



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

*Guy Rundle*

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In the third *Quarterly Essay* of 2001, 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.

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