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WENDY McCARTHY, MILOVAN DJILAS INTERVIEWED

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The Tribes of Europe

In a recent speech in Pittsburgh, Martin Walker, the London Guardian's US correspondent, pointed to Yugoslavia and described "the tribes of Europe" as the most bloodthirsty, vicious groups on the planet. If allowed, he said, they would plunge us into another world cataclysm.

At the same time, riots were taking place in Brooklyn, New York, after a seven-year-old black boy had been run down by a car driven by a member of the local Hassidic Jewish community. A travelling Hassidic rabbinical student was stabbed to death in retaliation. It was an extraordinary and tragic rerun of Spike Lee's 1990 film Straight out of Brooklyn, albeit with Hassidic Jews substituting for Italians.

The events of the past weeks in the Soviet Union have also displayed the fragility of unions involving minority peoples. The great quest for the republics of the USSR is to develop a better form of co-operation in which the sovereign rights of citizens, races and communities are upheld. As we move towards a new century in which many federations and states will have to redefine themselves anew, foremost among the issues to be resolved are those involving the recognition of ethnic and racial groups and indigenous peoples.

In the 'Soviet Union' of the future the concept of federation will have to be reinvented. Like Marx and Engels, the founders of the Soviet Union were arch opponents of federalism. Lenin, in turn, advocated not only a unitary state but a unitary world in which humankind came together as a single, supranational proletarian entity. For them, nationalities and republics were an important but temporary obstacle on the road to proletarian solidarity.

Lenin opposed the extreme centralising tendencies of his chief nationalities' theoretician, Stalin. But Lenin's support for federalism was tactical; he saw federalism as a temporary measure that would be supplanted as time went on.

The treatment of ethnic identity and republican ambitions by even the most liberal communists after Stalin has revolved around the illusion that federalism would ultimately be of no significance. There are over 120 ethnic groups in the Soviet Union. Stalin's centralist policies aggravated tensions, creating a seething cauldron of republican, racial and minority grievances that has never been adequately dealt with.

Even Mikhail Gorbachev had some experiences from which he should have learned. In the early period of perestroika he appointed an ethnic Russian, Gennadii Kolbin, as first secretary of the Kazakh Communist Party—a decision resulting in riots in Alma Ata in December 1986. The original Gorbachev politburo and secretariat contained only one non-Slav, Eduard Shevardnadze, whose departure in December 1990 was an early warning of the events that have recently taken place. Only in the latter part of 1990 were ethnic and minority representatives—a Kirghiz, a Latvian and an Armenian among them—included in the Presidential Council.

The ascendancy of Boris Yeltsin and his immediate demand that a majority of ethnic Russians be appointed to the Union's central cabinet will do nothing to accommodate a more co-operative set of power-sharing arrangements.

Most republics have substantial minority populations. They have yet to demonstrate that they are any better than were the federal authorities at respecting minority rights. Georgians, for example, have been as intolerant of their minority Ossetians as Russians have been of Georgians. On top of this, in many cases there is no economic glue to weld minorities and republics together other than through common grievances and opposition to Russia and the union.

In the South Pacific these problems of developing concepts of federation and nationhood that can accommodate the rights of ethnic groups and native peoples seem particularly pertinent. Australia has yet to develop an individual bill of rights. More meaningful treaties and agreements with the native peoples of Australia and New Zealand must also be developed. Papua New Guinea's Bougainville crisis also illustrates that the rights of indigenous people are not well enough protected under the nation state model of parliamentary democracy.

In Fiji, the feudal village chief system has resulted in the suppression of the country's ethnic minority, the overthrow of parliamentary democracy and a crackdown on the parliamentary labour party and trade unions. In the near future, when Colonel Rabuka's rule of force gives way, some compromise between indigenous rights, democracy and individual freedoms will have to be devised.

One of the great lessons of the late 20th century is that people of common racial and ethnic backgrounds seem to perceive themselves as having closer bonds and more in common with each other than those with whom they may be linked ideologically. Or, at least, it should be said race and ethnicity have supplanted political strategy as the basis for ideological meaning. We seem to have passed through an era of political ideology to an era of racial and ethnic solidarity.

PETER BOTSMAN, the executive director of the Evatt Foundation, is on leave in New York.
Judging by his two most recent books, Bishop John Shelby Spong, virtually unknown in this country a year ago, has gained widespread notoriety with Australians by July this year, mostly for his 'controversial' statements on the relations between homosexual people and the Church.

Spong was born and raised in the strong fundamentalist traditions of the Southern States but broke with them to participate in the civil rights movement during the 60s. He is now bishop in the Episcopal (Anglican) Church in the United States. Under his leadership, the Diocese of Newark has taken a leading role in recognising the contribution of homosexual women and men to the life of that church.

Spong has published twelve books and numerous articles on contemporary social and theological issues. Judging by his two most recent books (the only two available in Australia), Spong is not coming up with any really new biblical or theological directions—he seems to be blithely unaware of textual theory and practice since the early 70s. But he is clearly familiar with, and has taken up, a biblical and theological position which springs up every now and then like a Nightmare on Elm Street sequel.

Spong's point is that 'churcby' people are not the only people who do or 'are' good. Rather, he claims, God creates and blesses all people. At their best, the churches are a representation of this. At their worst, they behave as moral (too often defined in exclusively sexual categories) police in a sea of wickedness. Thankfully, the Church in toto can never be reduced to such mean spiritedness. The people of the Church are too diverse and its history of dissent too strong.

Secondly, he senses the urgency of the need for ordinary church people to win back their churches. Knowledge may be power—if you are knowledgeable. But ignorance can give a person a lot of leverage. In the US, Spong laments, it is appallingly apparent that ordinary people, especially people outside the church, simply do not know that reasonable alternatives to fundamentalism exist. Spong writes in fierce opposition to the fundamentalist leaders who benefit from this state of affairs. Rescuing the Bible from Fundamentalism, his most recent book, is an attempt to disseminate Bible scholarship beyond seminaries and theological institutions to "citizens of the modern world".

In this mêlée, Spong serves more as a demigod, his books are revolutionary to the mass of church people. The popular church has received great energy from the debate. Fundamentalism has taken a variety of political shapes in two thousand years but, clearly, the dominant form at the moment is anti-humanist and anti-reform. The incentive for lay people to take theological initiatives themselves and challenge fundamentalism on its own turf is tremendously exciting for our churches and society.

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The third aspect is a matter of evangelism. Clearly in conflict with the dreaded televangelists, Spong is far from being a proselytiser. But he has been applauded in some sections of the church as communicating with oppressed and marginalised people: "the kingdom of God belongs to you". Evangelism, of the style that sections of the church see reflected in Spong's program, is good news for Australian Christians and for a society at odds with itself.

Can Australian churches shake the colonial stigma and a wowser heritage? Spong may not be the answer but, as Dorothy McMahon, a Uniting Church Minister in Sydney, said of him, "He is, at the very least, asking the right questions."

ANDREW IRVINE works for the Australian Council of Churches.

PROFILE

Bishop Spong

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Shaky European Home

As fate had it, the August coup in the Soviet Union coincided with Pope John Paul’s tour in Hungary. Greeted with their first papal visit of the century, the Magyars had no intention of forfeiting their day in the sun to anyone at all, much less the Russians. The haunting sounds of mediaeval organ hymns echoed through Budapest’s hushed courtyards as the media followed every sacred step of the pontiff’s trip.

That afternoon my way to the swimming pool was blocked by legions of police who had cordoned off Hero’s Square where the Pope was to address the masses later in the day. In the neighbourhood, I stopped by the Soviet embassy to see what was up. The sidewalk outside the grey granite building was crowded with booths selling cotton candy and Papa János Pál II memorabilia. 200,000 Hungarians thronged to hear the Pope in Budapest, but not a single one showed up to protest at the overthrow of the man who opened the way for their country’s democracy.

In fact, there might have been more than a little Schadenfreude in the hearts of the peoples of the former Eastern bloc—a pleasure not unconnected with the Holy Father’s selective blessings. For many Hungarians and Poles, Czechs and Slovaks, Slovenes and Croats, a united Europe implicitly means the restoration of European Christendom. It is a Europe of which Russia and its Orthodox brethren were never members.

But the coup was over as suddenly as it began. As the tanks withdrew from Moscow and workers dismantled the Pope’s towering podium in Hero’s Square, a Europe from the Atlantic to the Urals appeared on track again. No doubt, the popular indignation and protest in the Soviet Union that drove the conservatives from power demonstrated an inspiring will to democracy. In many ways, the prospects for democratic reform now look brighter than ever before.

Yet the conspirators’ three-day takeover sent deep shock waves through the European House. Overnight, Gorbachev’s ouster seemed to put an abrupt end to plans for an integrated Europe. Although warnings of the Soviet leader’s imminent downfall had been in the air for years, when the hardliners finally moved, Europe looked on aghast. Nine short months after the 35 participants of the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe (CSCE) signed the Paris Charter envisaging a European order based on human rights and democracy, the Cold War appeared on again.

