



# Quarterly Essay 3 The Opportunist: John Howard and the Triumph of Reaction

*Guy Rundle*

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In the third Quarterly Essay, Guy Rundle comes to grips with John Howard, the prime minister who, on the eve of an election, seems to have turned round his political fortunes by spurning refugees and writing blank cheques for America's War on Terror.

This is a brilliant account of John Howard's dominant ideas, his concerted 'dreaming' with its emphasis on unity and national identity that reveals him to be the most reactionary PM we have ever had, the only political leader who would allow ideas like those of One Nation to dominate the mainstream of Australian politics in order to improve his political chances. Rundle puts Howard in the context of the economic liberalism he shares with his colleagues and opponents and the conservative social ideology that sets him apart. It is a complex portrait in a radical mirror which relates John Howard to everything from Menzies's 'forgotten people' to the inadvertent glamour of the government's antidrug advertising. It is also a plea for right-thinking people of every political persuasion to resist the call to prejudice and reaction.

'A portrait of a political opportunist who is also ... a sincere reactionary: putting back the clock because he believes in it, but also fanning the whirlwind of unreason in order to save his political skin.' —Peter Craven, Introduction

'The coincident occurrence of the asylum seeker confrontation and the attack on the U.S. has made visible the most dangerous and damaging thing he has done to the Australian polity...and that is to deepen contempt for such protection as we did have from unbridled executive power, mass hysteria, the rush to surrender our freedoms and offer them up on the alter of crisis.' —Guy Rundle, *The Opportunist*

Guy Rundle was a co-founding editor of *Arena*, a magazine of political and social comment. Formerly a theatre critic for the *Age*, he has written and produced a number of TV programs and stage shows, and contributes regularly to the *Age*, the *Australian*, the *Sydney Morning Herald* and *Spiked*, and is currently *Crikey's* global correspondent-at-large. He is the author of two Quarterly Essays, *The Opportunist: John Howard and the Triumph of Reaction* and *Bipolar Nation: How to Win the 2007 Election*. His most recent book is the award-winning *Down to the Crossroads: On the Trail of the 2008 US Election*.

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