increasingly came to characterise the party in the late 1980s and early 1990s.

As the 1980s dragged on, Baume increasingly came to recognise that his neoliberal colleagues regarded the Liberal Forum as the ‘cockroaches in the corner’, out of step with a party that was increasingly less interested and intolerant of the social-liberal views he represented. While the Wets were successful in providing a public critique of the rightward direction of the Liberal Party, the political goal of the Wets was not well defined beyond the promotion of a modern version of liberalism. Baume and his dwindling brigade of ‘Black Hand/Black Ankle’ supporters were drawn into factional disputes. As Liberal Forum members, they regularly discussed the tactical position of their faction, particularly during the 1987 election as the federal party was facing its third consecutive defeat at the polls. Brandis, Harley and Thompson edited \textit{Liberals Face the Future} (1984). The Liberal Forum produced \textit{Australian Liberalism: The continuing vision} (1986), regularly released occasional papers and undertook important speeches. Despite these efforts at public persuasion, the Group was not free of internal tensions and such conflicts required a fine balancing of personalities and the internal political machinations. One issue that dogged the Forum membership

\textsuperscript{10} Head (1989: 490).
\textsuperscript{11} See Hyde (2003).
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was the constant attention given to and media discussion of prominent Wet Ian Macphee's leadership ambitions. The media at the time had come to the assumption that Macphee was the official leader of the faction (incorrectly as it transpired), whereas no such internal discussion about leadership had ever taken place.

Baume's recounting of Wet factional activity reflects the faction's precarious position. Much time is dedicated to crisis management and offering consolation and support to other faction members. As Baume became more politically isolated and struggled to find the resources to engage courteously with party members he held in low regard, it is clear that Baume gained solace from his involvement with the Liberal Forum, where he would linger over the details of philosophical and tactical discussions that he had found pleasurable and intellectually stimulating.

Perhaps the greatest illustration of the limitations of the Liberal Forum as a politically oriented faction (such as the Group clearly was) occurred in 1989. As a factional member, Baume remained in the dark over the lightning leadership coup that replaced John Howard with Andrew Peacock as federal leader in that year. Baume remained in complete ignorance of the plotters, even though some key actors, such as Puplick, were close colleagues and Liberal Forum members. It illustrates the limits of the forum's utility as a political grouping and the overall limitations of factions within the Liberals more generally, as discussed above. At the federal level, the Black Hand simply could not compete with the more coordinated (but by no means well-organised) work of the Dries. Indeed, as Baume's diary records, the careers of several leading moderates were destroyed during this period, including Macphee, Puplick and, eventually, Baume himself.

Drawing towards the end of his political career in late 1990, Baume's diary increasingly reflected a man weary of politics and struggling to conceal the contempt he felt for some of his colleagues. His interactions with his colleagues became more limited and he disengaged from their politics. The factional interactions that once gave Baume much intellectual stimulation and enjoyment became facile and sterile. He despaired about the future of liberalism and the hijacking of his cherished Liberal Party, and grew weary of attending Parliament. By 1990, he was isolated in politics and opted to change career for the better. By contrast, in this fading political light, we see a re-blossoming of his family and his own inner life, and a growing sense that politics is not the only thing of importance to him. Baume's speeches from this period are generally uplifting and optimistic, yet his diary accounts are far more pessimistic and despondent while conveying remorse over the banalities and brutalities of political life.
Baume’s contribution to public life in Australia was as a progressive medical practitioner and educator, a dissident politician who managed to have influence on the body politic beyond his predominant position as a humble backbencher, and finally as an advocate of principled causes. Some would venture his career was partly that of a prophetic Cassandra, partly a St Jude as the patron saint of lost causes, and partly a platonic guardian less comfortable in the Machiavellian machinations of modern party politics.

References