Upon the Soviet leader’s return to power, Western leaders congratulated themselves for uniting against the plotters. The international community, however, bears a large share of the responsibility for the precarious situation throughout Eastern Europe. Their economies in ruin and their states fraught with ethnic tension, the stability of the Soviet Union as well as the central and eastern Europeans has hung by a thread for over a year. The US above all has contributed precious little to aid the East’s painful transition, substituting slogans about freedom and democracy for concrete economic and political initiatives.

The harsh terms of the radical IMF-administered free-market policies have pushed east and central European countries to the brink of collapse. The East has received only a fraction of the aid and investment that it was counting on. Time and again it has been the US that has quashed West European efforts to co-ordinate large-scale aid programs for the East.

From Berlin to Sofia, politicians surely must have reflected on their own fates too as they saw tanks lumber into Red Square. Their economies fare only slightly better than the Soviet Union’s and even optimists see no short-term end to the economic tailspin. The east Europeans are also still closely linked to the Soviet economy. They, as well as Austria, get the vast majority of their oil and gas from Soviet pipelines and still rely heavily on Soviet markets. Further upheavals there—which are almost certain—could have dire implications for the long-promised recovery.

Although the power structures differ from country to country, the military in the weak Eastern European democracies will be key factors for some time. The armed forces in Belgrade and Bucharest are already poised to restore law and order. Strikes are likely to mar the coming winter in Hungary and Poland. But will John Major and George Bush protest so loudly if armies step in to restore free market law and order?

The Soviet crisis also revealed just how close to the surface lies the mentality of the Cold War. Still mired in the East-West logic of the past, Western leaders have woefully neglected the processes of European integration. For 60 hours, as the prospects of a peaceful continental order appeared shattered, the familiar mechanisms of the Cold War were set in motion. Europe’s NATO brass were in their element again, bandying about heavy-handed threats and war scenarios at emergency crisis management sessions.

The CSCE, supposedly the new motor for a united Europe, still plays a distant second fiddle to NATO. For many conservatives, particularly in the US, the CSCE was simply a human rights body for the Cold War, the usefulness of which came to an end with the collapse of communism. The US State Department and its allies in Europe have fought hard—and successfully—to maintain NATO’s priority over the CSCE and other non-military all-European institutions. Only grudgingly did NATO recently agree to tiny concessions for including the European Community (EC) and CSCE in security policy discussion.

The threat of a hardline military dictatorship next door also caused the Soviet Union’s western border states
to think twice about their own security policies. Although the possibility that Kremlin hardliners would try to 'take back' Eastern Europe hard-ly seemed plausible, Poland, Czechoslovakia and Hungary all secured their borders. At a joint meeting, the three also discussed a co-ordinated response to a mass migration of people fleeing the crackdown. In the future, civil war in the Baltics or Moldavia could well spill over into their neighbours' backyards.

These scenarios naturally frighten the Central and East Europeans who are now neither members of NATO nor the Warsaw Pact. Rather than try to fend for themselves, thus plummeting their strapped economies even further into debt and jeopardising western security, they are likely to speed up their entry into NATO.

The West's special status for the central Europeans has simply widened the gap between the three and their Eastern colleagues. The day after the coup, for example, an emergency EC meeting called for accelerated integration of Hungary, Poland and Czechoslovakia into the community structures. Though laudable in its own right, the move treats Romania and the Balkan states as third class citizens. The two-tier policy in Eastern and Central Europe has left the Balkans as dangerously isolated as the Soviet Union.

The less the Easterners feel part of Europe, the greater the likelihood of more military coups, regional wars and ugly crackdowns. At the moment, Romania is still being punished as a remnant of neo-communism. So fruitless has European diplomacy proved in Yugoslavia, the West has thrown up its hands in despair. Bulgaria has simply been forgotten about, and Europe only wishes that it could forget about Albania.

The instability in Eastern Europe underlines the failure of Western policy. Without far-reaching political and economic co-operation, Europe will not magically integrate itself. Neither in the Soviet Union nor in Central Europe are military solutions the answer to the region's dilemmas.

Over the last weeks, Europe may have come closer to recognising just how closely intertwined it is—whether its constituents like it or not. The coup in the Soviet Union was a desperate cry for help, and catastrophe was only narrowly, incredibly averted. The international community cannot afford to make the same mistake twice.

PAUL HOCKENOS is a Budapest-based freelance journalist.
1991 marks the passing of a quarter of a century since the first test at Moruroa and over 100 years of French colonialism in French Polynesia.

Yet French Polynesia was of little consequence to metropolitan officials prior to the decision to use Moruroa as a nuclear test site in the 1950s, when an alternative to Algeria was required. There was then a tightening of control over the colony, including draconian decrees to counteract the rapid growth of the indigenous nationalist movement. It was not until 1977 that Paris granted the local territorial assembly a statute of limited internal self-government and later a statute of internal autonomy which came into being in 1984.

The Pacific testing centre (CEP) had a dramatic and ultimately detrimental impact on economy and society. Initially, the CEP brought apparent prosperity in the form of massive investment in infrastructure, customs revenues, local expenditure and employ. ent; during its first decade of operations, CEP expenditure was more than twice that of the territorial budget. This was accompanied by an influx of some 15,000 French personnel. The rapid drive to recruit Maohi (Polynesian) workers for the CEP was to be one of the main contributors to a spiral of dependency. On many small outer islands the entire male population left to sign up for the high CEP salaries. Consequently, subsistence agriculture and fishing were neglected and never recovered. The uncontrolled urban drift led to overcrowding, high unemployment and sub-standard living conditions around the capital of Papeete.

Increasing economic dependency has been matched by an intense process of cultural assimilation. The migration of French citizens and their intermarriage with the Maohi people is one factor. In addition, the teaching of French language and culture accelerated in the 1960s. Finally, the shift by many Maohi from a rural subsistence lifestyle to that of urban wage earners produced a preference for Western consumer goods and entertain ment at the expense of traditional forms of kinship and cultural pursuits. This policy of Francisation contrasted with the segregation practised in New Caledonia which saw Kanaks placed on reserves far from the economic and political centre of Noumea. This partly explains the relative unity of the Kanak nationalists today compared with the smaller and more fragmented Maohi independence movement.

Given the legacy of the CEP and the colonial relationship with France, a party challenging the French presence might be expected to gain widespread support. However, in the elections in March this year the two pro-independence and anti-nuclear parties, Tavini and Ia Mana, garnered a total of merely four seats in the 41-seat assembly, while the established conservative parties, Tahoeraa and Ai's Api, obtained 18 and five seats respectively.

Part of the apparent failure of the pro-independence parties can be attributed to the skewed electoral system which gives disproportionate power to outer island voters. The established conservative parties, particularly Tahoeraa, have been conscious of this important electoral...
factor and have gone to great lengths to cultivate support from the outer islands. The comparatively young and urban based pro-independence parties are disadvantaged by financial, transport and communications obstacles in their attempt to reach the outer island electorate. Another electoral law favouring the larger parties is that which eliminates all candidates whose lists obtain less than 5% of the votes cast in any of the five constituencies. Tahoeraa gained 18 of the 41 seats with only 31.5% of ballots cast. In effect, candidates challenging the established parties received a total of 27.4% of the votes but only acquired four seats.

There is much popular sympathy for the anti-nuclear platform of Tavini and la Mana. Nevertheless, it is clear that the pro-independence parties do alienate some sections of the electorate for whom independence poses economic uncertainties, including the level of assistance France would be prepared to provide. In this way the territory’s economic dependency, albeit a financial burden to France, ensures widespread acquiescence to an ongoing French presence and, by extension, the CEP. One factor which could sway popular opinion towards the ‘independantistes’ is concern about the imminent integration of Europe—French Polynesia is constitutionally still a part of France. There are widespread fears that unrestricted European immigration to the territory would have a devastating impact on local society.

External influences aside, the conservative government of Gaston Flosse elected in March is already in trouble as it struggles to deal with a budgetary crisis inherited from the previous government. The initial response was to instigate a sharp increase in indirect taxes. This precipitated protests in the form of blockades around the capital in June and July which culminated in riots. The conflict was only resolved as a result of intervention by the French High Commissioner who promised French financial assistance in place of the proposed tax increases. Industrial action and riots were major factors leading to the downfall of Flosse and his government in 1987. And Flosse is still awaiting a verdict on the last of several corruption charges laid against him. The case will be heard in December 1991 and, if convicted, Flosse faces being barred from office, a fine, and up to two years in prison.

Electoral politics in French Polynesia, now as in the past, is primarily governed by the appeal of charismatic leadership, patron-client relations and municipal loyalties. It is no coincidence that four of the five parties in the territorial assembly are led by mayors of the largest municipalities in the territory. The rate of incumbency for mayors and territorial representatives is very high. Debate over policy is not a feature of election campaigns because the majority of parties have broadly similar socio-economic programs. The mainstream parties lack clearly-defined ideologies and cannot be distinguished on this basis. Political expediency remains the determining factor in shaping government coalitions rather than any attempt to be ideologically consistent.

