



DISCUSSION

Ferocious

The ferocity of the criticisms by Michael Costa and Mark Duffy of our *Politics and the Accord* (ALR 137, March) seems a little over-sensitive, since we start from a position similar to theirs in their book *Labor, Prosperity and the Nineties*.

Like them, we locate unionism's current difficulties in the crisis of labourism, the strategy used by organised labour to protect Australian workers through tariff protection, the arbitration system and occupational demarcations defended by craft unions.

The issue, then, is not whether this organising practice is in crisis, as it clearly is, but whether the union movement can formulate a coherent replacement for it. The choices are twofold. One course would replace the occupational divisions within the union movement with enterprise bargaining, breaking the links between workers in different workplaces and tying workers to individual employers through in-house and non-portable training.

The alternative we put forward is based on a more collective vision, of genuine industry unionism supported by a national and more universal training system which would move beyond the current emphasis we place on trade and degree-level training. By neglecting to put

the debate in these terms, Costa and Duffy escape the need to address the criticisms we make of the enterprise bargaining option:

Australian unionism needs urgently to improve the ability of its constituency to deal with economic dislocation. Without portable training which is nationally recognised, long-term unemployment will continue to be the lot of workers displaced by restructuring.

Far from the rigidity imagined by Costa and Duffy, such a training framework would actually increase labour 'flexibility' by helping workers to move from industries in decline to those in growth. But in the current gushing enthusiasm for all things located within the enterprise, this form of flexibility is a very unwelcome intruder. Whatever the economic arguments, enterprise bargaining has more to do with breaking the mobilising capacity of unionism. By uncritically embracing the new 'workplace culture' which equates the interest of workers with those of individual employers, unionism stands to break its own foundation stones of solidarity and collectivism.

With the industrial relations 'reforms' of the federal government, it would seem that this threat to unionism will intensify. Thus the ability of the Industrial Relations Commission to rationalise union coverage has been strengthened, a process which Costa and Duffy find 'creative' and 'innovative' (*Union Issues*, Summer 1992). Simply repeating that enterprise bargaining is the only viable option for unionism neatly closes down debate on the real issues. Thus Costa and Duffy can move on to make a range of more particular complaints against us.

Our work is supposedly 'ahistorical' because we do not recognise the recurring balance of payments problems Australia has endured. Our balance of payments weaknesses are, in their view, not policy-derived, but rooted in the 'structure' of the Australian economy (as

though this was determined by something other than by political processes). The implication seems to be that we should get used to external imbalance, because economic 'structure' so demands. And why? Could it not be that rightwing unions, covering the commodity-based industries, find our role as a quarry for the world mighty comfortable.

Costa and Duffy go on to suggest that our opposition to the 'market' is crude. It is true that our theoretical coverage in this area is a little shorthand, but we are not unaware of Left debate about the role of the market in a socialist economy, as a perusal of *Politics and the Accord* (pp 117-119) would confirm. On the other hand, they seem unaware of the positive role the state can play in capitalist economic development. Thus they argue that our interventionist prescriptions are irrelevant, since 'non-market economic systems' have disintegrated (*Union Issues*, Summer 1992). However, it is precisely state direction of such 'market' economies as Japan and Germany, not to mention our Asian neighbours like Taiwan, that explains their success.

Costa and Duffy set themselves up as arbiters of what the 'thoughtful Left' should be reading. Whether they do so with a straight face we do not know, but to imply that *Politics and the Accord* fails to take debate in union circles further really cannot go unchallenged. We question the worth of many traditional practices on the Left and the broader union movement. The divisive nature of trade elitism, the inability of the Left to attach industrial militancy to a wider and more equitable strategy of social change and the shortcomings of the industry development strategy in the 1980s are all tackled with as much frankness as we could muster.

In the post-Gorbachev age, Costa and Duffy could not, of course, resist the temptation to portray our work as the ravings of unreconstructed central planners. This pejorative as-

sociation has little to do with the arguments actually contained in *Politics and the Accord*. In fact, we go to some effort to wean the labour movement off the notion that a parliamentary route to socialism exists. Instead, we argue that the fate of unionism hinges very much on putting the 'movement' back into labour. This means that union members themselves must be responsible for the development and implementation of union policy.

If anyone retains faith in 'top-down' strategies for organised labour, it is Costa and Duffy. Just as they avoid discussing the anti-democratic nature of the sort of enterprise bargaining they advocate, their argument for 'service delivery' by unions is unconvincing. Unions are not businesses. 'Service delivery' will not be a substitute for the participation of members in the affairs of their unions.

We wrote *Politics and the Accord* to further the debate in union circles over the movement's future. We expected thoughtful criticism. Regrettably, Costa and Duffy's review does not provide that criticism. We can

only conclude that our exposure of the NSW Right's comfortable tradition of deal-making with employers has struck a little too close to home.

**Peter Ewer, Ian Hampson,
Chris Lloyd, John Rainford,
Stephen Rix and Meg Smith are
the authors of
Politics and the Accord.**

Royal Nonsense

Did anyone in an editorial capacity read Wanda Jamrozik's 'Profile: Elizabeth R' before it was published?

The article is deeply disturbing on a number of counts. First, it maintains the discredited practice of the interpretation of women's minds and worth through their conformity or otherwise to current fashion in clothing. Jamrozik disdains her subject for "sensible shoes" and concludes that because Elizabeth chooses sometimes to wear a head-scarf she "must be the only person who was actually there who is nostalgic for Britain after the war".

Secondly, there is a flow of superficial over-generalisation beginning with "We're terminal adolescents, we Australians".

Finally, you have published material on a constitutional monarch written by one who clearly hasn't the least knowledge of what constitutes constitutional monarchy as it has evolved with the parliamentary system; eg, because Elizabeth maintains the requirement of public impartiality Jamrozik disdains her as without "strong opinions" and "never having voiced an opinion on anything of import".

Such nonsense would not ordinarily matter very much except that at this time of probable transition to a republic there seems to be considerable public confusion on the facts involved in the head of state/head of government issue. Some people even believe we need an American type presidency to be a republic. I find it sad that a journal of the Left should be contributing to ignorance on this matter.

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Judy Horacek

