In 2004, I was invited to speak to a group in an inner Sydney hotel where politics was discussed regularly. I chose to talk about liberal roots and central liberal beliefs.

Three points of history are relevant and necessary. Bear with me, please.

First, my grandfather was a Liberal member of the Parliament of New Zealand. His opponents were the conservatives. He was elected as a Liberal and was opposed, in the electorate, and in the Parliament, by the conservatives. His beliefs and his traditions have come down to me—by serendipity.

Second, one of our early prime ministers was a liberal exemplar. His name was Alfred Deakin. Some of his disciples today are called, unflatteringly, by neo-Thatcherites, ‘Deakinite wets’.

The third piece of history: in 1944, in Albury, Robert Menzies brought together all non-Labor parties, at a time when the non-Labor side of politics was split and in disarray. The Liberal Party of Australia was the result. The Country Party, later the National Party, refused to join. It is a more conservative party and its refusal to join was true to its traditions.

But there is no history of the Liberal Party as we know it before 1944. The Liberal Party then, because of the melding of elements, was a mixture of conservatives and liberals. In 1970 the party was still a mixture. It was possible to join it and to be a liberal and to put liberal positions publicly.

Malcolm Fraser was the prime minister who made me a minister. He was not then a conservative and is not now. Perceptions of him were wrong. He never let me down as Minister for Aboriginal Affairs. What you see of him now is how he was then.
In the 1980s, under John Howard, an avowed conservative, the Liberal Party of Australia became a conservative party, increasingly, and liberals were no longer welcome. Now, there is nothing intrinsically wrong with being conservative. Of course, there is nothing right about it either. But a conservative party is a different party. It is not my party. It is the party my grandfather opposed.

Liberals introduced, or supported, initiatives like land rights, sex discrimination legislation, equal employment opportunity for women, national parks, publicly funded education, generous social services, benefits for veterans, workers’ compensation.

To be a liberal is of long tradition. Liberalism is the belief of T.H. Green, of Alfred Deakin, of so many.

Liberalism is a philosophy no longer present, or welcome, in Australia. Those who are liberals have no party today.

What exists in Canberra is a conservative party with a conservative prime minister. It is called the Liberal Party of Australia—but it is not a liberal party.

Some former liberals have become able to serve in the present government. Indeed, some of them seem to take harsh and compliant stands when previously they reacted differently.

Those few liberals who remain in the community keep the flame alive and wait. Let us note that there are a few liberals still in Parliament in Canberra. But preselection success is difficult for them in an increasingly conservative party, and some of them are not now taking the stands that they might have taken a couple of decades ago.

The Labor Party is too conservative for me today—it, for example, supports the present war in Iraq.

The Liberal Party of Australia is much too conservative for me. And being conservative does not entitle anyone to lie, or cheat, or not to resign when resignation is called for.

We—people like me, now disenfranchised—see a conservative polity, and wait. Our day will come again. That is our belief.
This text is taken from *A Dissident Liberal: The Political Writings of Peter Baume*, by Peter Baume, edited by John Wanna and Marija Taflaga, published 2015 by ANU Press, The Australian National University, Canberra, Australia.