However, the past decade has also witnessed a gradual but significant reclamation of politics and culture by the Maohi people. This is most evident with regard to the increasing rejection of the French language. Tahitian became an official language in 1980 and has since acquired dominance in the political arena. For political leaders to be successful they must now be able to deliver eloquent speeches in Tahitian and political parties have all adopted Tahitian names. Tahitian language radio stations have been established in many municipalities. A radical Maohi theologian has created great controversy with an interpretation of the Bible which integrates the Christian message with Maohi identity. In the arts and the preservation of traditional monuments the Maohi cultural revival has also made its mark.

Finally, the hitherto taboo issue of indigenous land rights has become a legitimate subject for public debate. The renewed pride in Maohi history and culture emanating from the church and other social movements is already evident in the political arena, particularly in the Tavini party. The logical extension of the budding Maohi nationalism is to further question the existing relationship with France. This process is, for the present, being obstructed within the territory by those who fear the economic ramifications of such a move, and by France because it sees no alternative site for nuclear tests.

KARIN VON STROKIRCH works in the Centre for South East Asian Studies at Monash University.
In September the Labor Caucus ruled on the amount of foreign equity the government would allow in the bidding for the John Fairfax newspaper group. The decision restricted bidders to 20% foreign ownership by shareholding, but allowed for greater foreign equity by other means. It was widely criticised in the media — most prominently by the Centre Left's Senator Chris Schacht — as favouring the bid of the Conrad Black/Kerry Packer syndicate. The Left's John Langmore proposed the controversial motion, which was supported by most of the Left. ALR's Mike Ticher spoke to John Langmore about the decision, and the controversy.

The Left has always been opposed to foreign investment in newspapers; why do you think they voted for your motion in this instance?

Well, my motion was aimed at achieving exactly that — the restriction of foreign ownership. It's been entirely misrepresented by Chris Schacht. The motion is in two parts. What it says is firstly that the government should prefer complete Australian ownership of all major media, and secondly, that in any case, an absolute upper limit of 20% of foreign ownership should be set.

So why do you think he has read a completely contrary interpretation into it?

I think he misunderstands the motion. He believes it allows what lay people are calling 'quasi-equity', which carries some degree of control, to be raised outside the 20% limit — but in fact that's quite specifically excluded by the motion. What it's intended to say is that foreign equity and financial instruments that give some degree of control up to 20%, can be allowed, but beyond that they can't be allowed.

How tenable is that argument that you can have foreign capital without any control at all? Presumably the money can always be withdrawn.

No, I don't think so. If a bank lends money for a period, and signs a contract, then it hasn't got the capacity to withdraw it. We're talking about borrowing not something akin to shares. It's really a question of loans rather than non-voting shares or quasi-equity.

Do you think it's a fair perception that this motion is motivated not solely by a desire for more diversity but also as being antagonistic towards the Australian Independent Newspapers bid?

Absolutely not. The motion is simply designed to set a framework for the limit to which foreign investment would be allowed in any major media. It doesn't attempt to differentiate between bidders, except in so far as there's a foreign involvement in them. To the extent that it can be seen to favour anyone, clearly it favours AIN, because it's wholly Australian-owned, and that's what the motion says the government should prefer, but it doesn't rule out the O'Reilly bid, and it wouldn't rule out the Black/Packer bid if they brought it within those guidelines. The interpretation that the motion favours Packer is simply mischievous. It is neither the intention nor the substance of the resolution. In any case, because of this alleged misunderstanding, we will be presenting a more detailed motion to make crystal clear what it is that we're proposing.

Kim Beazley was quoted disparaging the AIN group bid as being from the "uptown Melbourne establishment". Implicit in this view would seem to be the assumption that financial control is tantamount to some measure of editorial influence. Would you agree with that?

Well, it's true that is implied by some of the alleged remarks made by Beazley, but the fact is that AIN have agreed to sign a charter of editorial independence. The degree of co-operation they've exhibited with Fairfax journalists, particularly the Friends of Fairfax, suggests that they wouldn't interfere. Who knows what would
happen after they gained ownership, but those are the signals they're throwing out at present.

Wouldn't you agree that editorial independence is at least of equal importance as where the money comes from?

Sure. All this motion was trying to do was clarify, and set guidelines for, the extent to which foreign investment would be allowed. It was motivated by the fact that there had been some talk a few days previously about increasing the extent of foreign ownership beyond 20% to 25%, 30% or even more. It seemed to me very important to have on the record a motion that clearly and definitely expresses a caucus view that foreign investment would not be permitted. The figure of 20% simply derives from the broadcasting limits, and the general argument that consistency across the media is desirable seems warranted. The figure itself is arbitrary of course, but 20% has already been set for broadcasting, so it may as well be set for print media as well. This government doesn't have a good track record on media regulation. If Black/Packer won the bid for Fairfax it would seem to have succeeded in achieving the worst of all possible worlds, in terms of both diversity (because of Packer's broadcasting interests) and foreign ownership.

I certainly believe that the decision to allow News Limited to take over the Herald and Weekly Times was one of the worst decisions the government has made in the whole of the last eight and a half years, because it's allowed a quite unprecedented level of concentration of media ownership — unprecedented in Australia and unparalleled in any other Western country at any time. And that must mean that our democracy is in a very unhealthy state, because with that degree of concentration there is inevitably a narrowing of the range of ideas and information that are circulating in the community. You only have to compare our press with that in Britain or the United States or Canada to see the relative lack of diversity there.

Of course it would be an absolute disgrace and a disaster if the Black/Packer bid won. But remember their bid still has to be tested against the cross-media ownership rules. The whole point of the amendment to the Broadcasting Act introduced into Parliament in September is to strengthen and clarify those rules, so that the Australian Broadcasting Tribunal will have clearer guidelines as to how it should assess cross-media ownership.

Is it a fundamentally contradictory aim to be attempting to facilitate both diversity and purely domestic ownership at one and the same time?

Absolutely not. Australia is awash with funds looking for profitable places to be located. The superannuation funds are going to have hundreds of billions of dollars to invest over the rest of the decade. There are plenty of entrepreneurs here, and plenty of journalists who would love to be involved in the management of the press. Clearly, the highest priority is to have greater diversity, but I don't see any reason why we should not seek both greater diversity and Australian ownership at the same time.

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Unholy Orders

‘New world order’: the Left’s three favourite hate words of the year. But Diarmuid Maguire suggests righteous indignation isn’t enough. A sober look at the new global realities is in order.

The New World Order’ threatens to become as pervasive a slogan as “Drink Coca Cola”. It has entered our homes through the electronic media; it turns up in our daily newspapers; and entire conferences are organised around the meaning of the concept. Indeed, one wouldn’t be surprised to come across it on a trip to a remote village somewhere. Whenever I hear or read the phrase I imagine that a Saddam-like portrait of George Bush has been erected in my living room or on a billboard on my way to work. And my immediate urge is to pencil in a funny moustache and a pair of round glasses.

It is clear that I am not alone. There are a host of subversive scribblers who insert in their articles a “dis” before the “order” or substitute “American” for “world”. “Fight the New World Order!” screams a poster near my local railway station. This shows that some are prepared to challenge the concept head on. But the contested slogan survives even here. One wonders if such a campaign - like “Don’t Drink Coca Cola!” - can ultimately be successful.

I must admit that there is a dark part of me that cheers every time there is some terrible international news. I know that this news chips away at the New American Order and illustrates the true character of our New World Disorder. In this regard - to paraphrase John Lennon - I know I’m not the only one. But again, like Lennon, I would...
much prefer to imagine a world that was better and explore positive ways to help build it.

So what is 'The New World Order' exactly, and what are we supposed to do with it? For it isn't good enough to draw funny moustaches or issue open challenges without knowing what one wants to subvert, fight or replace. It seems that at least three meanings have been attached to the slogan and it is useful to examine each in turn.

New World Order One characterises an international system that has supposedly become more stable and secure because of the end of the Cold War. From this viewpoint, the evaporation of the East-West equation and greater US-Soviet cooperation will reduce the nuclear threat and lead to the resolution of regional conflicts. Although this version of the New World Order received a body blow with Iraq's invasion of Kuwait, it was quickly reconstituted in the wake of the US victory over Iraq.

New World Order Two stems from the notion that the collapse of Soviet power represents the ultimate and global triumph of capitalist democracy. This thesis has been argued forcefully by Francis Fukuyama in his 'End of History' articles. It is an argument that has been criticised by those who see History's virulent return with the resurrection of ancient quarrels in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. Regardless, it is clear that the marxist-leninist model of economic and political development has collapsed and that the alternative of capitalist democracy has been used to fill the vacuum. In this manifestation of world politics in transition, peace and cooperation will be established among states that need trade and investment and whose militaries will be subject to 'the democratic veto'.

