

begin to get across the idea that three-year electoral schedules and political expediency provide no rational basis for dealing with many of the problems facing Australia and its working people. This is not to suggest that we should not pursue incremental legislative gains — but we should also begin to muster support and expertise for cogent and popularly-arguable national goals. Socialism is, after all, supposed to promote rational and humanistic planning for social development.

The same sort of reasoning applies to any strategy for significant

constitutional reform, or for revival of the recently-murdered Bill of Rights, and for industry/government research and development strategies. The general problem remains of how best to popularise the notion of goals and planning, and particular reforms. It can do us no harm to try out alternative approaches to coalition building on such questions, as long as we can (eventually) wrest from the right and big business control of Australia's political agenda.

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After the Decade

Women: A World Report (Pluto Press, 1985). Reviewed by JANE INGLIS.

It might seem a trifle late for a review of a book which was, as its preface states, produced "as an attempt to capture the essence of the position of women" at the end of the UN Decade for Women. But then, it sometimes feels as though the women's movement has been placed in a time warp — with the End of the Decade providing a signal for conservatives to turn the clock well back. With this book, despite some of its shortcomings, we can savour, to an extent, the gains made through hard slog, and an awareness of differences within the international women's movement.

The book looks at five aspects of women's life: family; work; education; politics; and sex. Two countries are examined under each of these — a poor country and a wealthy country, with a woman from a poor country visiting the wealthy country and vice versa, each giving their personal impressions of the country visited. The purpose of this was to give the book "true depth". And the purpose of the reciprocal conjunction of wealthy and poor was to avoid "just another piece of international voyeurism" with "the rich world ogling at the poor". Hence, under the heading of "Women and Sex", Australia was visited by Elena Poniatowska (journalist; born in Paris

of French-Polish father and Mexican mother; now living in Mexico), while Angela Davis (Black American activist) visited Egypt. With all due respect, the fact that the writers spent only a matter of days (eleven in Elena's case) in each country means that the pieces are indeed impressionistic. This, in itself, can be useful to locals — to see just what it is that impresses a visitor. But there is a very real danger of mixing preconceptions and foreknowledge with first, fast impressions. What can result are clichés. In the case of Australia, I fear this was the result.

The section on Australia begins with a full-page pic of a Surfers' meter maid — replete in tinselly highcut onepiece bathers, sash and hideous tiara/1950s waitress-style headdress with the words 'METER MAID' appliqued across it — and grasping a parking meter. Elena Poniatowska's observations of Australia were that of a tourist-with-a-difference, in that she had a specific brief and contacts were provided. But these observations were not particularly new or enlightening.

The comparisons between rich and poor communities are inevitable, and it is of value to see someone else's astonishment at the community services women in Australia have

gained through the hard struggle of the women's movement; women's confidence in their own sexuality; and, inevitably, the continuing and high degree of exploitation of women and sex through commercialism. It is also useful to be reminded, albeit secondhand in this instance, that Aboriginal women are well and truly fed up with the predominantly anglo-feminist movement's pontificating on and co-opting of their specific concerns. Nevertheless, the real issues for Australian feminism are far more complex than such an impression might give readers outside Australia (and even readers outside the women's movement in Australia).

It came across quite clearly that allotting each country a specific topic was perhaps not the best way to gain an informed opinion of the state of the women's movement and women in general. And this was compounded by the shortness of the visits. A particular example is the assignment of sex as the specific topic for Egypt. Angela Davis was taken aback by the "palpable hostility" from a group of Egyptian women when she introduced her topic. However, she handled the situation with sensitivity, and her experience as an activist and theorist helped produce an interesting account of Egyptian women's concerns. It's worth noting that the editors apologised for a lack of adequate communication with Davis over the project's intention.

And that intention was to produce a substantial analysis of, and insight into, women's lives around the world which, at the End of the Decade for Women, would set the future agenda. For the reasons I have mentioned, it has fallen short of this, but it is still a worthwhile addition to literature on the development of the international women's movement.

There are other pieces by recognisable names, such as Nawal el Saadawi (on the UK), Germaine Greer (on Cuba) and Marilyn French (on India). The book also contains a useful statistical section. It was certainly a mammoth task — an appetiser, perhaps, for a deeper analysis.

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