

From the Executive Director

John Roskam

A favourite accusation made by the IPA's critics is that the Institute is 'right-wing'. The *Melbourne Age* (10 December 2005) discussed the term as it applies to the IPA. The relevant section of the article ran as follows:

Think tanks aim to create new terms and concepts, but they don't like being tagged themselves. Lindsay [Greg Lindsay of the Centre for Independent Studies] and Roskam reject the right-wing label. 'Right-wing in Russia is old communist. Right-wing in Australia is One Nation,' Roskam says... ..

Says Hamilton [Clive Hamilton of The Australia Institute]: 'Of course, they are right-wing. The don't like it because of its associations, but it's certainly an accurate description in terms of the historical use of the left/right division.'

There the discussion of exactly how the IPA could be 'right-wing' ends. Either Hamilton didn't explain how 'right-wing' could be an accurate description of the IPA or the *Age* decided not to publish that explanation.

Of course, the origin of the term lies in the French Revolution. Those who supported the King and the monarchy sat on the right at meetings of the Estates-General, while those whose views didn't coincide with the ruling regime sat on the left.

The idea of a single spectrum of political views ranging from the 'right' to the 'left' is now so out-dated as to be useless. In fact it is arguable whether the labels ever had any validity. If the criterion by which a political system is judged is the degree of state control over the lives of individuals, then there is nothing to differentiate 'right-wing' and 'left-

wing' regimes. If a political spectrum is to be constructed, then surely it must have 'freedom' on one side of the axis and 'oppression' on the other—'left' and 'right' have nothing to do with it.

An examination of recent policy analyses published by the IPA demonstrates where on the spectrum the Institute lies. The IPA Backgrounder *The Empowerment Agenda—Civil Society and Markets in Disability and Mental Health*, argues for greater individual choice in the provision of services and less government control of the sector. *Reducing Red Tape in New South Wales* argues that bureaucratic interference in public and private life is resulting in a substantially reduced standard of living. *Cutting Red Tape in Victoria's Planning Process* argues that government planning laws increase the price of housing. In this issue of the *IPA Review*, Chris Berg argues for the abolition of government control over the media.

None of these positions is remotely 'right-wing'. And there's nothing 'right-wing' about advocating for lower tax, less government, and greater choice. One of the greatest travesties of political discourse (and one of the greatest successes of those who believe in more state control) is that the term 'right-wing' has been turned on its head and directed against those who believe in exactly the opposite of everything that the word historically represents.

Unfortunately, the resort to the 'right-wing' label is not restricted to those at The Australia Institute. Journalists and writers of letters to newspaper editors continue to use the description, presumably because those journalists and letter writers have little or no knowledge of either politics or history.

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