Finally, New World Order Three condenses the previous two, but expresses them in concrete politico-strategic terms. That is, the US won the Cold War and it is the US that will shape the post-Cold War world. In this version, America will be the cautious leader of a unipolar world in which it shares not only power, but also the economic burden of hegemony. In return, it will help guarantee the survival of capitalism and democracy and will provide a modicum of international stability.

All three world orders represent an attempt to envisage a replacement for an old international system that no longer exists. The Cold War Order has gone and it has left a vacuum in international politics. Old power structures and ideologies are being sloughed off painfully and slowly. Leaders are searching for principles and institutions around which to organise a new system. The post-Cold War era is still pre-Something Else, and slogans like 'The New World Order' hide the fact that nobody knows what that 'Something' will be. Will international politics in fu-
ture be shaped by cooperative security alliances, the 'natural' harmony of capitalist democracy, or the continuing dominance of the United States?

**New World Order One**: Saddam Hussein's invasion of Kuwait on 2 August 1990 not only challenged New World Order One, but also illustrated what superpower clients might do if freed from Cold War constraints. The degeneration of the international system into a Hobbesian 'war of all against all' was something that the US and the Soviets were determined to prevent. Bush's repeated references to the collapse of global order in the 1920s and 1930s, and his comparison of Saddam with Hitler, revealed this deep-seated fear. The US administration also sought to use the Gulf War as a means of forging new security arrangements through coalition building and burden sharing among capitalist democracies — old, new and potential.

In the short-term, the coalition was a success. In the long-term, however, no structures have been established to fight, let alone prevent such wars in future. The United Nations merely sanctioned the use of force by the US-led alliance and thus was not strengthened as an international security organisation. NATO was not involved and still resists the idea of military engagement outside Europe. The organisation that was established, in the words of one of its architects to "keep the Soviets out, the Americans in and the Germans down", no longer has a rationale for existing. The European Community lacks the military apparatus to guarantee 'order' internally or externally. This can be seen by the failure of its monitors in attempting to impose a ceasefire in Yugoslavia by carrying little more than EC flags.

All the Gulf War demonstrated was that an international coalition can be established if conflict breaks out in a vital strategic and economic region. But the tremendous effort that went into defeating such a small nation cannot be exerted repeatedly. Thus the Kurds and the Shi'ites have been subjected to renewed Iraqi attacks and receive little more than rhetorical support. Yugoslavia is left to pursue its own civil war which has already claimed more casualties than those borne by the allies in the Gulf.

The greatest challenge to New World Order One comes from the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. There, old elites in new guises struggle to preserve their power and some are willing to shed blood in order to do so. Conflicts are becoming more fierce in Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Ukraine and the central Asian republics. But there are no international frameworks for resolving them, or even dampening their effects.

It is unclear how the New World Order can maintain international security when these conflicts spill across national boundaries and challenge their very existence. Under these circumstances, the Bush administration is forced to sit back and observe these events like the rest of us. This explains its caution in recognising various independence movements. If a large and important part of the world is deprived of legitimate national boundaries, there can be no international stability and order for the foreseeable future.

**New World Order Two**: Perhaps these problems might be resolved as the free market and representative democracy slowly encourage individuals to pursue more material gains and to settle their differences peacefully. This is the solution advanced by the advocates of New World Order Two. They argue that the end of the Cold War shows that capitalist democracy is the only viable way to manage a political and economic system. Thus the problems of post-communist regimes can be solved by their societies absorbing the short-term pain of market transition and fully accepting representative democracy. It has been claimed that countries like Poland have already moved well along this path.

Yet this analysis of the post-communist world fails to recognise how old elites are engaged in a struggle to keep control of the means of production and existing state structures. Democratic centralisers want to maintain the nation-state but transform its institutions. Authoritarian centralisers work to keep the nation-state and existing institutions intact. And regional ethnocrats — whether authoritarian or democratic — are prepared to encourage ethnic conflict in order to challenge present boundaries. But all are capable of accepting the market and the trappings of democracy if it helps them realise their goals. In this way, after the transition to capitalist democracy, the same people remain in charge but, as the Poles say, they now wear different hats. Often their power is legitimated by free elections. To paraphrase de Tocqueville, elections allow the ruled in Eastern Europe to hear their new chains rattle.

**The post-Cold War era is still pre-Something Else**

Like most of Latin America, much of Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union is now formally democratic. But also like Latin America, this democracy is a thin electoral veneer that covers highly elitist power structures. The post-coup Soviet Union was managed by an unelected Soviet President who ruled by decree. The post-coup Soviet Union is run by Russia's first elected president, who nonetheless prefers the same method of control.

The argument that the marriage of capitalism and democracy will produce 'order' in the East also ignores important lessons from history. It is no easy task to absorb the social costs of the market and maintain political democracy simultaneously. Italy, Germany and Spain discovered this in the interwar years. The birth of new capitalist democracies in the international system is no guarantee of future stability and order.
New World Order Three: Given the limitations of the first two alternatives, is the United States the only power capable of promoting international stability? The US is a representative democracy and it has the world’s largest capitalist economy and military machine. It has no real challengers in the international system, and even powerful economic actors like Germany and Japan are prepared to follow its political lead. It has even been argued that the US governs a unipolar world and that this will be the case for some time to come.

But the US isn’t running the world at the moment. Nobody is. It’s just that the US reaction to a particular world event is much more important than that of anyone else. The Iraqi invasion of Kuwait provided it with a rare opportunity to exercise its power successfully. The strategic importance of the region, the brutal nature of the aggression and the lack of a skilled opponent weighed the odds heavily in America’s favour. This combination is unlikely to occur again.

The Gulf War also revealed a central weakness in the position of the US. It may well be that there is no great power interested in pushing America off its perch. But the US is economically reliant on other great powers to stay there. The demands for economic contributions during the war against Iraq showed that the US does not have the domestic base to sustain its solitary superpower status. In fact, America’s military machine is now being cut to the size of a declining national economy.

Perhaps America did win the Cold War, but it certainly exhausted itself in the process. The collapse of Soviet power and the failure of a new challenger to emerge, makes the US look much stronger than it actually is. Imagine if after World War Two the United States and the Soviet Union did not exist, leaving only Britain and Germany. Britain would still be exhausted by war, but the remnants of its former power would seem to be more important. Germany, by contrast, would be even more devastated — economically crushed and shattered as a unified nation-state — because Britain couldn’t afford to help her. This analogy, though flawed, captures an important truth about the current international situation.

Furthermore, if the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe continue to be dominated by old elites wearing ‘new hats’, the same is also true of the United States. The President is a former UN ambassador, envoy to China and director of the CIA. He was Reagan’s vice-president throughout Cold War II. Those around him also have impeccable elite and Cold War credentials. Together, they run a Cold War military-industrial apparatus which not only remains intact, but is searching for new missions to justify its existence. Drug traffickers and terrorists compete to be the new number one enemy, while the threat of an Islamic bomb is the latest justification for continuing with the expensive Star Wars program.

The continuous rule of Cold War elites in a post-Cold War era also has an ideological effect. Put bluntly, these rulers lack a strategic vision for the role of their nation in the new international system. Gorbachev’s blindness in this regard almost had fatal consequences for him personally. Bush’s strategic myopia has resulted in disasters in Panama and the Middle East.

Bush’s failure to define the exact meaning of his New World Order and how it might be implemented has been hidden by some great successes in the day-to-day management of US foreign policy. But reactive political ad-hoc-ery cannot sustain New World Order Three. The US administration palpably lacks the vision and the means to develop its version of the New World Order. It has simply provided the world with an empty phrase to cover its own lack of strategy in the post-Cold War era.

East European democracy is a thin electoral veneer.

It has often been pointed out that one of the great ironies of this century has been that the Left has been ‘nationalised’ as capitalism becomes internationalised. European socialist parties, with the exception of the Italians, supported their nation-states in World War One. ‘Socialism in One Country’ became the motto of Eastern and Western communist parties. In the Third World, Marxist-leninist organisations were, at best, movements for national liberation. Almost everywhere, social democracy and marxism-leninism became statist strategies for increasing power and wealth.

The collapse of the Bolshevik model means that one path of national development for the Left has been closed off. The current crisis of social democracy (since the mid-1970s) shows that ‘Social Democracy in One Country’ isn’t possible either. Thus the Left must be de-nationalised and re-internationalised if it wants to solve its own problems and help resolve those of the world. The historic split of 1917 is no longer relevant, and it is time to fundamentally re-examine these basic issues.

None of the three dominant world orders, as presently defined, will solve the problems of superpower decline and the eruption of regional conflicts. The four ‘P’s of poverty, patriarchy, pollution and proliferation also remain unaddressed by existing alternatives. This should not give us satisfaction, but instead spur our thoughts and our actions. One can only hope that a pluralistic and international Left can meet the exciting challenges of this new post-Cold War world. If it doesn’t, it will deserve its current media caricature as offering no concrete solutions to real and pressing global problems.

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Are we all social democrats now?

Following the USSR's August coup Mikhail Gorbachev finally bade farewell to Soviet socialism. He now considered himself, he said, a Western-style socialist in the model of Willy Brandt and the Swedish Social Democrats. The epoch of 1917 finally drew to a close. But what does the belated death of the revolutionary mystique mean for the Western Left? Are we all social democrats now? ALR asked four political observers for their opinions.
End of the Line

With the collapse of Gorbachev's 'reform communism' the Left's dreams of a 'third way' have finally been shattered. But Mitchell Dean argues a retreat to the rhetoric of democracy isn't enough.

The condition of the Left today must be stated frankly: it is one of ideological and political disarray. Under the impulse of Green politics and feminism, and new forms of oppositional cultural movements, the Western left has been involved in a long-term shift away from Marxist socialism for the past decade, symbolised by the effective dissolution of Western Communist parties. The events of 1989 and 1991, first in the former Soviet satellites, and now in the Union itself, have cemented this shift.

Not only is the Cold War over, but so too is the rhetoric of the division of the world into two antagonistic power blocs, and, as a corollary, the politics of confrontation. At the same time, the possible terrain for the Left seems fraught with dangers: a 'realist' social democracy committed to economic management within the existing and deeply problematic institutions of liberal democracy, or a 'utopian' radical democracy, which reinterprets socialism as an extension of democracy, without being able to address substantive issues of economic and social policy or to muster popular support. For the Left today, there are no easy solutions, and we should be wary of those who claim to have them. That would include a retreat into a comfortable social democracy.

While communism existed in Eastern Europe, it was always possible for the Left to imagine an internal democratisation of these regimes leading to a 'third way' between tyranny of the state and the logic of the market. The aborted coup has made clear that there is no turning back towards a reconstructed marxist socialism in the East. The lesson for the left was that any dream of a 'third way' was illusory, that marxism-leninism could not provide the framework for institutional reform in Soviet societies, and that the end of communism was a condition for extending the process of reform. In accepting these propositions, however, conventional Left positions are revealed as irrelevant to the problems faced by these societies — those of economic collapse, of national and ethnic divisions, of political instability and political immaturity, of refugees, and of the rejection of the rule of law in favour of civil war.

The Left's position is hardly better placed in regard to the liberal-democratic West, particularly in those countries facing long-term economic and industrial decline such as Australia. Long-term, cyclical economic depression, apparently irreversible deindustrialisation, chronic unemployment and mass poverty have not been a fruitful context for the Left. It has remained powerless in the face of the dismantling of the welfare state - perhaps due to ambivalence in the first place, but more likely due to its inability to provide an alternative program for economic reform and recovery, or for political change.

The institutions of liberal democracy have proved unable to provide for even minimal levels of citizen participation, public debate, policy choice and government accountability. While the Right would hail the changes in the East as a victory for democracy, these changes reveal in full light the poverty of our own democratic institutions, the flimsy nature of their legitimation and the endemic problems of a deregulated market economy.

If liberal democracy is fundamentally flawed, then so too is a political ideology which would claim to manage the economy in the interests of a modicum of social justice. Social democracy, by definition, accepts the limits set by the institutions of representative democracy. The only form of participation and accountability it knows is manageralist corporatism, as the recent Australian experience has shown. Labourism, our indigenous version of social democracy, with its penchant for enlisting the services of the shady side of the 'big end of town', amplifies some of the species' worst tendencies.

It must be said, however, that it has at least been prepared to listen to agendas other than those of economic rationalism, and its persistence in government has protected Australians from a fate comparable to Thatcherism. Yet, contrary to Gorbachev's statement, social democracy offers no safe haven for the Left after the collapse of communism. Its major attraction is its status as a component of two-party systems, where the alternative is a wholesale radical destruction of social rights and citizen participation in favour of an out-of-control market logic.
The other option also involves democracy. The great temptation now is to take up and radicalise the Right's position. The latter presents liberal democracy as the solution to all existing problems in the East. In the case of the Left, a kind of outbidding occurs in which socialism now lays claim to the true legacy of democracy. This is the position of the new democratic Left. It theorises a renewal of democracy through the social movements and citizen participation of 'civil society'. The key theoretical problem here is the failure to recognise what even bourgeois political economy already knew, that civil society is the sphere of those antagonistic interests which give rise to the state and which lead to pluralist party systems under conditions of liberal democracy. The political danger in the West is that greater democratisation becomes a mere slogan which conceals the absence of substantive economic and social policy engagement on the one hand, and a program for political and constitutional reform on the other. In the East, the danger is that the appeal to the coalitions forged in civil society may become the basis for populist, authoritarian rule, as recent developments in Soviet Georgia have already shown.

Neither existing social democracy, nor projected radical democracy offers us a ready alternative to discredited political theology. There is no correct line or 'ism' towards which the Left can retreat. The urgent need is not sloganising, but the reconstruction of the Left's agenda so that it takes its place within those debates which will determine the shape of our future.

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What Social Democrat is That?

If we're all social democrats now, Winton Higgins observes, the way to tell us apart may be to look at our backbones...

If we are now all social democrats it is high time we identified the major subspecies and located ourselves properly in this otherwise vaguely-defined category. An early social democrat, Rosa Luxemburg, once observed that all animals (political ones in particular) fell into two categories—those with backbones who could stand and get around upright, and those without, who are condemned to less dignified postures and locomotion. Vertebrates and invertebrates, as zoologists say. The distinction holds among self-styled social democrats, too.

Three years ago the then Swedish treasurer succinctly and authoritatively summed up his own invertebrate form of social democracy. Capitalism is the inevitable and unsurpassable basis of productive organisation, he said. Socialism is about redistribution only. From this brief formulation we can see clearly the resignation and self-deception that characterises the invertebrate posture. It beguiles itself into believing that there is no necessary connection between relations of production and relations of distribution, as if the goose magnanimously abandons the golden eggs it lays. In reality, the pure-bred capitalist goose only lays those golden eggs it gets to keep.

After over eight years of invertebrate social democracy in Australia the pattern is as clear as it is unsurprising. Capitalism has been managed on its own traditionally preferred terms (rebadged as economic 'rationalism'). Only in the convict era and the depression has our workforce been treated with comparable ruthlessness and contempt. Economic decision-makers have made a virtue of inhumanity in their pursuit of 'efficiencies' (for which read 'degradation of services' in most instances) in the form of layoffs and job reorganisation. Unemployment will soon return to double digits. And after so many years of 'efficiencies' and 'necessary sacrifices' as preludes to 'affluence' we find we can no longer afford viable public education, health and child care, transport and broadcasting—the most basic underpinnings of our quality of life.
Invertebrate social democracy is an international movement and our local experience of it is unremarkable. Even in the social democratic holy land, Sweden, it has taken the lead, as it has here, in declaring much of social life unaffordable and engaging in what it used to abhor as 'social disarmament'. Political science has yet to come up with a substitute for a backbone. Some of us social democrats find this invertebrate mutant less than compelling. It is neither social nor democratic. Fortunately, we can avail ourselves of the vertebrate strain, and with relief discover only the most tenuous genetic links between it and the invertebrate condition. Vertebrate social democrats are predators rather than parasites on capitalism. The basic premise of this social democracy is that capitalism is an inefficient and destructive basis for the further development of mature industrial society. As long as paper entrepreneurs disorganise our industries, the latter will not fulfill their historic promise of greater individual social choice for less drudgery. The tempo of work increases today for less socially relevant output.

There is a second basic point about capitalism which enjoys great programmatic relevance among vertebrates. In flat opposition to the economists' old furphy that efficiency and equity are antithetical, capitalism's inequity and inefficiency reinforce each other. Conversely, democratic and egalitarian reforms to economic organisation and income distribution have fostered economic prosperity and social justice in countries where social democrats have broken through. For the vast majority, the pursuit of democratic norms, equity and efficiency carries its own fairly immediate rewards. Yet this line of reform is no mere palliative.

Over time it implies the cumulative displacement of capitalist institutions that chronically underachieve and are incorrigibly inge...
We are, of course, not 'all' anything at all—except human beings; though there is some argument about that, too. Yet radicals—readers of Australian Left Review, for example—have some shared sources of identity. And a hundred years ago, our predecessors reading Die Neue Zeit would 'all' have been social democrats—for 'social democrat' was the fin-de-siecle equivalent of 'marxist', and many socialists viewed marxism and socialism as co-extensive. Whatever marxism's own territorial claims to monopoly of wisdom, however, social democracy certainly represented difference. In the German Social Democratic Party reforming feminists such as Lily Braun clashed with hardliners like Clara Zetkin, while revolutionaries like Alexander Helphand-Parvin and Rosa Luxemburg scuffled with poor Eduard Bernstein, the great revisionist. In the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party there were simultaneously softies like Martov and hardened professional revolutionaries such as Lenin. When taunted, was he a Jew or a Russian, the young Leon Trotsky replied simply—'neither: I am a Social Democrat'. Social democracy, whatever else it was, gave an image of purpose combined with revolutionaries such as Lenin. When taunted, was he a Jew or a Russian, the young Leon Trotsky replied simply—'neither: I am a Social Democrat'. Social democracy, whatever else it was, gave an image of purpose combined with difference in perspective; it contained the eagle-eyed Lenin and the blinking Martov, the young Antonio Gramsci and Jean Juares, the smug August Bebel and the smugger Karl Kautsky, as well as Rosa Luxemburg and Trotsky.

A hundred years ago social democrats—including even the revisionist Bernstein—still defined themselves as marxists. Marxist credentials have weighed heavily in debate ever since; even Foucault and Derrida have on occasions been known to describe themselves as marxists, and, as some unkind observers have remarked, the recent protracted struggle between 'class politics' and 'alliance' politics on the Western Left sometimes resembled a staged replay of the earlier battles between Luxemburg and Bernstein. Looking like a marxist, or having decent 'credentials', is still an important thing; as some people have pointed out, postmarxist is a much more ambivalent condition than the 'post' at first suggests.

Yet much has changed. Ten years ago, perhaps a little more, a marxist (such as I then was) would have explained socialism negatively, via Marx's very good book Capital. The argument went something like this. Capital was essentially a social relation; socialism, it followed, had to be the negation of capitalist production. Alienation could only be overcome if labour power was no longer commodified. Socialism could only involve the regime of the associated producers. No money, and likely no state. No troubles.

Today, socialism makes more sense (to me) as the organisation of ideas, practices and resources with which we are already largely working. The Fall of the Wall reinforces the point, which had been argued for enough earlier already, that socialists still need markets. The point now, rather, is, as Michael Walzer says, that the morality of the bazaar belongs to the bazaar. To argue for socialism, as Karl Polanyi put it, means to acknowledge the social over the economic, to insist that economic means must be put to social ends. This is as good a working definition of social democracy as I can find because it isn't excessively programmatic so much as it is normative; it avoids implying (as Marx did) that socialism was a condition, his own favoured interpretation of the end of the history-prehistory scenario.

Certainly social democracy can still be defended, in the manner of the Swedish Social Democrats, as a kind of political long-wave theory, identifying the task as successive waves of democratisation going through politics, society, and economy. All this echoes through Marshall's idea of progressive phases of citizenship, civil, political and social rights. But in a more general sense, too, it ought to be recognised that socialism and social democracy contain a storehouse of traditions ignored until recently, because of the reign of so-called scientific socialism over other local and variegated traditions. There are a few things here which even Gorbachev could learn from—though that particular possibility is unlikely, and is one reason why Gorbachev the reform communist has yielded to Yeltsin. The Gorbachev moment has passed, coup or no coup.

The central victim in this process is arguably less the idea of planning or regulation than the idea of revolution. Yet again, socialists under the influence of Gramsci were already arguing for processual rather than ruptural hopes of change into the 80s. At the time, they were damned by superior revolutionary minds who made the charge that Eurocommunism really represented the creeping social-democratisation of marxist politics. Perhaps the superior critics were correct. The dispute nowadays seems to be one over the content of social democracy, its earlier radical impulse, its postwar Keynesian administrative form, and its remaining hopes and prospects.

Are we then, all social democrats now? 'No; but what a shame'—might be an immediate response. A more measured response might be different. There is no prospect (or risk) of 'us' all, Australia-wide and to a person, becoming social democrats, and even if there were there would still be lots of issues over which we should properly continue to disagree. 'We' may 'all' be social democrats now in a residual, historical sense, but no more than that. Those for whom the condition is potentially positive need to rediscover the traditions of various socialisms and radicalisms and rethink them. The more immediate challenge in Australia is that of endeavouring to place social democracy back on the social agenda, not least of all in Canberra. Somewhere near the bottom of the list on this agenda will do, for a start.

A great labour lies before us, wherever we now find ourselves, however we now define ourselves, as inheritors of social democracy or the radical traditions, as socialists or radicals. The certainty that we are great in numbers need not be part of this process. As Bernstein said, historical materialists were Calvinists without God. We need to choose our own gods, and argue for them in the contingent world which is politics.

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f we are all social democrats now, it is the structures in which we have confidence which have changed, not our principles or objectives. Our noses have been rubbed comprehensively in the deficiencies of statutory corporations and the command economy. The need to achieve better ways of working together remains the same.

Democratic socialists and social democrats should not be seeking to abolish private ownership of the means of production, distribution and exchange, as our conservative critics constantly claim but, rather, to disperse and democratise ownership in ways which rule out exploitation and other forms of misuse. It is no useful part of the social democratic or democratic socialist program to take major industries out of the hands of faceless and accountable boards of directors, elected by shareholders whose function is otherwise restricted to the provision of capital, only to vest them in statutory corporations which so far have not been observed to behave any better. What should be non-negotiable, as far as democratic socialists and social democrats are concerned, is the principle that no member of our community should live off the product of another's work, and that there should be a say in the governance of the workplace for every workforce member who wishes to take advantage of it. It follows that a social democratic or democratic socialist society ought to encompass a rich profusion of ownership arrangements, from corporations with employee shareholdings, to the traditional owner-operated business.

Historically, social democrats have been content simply to shuffle enterprises between the private and public sectors. The democratic socialism or social democracy of the future should be concerned rather to open up the possibility of a new, third sector, where increasingly workers and consumers exercise ownership in conformity with the needs of the communities to which they belong. Enterprises such as these would have four common characteristics. First, exploitation of one person's work by another would be ruled out by enterprise self-ownership, with the workers themselves as shareholders. Secondly, as co-owners, workers would have the governance of the enterprise in their own hands, and decide for themselves precisely how far to involve themselves in management and decision-making processes. Thirdly, accountability would be achieved by writing into the enterprise's constitution or articles of association its obligations to the wider community, subject to an annual assessment of social as well as financial performance through external audit. Finally, diversity would be promoted through a decentralist approach, with each enterprise choosing its own path towards self-ownership, self-government and self-regulation, as well as the pace of change and the manner in which it takes place.

The great industrial co-operatives at Mondragon in Spain are a case in point. In 1956, a handful of Mondragon townspeople decided to break out from the poverty which had dominated their lives since the Civil War. A co-operative was started which used hand tools and sheet metal to manufacture paraffin-fired domestic heating and cooking stoves for the local market. Today, Mondragon is the centre of a group of more than 100 major industrial co-operatives. The group's products include heavy earth-moving machinery, ultra-sophisticated machine tools, furniture, white goods such as refrigerators and washing machines, and a wide range of other capital equipment and consumer durables. The industrial co-operatives, in turn, are serviced by secondary co-operatives, including the group's bank—the Caja Laboral Popular—which has made them capital self-sufficient; and associated co-operatives for research and development, health care and social security, primary and secondary schools, a co-operative university of technology; and a co-operative school of business management. There are also agricultural co-operatives and housing co-operatives.

All told, the Mondragon co-operatives have in every way enriched the lives of the more than twenty thousand families who make up their memberships. It is arrangements of this sort, and not the command economy or statutory corporations, which reflect the authentic face of social democracy or democratic socialism, and move us forward in the direction of the society of equals which is our enduring goal.

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Belgrade BREAKUP

Wracked by civil war, Yugoslavia now looks ungovernable. Yet the roots of the crisis lie deep in the Titoist past. Paul Hockenos spoke to Yugoslavia’s most famous dissident, Milovan Djilas, about the country’s impasse and its origins.

Milovan Djilas, 79, is Yugoslavia’s most famous former dissident. In 1932, the young Montenegrin joined the then-illegal Communist Party of Yugoslavia and later led the World War Two underground resistance as a partisan general. After the war, Djilas was Tito’s right-hand man until his democratic objections to Yugoslavia’s course precipitated his expulsion from the party in 1954. As an outspoken critic of the regime, his views and numerous books cost him ten years’ imprisonment. Only in May 1989 did he achieve de facto rehabilitation when he began to appear openly in the media.

As one of postwar Yugoslavia’s founding fathers, how do you feel today as you witness the country’s violent collapse?

I had long predicted the downfall of Tito’s centralised Yugoslavia. Of course, I didn’t suppose that the state would disintegrate so rapidly—although, unlike the Soviet Union or Eastern Europe, the evolution of the system here has been in progress for some time. I thought that after so many years of dictatorship the initial reaction of people would be more democratic. I knew, of course, that nationalism would play a great role in Yugoslavia, but I didn’t foresee it being this strong.

Yet, single party rule is over and democratic elections have been held in every republic...

Certainly, elections marked the beginning of a process of democratisation. But the end of communist rule brought different nationalistic movements to power in every republic in Yugoslavia. Regardless of their ideological pretences, there are no essential differences between the regimes in the six Yugoslav republics. While the governments are democratically elected, the parliaments are ineffectual and the oppositions everywhere are very weak. The means of information are by and large tightly controlled. In Belgrade and Zagreb, as well as Skopje and Ljubljana, what we have now are autocratic nationalistic governments in power.
How do you explain the intensity and ferocity of nationalism in Yugoslavia today?

Nationalism, of course, has deep roots here. The Croats, for example, have been obsessed with the creation of their own state since the 13th century. But four decades of communist dictatorship haven’t helped any. The communists blocked the growth of a democratic consciousness here by suppressing every form of opposition—particularly democratic opposition.

Nationalism was also suppressed but, unlike democracy, it is a spontaneous movement. In the new political space, nationalist populist groups found the national ideologies easy to manipulate. The Serb and Croat ruling parties launched fierce nationalistic campaigns against one another that fanned hatred and laid the basis for military conflict.

So, the break-up of post-Tito Yugoslavia was inevitable?

In its communist form—yes. Maybe if Tito had been more elastic much earlier on, less orthodox in his ideology, things would look different today. I advocated a step by step process of democratisation in the early 1950s. But Tito was a dictator, and dictators demand full control.

War is already a reality. What are your thoughts as Yugoslavia slides ever deeper into civil war again after 45 years?

This is a crazy war because it is one that nobody will win. Even if we imagine a Serbian or Croatian victory, the essential problems will remain the same. Let’s say that Serbia wins and takes Croatian land, Croatia will always be eager to take that territory back again. Of course, I am very worried and I ask myself what can I do. But I'm too old now to participate in politics. There isn’t a social democratic organisation that suits me at the moment and I have no desire to serve any particular leadership.

Many observers today lay the brunt of the blame at the feet of the Serbian government. Can one speak of Serbia as the aggressor, pressing for a Greater Serbia at the territorial expense of the other republics?

No side is exclusively guilty. During elections last year, the leader of the nationalistic Croat party, now Croat President Franjo Tudjman, expressed his intention to create a Greater Croatia. That meant taking parts of Bosnia, as well as Serbia and Montenegro. Now, because they have suffered great losses on the battlefield, they hope simply to maintain Croatia’s present frontiers. Under the pretext of defending the Serb minority there, the Serbian leadership—and now the army too—is attacking some parts of northeastern Croatia, where Croats constitute the majority of the population. From my point of view this is a war of invasion.

The story is somewhat different in the Krajina region of southern Croatia, where Serbs in fact constitute the majority. The Serbs there do have a right to some form of autonomy which the newly-elected Croat government denied them. They felt endangered, and the Serbs are a people very strongly inclined to protect the Serbian minority in Croatia. The memories of the Ustashe [World War Two Croatian fascists] massacres are still very much alive in the Serb consciousness.

Yet surely Serbia’s intentions to impose its hegemony over large parts of Yugoslavia has been clear for some time now.

Serbia, as a republic, is not formally involved in the conflict. It was the Serbian minority in Croatia that started to revolt and the Croatian militia suppressed them. In the beginning, the army was more or less neutral. Nevertheless, the Serbs can’t justify such a large military response. The political leadership of Krajina which, indeed, is backed by Serbia seems intent on enlarging its own ethnic territory. They are even speaking of the Dalmatian port of Zadar as Serbian.

The aims of Serbia’s President Milosevic are still unclear. Although his rhetoric is that of a united Yugoslavia, his moves to expand Serbian influence are anti-Yugoslav. But that doesn’t necessarily mean that he wouldn’t settle for national rights and autonomy for the Serb minorities in a reworked Yugoslavia. I am afraid, however, that he is more inclined to enlarge Serbia which implicitly spells war in Croatia as well as in neighbouring Bosnia and elsewhere, such as the overwhelming ethnic Albanian province of Kosovo. If there is a rebellion in Kosovo, Albania itself will
go to war. Albania may be weak and demoralised, but Albanians in Kosovo are unanimous and intensely inspired along national lines.

Croatia and Slovenia both base their claims to independence on the right of nations to self-determination. The application of this right is obviously problematic in such ethnically mixed regions as Croatia and Bosnia. But, on the other hand, can it be denied?

The republics' positions are all riddled with hypocrisy

Theoretically, everybody has this right but, in practice, we are not so free. Neither Croatia nor Bosnia can separate without sparking war. If Croatia has the right to self-determination, say the Serbs, then so does the Serb minority— and they will elect to join Serbia proper. The republics' different positions are all riddled with hypocrisy. While the Serbs demand the right to separate from Croatia, they deny the same prerogative to the Albanians in Kosovo. Since Slovenia is ethnically homogeneous, and her present republican frontiers are in harmony with her ethnic borders, she can become independent. Macedonia, maybe, can too, but it will find itself threatened from the Bulgarian and Albanian side as well as Serbian. Frontiers are nearly impossible to define within Yugoslavia. But, then, the question of borders is the problem of all of Europe, not only Yugoslavia.

As the war in Croatia has escalated, the federal army has intervened with increasing force on behalf of the Serbs. How do you explain this development?

Longer than any other institution in Yugoslavia, the army stuck by the old communist ideology of federal Yugoslavia. Yet, with time, even it began to understand that this was obsolete. The independence drives of the republics prompted a belated but parallel disintegration within the army. The military hierarchy simply replaced their communist values with nationalist orientations. Now all republics, with the exception of Serbia, insist upon their own republican army. The generals from Slovenia, Macedonia, Croatia and Bosnian are actively promoting desertion from the army. Thus, although the army is formally Yugoslav, in practice it is ever more Serbian. Under the pretext of maintaining a federal Yugoslavia, the army is, in fact, backing the Serbs in Croatia.

The outlook appears so grim. Is a resolution to the crisis anywhere in sight?

Unless some qualitatively new factors arise, I don't see this war coming to an end in the near future. At the same time, I still don't believe that an all-out Balkan war is inevitable. The people are not enthusiastic about the war, even in Serbia.

The European institutions have a key role to play in Yugoslavia. The latest decision to hold a peace conference for Yugoslavia is positive. In contrast to earlier initiatives that were empty, this move promises something concrete. I've been extremely disappointed with the European diplomacy until now. There haven't been any real achievements, only propositions, declarations and promises. The German and Austrian moves to recognise Slovenian and Croatian independence had negative repercussions. On the one hand, they encouraged Croats to continue the civil war as a means to win international recognition. On the other hand, the possibility of an independent Croatia only frightened the Serb minority further, prompting them to step up their revolt.

How, then, do you envision the nations and ethnic minorities of Yugoslavia living together?

The one way out for Yugoslavia is to move itself towards a liberal, democratic state. I envision a completely new structure for Yugoslavia—something between federation and confederation. That means a state organised with completely independent life for equal republics and, at the same time, with a strong centre. The republics must agree upon a common army, common monetary and foreign policy, and common guaranteed human rights.

But isn't it already too late for this? Hasn't a united Yugoslavia already been rejected?

It can't be too late because there isn't any other way to avoid all-out war. A structure similar to the one I have in mind was basically proposed last month by the presidents of Bosnia and Macedonia. All the republican leaders agreed but, then, the next day, some of them backed away.

Yugoslavs watched the recent crisis in the Soviet Union with particular interest. How have the events there affected Yugoslavia?

It was telling that the Serbian leadership was the only government in Europe that didn't condemn the putsch. In a similar boat, the Soviet Union had sheltered Serbia and army hardliners. I think Moscow will now adopt a position closer to that of the West Europeans, thus isolating Serbia even more.

Yugoslavia could use its own Gorbachev today. But neither is that person in sight nor, honestly, do I feel that he or she could really counter the tide of nationalism here. I think that the crisis in the Soviet Union will resolve itself more easily than in Yugoslavia.

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In the wake of the Soviet coup, Eastern Europe’s rapid transition to the market has taken a spurt. Reformers are determined to make a clean break with the past. But Louis Haddad sounds a note of caution. The fast-track road to private ownership, he argues, could turn out to be just a fast-track to economic chaos.

Economic reformers in Eastern and Central Europe seem to know exactly what they want and where they are heading: a well-functioning market system of the kind found in developed Western countries. Further, they are in a hurry to get there, and are in no mood for any experimentation on the way lest it leads them into a costly detour or dead end. For them and their supporters in the IMF there is simply no alternative to the free market system. Marxism, socialism, communism and even planning are dead and buried in Europe. The ideology of marketism has presently triumphed over the ideology of communism.

All the same, having a clear vision of one’s goal is one thing; getting there is quite another. The transition from central planning to the market cannot be effected simply by a process of transplanting all the institutions, structures and policies of the developed market economies. This is not simply because of the legacy of the bureaucratic past; it is in the nature of the beast. Systemic changes and institution building are not a matter of mechanics, of assembling the different components together as in a building. What is involved is an organic process that requires time to allow the interdependent components mutually to adjust and interact with one another in order to get together.

Anyone who knows anything about the evolution of markets in developed countries will be aware of the fact that it took decades, if not centuries, for these markets to develop and function efficiently and effectively. This is not
to deny that the period of transition can be telescoped by copying from the developed market economies their institutions, organisations and policies, through foreign technical and financial assistance, investment and joint ventures, and through sales of state enterprises to foreign corporations. These things are helpful and are indeed encouraged by the reformers. Of course, the speed of transition will depend on the circumstances of particular countries, on the initial conditions such as the degree of decentralisation of decision-making, the size of the existing private sector and state of the economy, its internal and external balance.

Nevertheless, there is, in principle, an ‘optimal’ pace of reform for each country which should not be artificially speeded up or delayed. But in practice the policy-makers in Eastern Europe are confronted with the stark choice between the application of shock therapies and a sequenced, gradual transition. Both strategies have their merits and demerits, as I will explain below.

In general, though, the reformers in Eastern Europe at present are in favour of rapid transition to a market-based system. In this they are strongly supported by the IMF, the World Bank and a number of experts in the West. They all reject the gradual approach on historical, political strategic and economic grounds. According to them, the gradual approach was tried in the past and found wanting. Previous attempts to reform the planning system in Hungary, Poland and elsewhere have met only with a limited degree of success. Further, the gradual approach, they argue, provides the anti-reformers with ample time to frustrate the reform process and ultimately derail it. Furthermore, as old habits die hard, it is necessary to administer quick, sharp measures in order to force people to change their thinking and behaviour. Shock therapies, which are meant to cut the Gordian knot of the bureaucratic legacy, can shorten the most painful and insecure stage of transformation. Finally, there are economic gains to be got from dismantling the old costly system and replacing it as quickly as possible with a well-functioning market system that will allocate resources more effectively and generate a higher rate of technological innovation.

The radical reformers are fully aware of the likely danger of chaos that might follow the destruction of the old system, which did work after some fashion, while the new one is being installed, a danger that already exists in the ‘Soviet Union’, Romania and Bulgaria. But to them the risks involved in their strategy are less than those of the gradual approach. The reformers and their supporters are also aware of the inevitable hardships of market reforms, the economic and psychological costs which flow from the strategy of rapid transition. However, they believe such ‘adjustment’ costs will be temporary and will be more than offset by the permanent gains that would accrue from the establishment of the market system. With appropriate macroeconomic policies, it is maintained, a recovery from the reduced level of output and employment will be possible within a relatively short period of time—perhaps a few years. As to the human and psychological costs of adjusting to market forces, they argue, these can be cushioned by ‘a social safety net’ designed to help the most vulnerable segments of the population. Moreover, these costs, it is suggested, will be accepted by the population since it is widely understood that the old planning system is simply unable to deliver a modern progressive economy. The alternative gradual approach would, according to the radical reformers, postpone but not avoid the painful costs of adjusting to a market economy.

Ironically, the advocates of rapid transition and shock therapies are recommending strategies of rapid industrialisation which seem oddly similar to the kinds of ‘cultural revolutions’ and ‘great leaps forward’ adopted with disastrous consequences by the former communist regimes. Historical arguments apply both ways. But what is even more astonishing is the dismissal of the gradual approach by the managing director of the IMF as having no merit other than its ‘semblance of wisdom’. But is it a semblance of wisdom to insist on preparing the ground before rushing forward, or is it not in fact a cardinal blunder to ignore the preconditions for a successful and speedy transition? And what of the likely hidden costs of hastily devising faulty social arrangements, incentives and institutions? Initial errors committed in a hurry can lead to lasting handicaps and deformities. To prevent such deformities it may be necessary to spend more time and take special care when laying the very foundations of new institutions and organisations. However, this should not be used to justify unnecessary delays and indifference to the pace of reforms.

Additionally, shock therapies if applied simultaneously in Eastern Europe, as is recommended by the IMF, can aggravate the costs of transition. They will lead to a dramatic decline in production, employment, and foreign trade. Hundreds of factories which used to produce for one another, have closed down as a result of the recent changes and shock therapies. Thus, in 1990, Hungary’s trade with Poland declined by 60%. Was all of this decline an inevitable cost of transition?

There is yet another danger. Despite the wholesale and universal condemnation of the old system of central planning, there are certain sectors, chiefly the urban transport system and agriculture in Czechoslovakia and Hungary, which are quite successful by Western European standards. Given the indecent haste with which changes are occurring, there is real danger that the efficient sectors and enterprises will be thrown out along with the inefficient.

Finally, the advocates of rapid transition, despite their awareness of the social and human costs of transition, do not really face the question of how the needs of those who will be adversely affected can be satisfied at a time when budgetary deficits and inflation resulting from the liberalisation of prices threaten the already meagre resources devoted to social security. Nor do they face the psychological problems of coping with the market, unemployment and security. The economic reformers have not yet set up adequate administrative and advisory machineries to help people make the transition. Already, new economic crimes have appeared in Eastern Europe which are of serious concern to sociologists but not apparently to the market economists.
It would be reassuring, especially for the victims of shock therapies, to know if the transitional phase will be as short-lived as their advocates believe and whether the expected long-term benefits will outweigh the immediate costs. But there can be no certainty about such matters. So far, the Polish experience is proving very painful— notwithstanding the substantial assistance it is receiving from abroad.

It must be noted that the list of institutions, organisations and pre-conditions for a workable market system, which we take for granted, seems endless. It includes, among other things, a legal system to protect private property and enforce market contracts, a regulatory framework that includes trade practices, the creation of financial institutions, an accounting and auditing system, bankruptcy laws, extensive privatisation of enterprises, government statistics that meet the needs of market and macro-economic policies and a corresponding infrastructure to formulate and administer stabilising policies, and last and (perhaps the most difficult for the Eastern European countries) a new army of accountants, lawyers, bankers, managers and entrepreneurs to enable the market economy to work well.

A few of these requirements can be implemented simul-}


taneously in a relatively short period of time. The great bulk of them will take a good deal longer. The process of privatisation, for example, will not be short and easy, even if all the legal rules of ownership and property rights have been formulated and passed to speed up the transition.

In Eastern Europe it is now widely, if not universally, accepted that privatisation is needed for the orderly functioning of a market, and that marketisation will not be completed without a substantial degree of privatisation involving most of the economy. This belief is buttressed by the observation that no well-developed Western economy has more than one-third of its labour force employed in the public sector and that recently there has been a general trend towards privatisation in Western countries. The debate over privatisation now centres on the optimal speed and timing (ie, whether it should proceed or follow other reforms), not on the necessity of private ownership in itself. There are other subsidiary questions relating to the criteria to be used for deciding which firms will be offered for sale, to whom and at what price.

Harvard University’s Professor Jeffery Sachs has recently argued that “accelerating privatisation is the number one priority in Eastern Europe” and that “if there is no breakthrough in the privatisation of large enterprises in the
near future the entire process of reform would be stalled for years to come with dire consequences". In Sachs' view, failure to privatise quickly means that governments will continue to be deeply involved in the affairs of state enterprises and their attention will be deflected from the bigger problems of building the infrastructure and reforming the economic institutions. Further, corporatisation or commercialisation of state enterprises, he argues, will not work in the highly political climate of Eastern Europe. Thus, he rejects the idea of commercialising enterprises before privatising them: "one must forget about putting enterprises in shape before privatising them; the idea is to privatisate them and solve the problems of enterprises, not the other way round".

The strategy of privatising first and quickly overlooks a number of fundamental problems, of which the most important is to decide on the value of the assets to be sold. It is easy to argue that privatisation is needed to create proper markets (in particular a capital market) but, in the absence of such markets, privatisation cannot proceed on a rational basis. A capital market is needed to generate meaningful valuations of assets without which product prices would not reflect the real costs of all resources used in their production. Thus the strategy of privatisation first without developing other market-related institutions can lead to waste and distortion.

Moreover, rapid privatisation of state enterprises provides opportunity for corruption and abuse. Some people will get very rich as a result, while others will become unemployed. The difficulty of evaluating the assets of an enterprise before the establishment of a capital market gives enterprise managers considerable room for manoeuvre in drawing up sale contracts. In Hungary, during the early phase of 'spontaneous privatisation', a number of state firms were bought by their (formerly communist) managers at very low prices. More seriously, there have been buy-outs by former elites with no prior experience in production or marketing. It is unlikely that such privatisation will bring much economic benefit to society, even if the problem of equity is ignored.

An argument that is sometimes encountered in Eastern Europe is that rapid privatisation should proceed at once even though state assets might be sold below their market valuations: "put it down on the bill as one more but final cost of 40 years of communist misrule". The cost of dismantling the old system, according to this view, is beside the point. It does not even matter if former party officials, 'the nomenklatura' now become owners. What matters is not the owner but the function of ownership. Any real profit maximiser is better than no owner at all.

Such attitudes explain why there has been little fuss about who owns what. It does not seem to bother these advocates of the rapid path that 20% of public property in Poland has already been converted into private ownership of former elites. Elsewhere in Eastern Europe, enterprise elites of the old order are using the new measures of privatisation to retain managerial positions in the restructured firms and in joint ventures with foreign companies. While this provides an element of continuity and stability, it also carries the danger of perpetuating old habits of doing business. It is possible, of course, that the 'new' elites will behave differently as they will be working under different rules of the game. However, one would not want to count on it.

Another argument against rapid privatisation is that it might lead to a disproportionate share of state assets in foreign ownership. Given the very low ratio of domestic savings to public assets, rapid sales of state enterprises would tend to favour foreign buyers. Curiously, however, there is in Eastern Europe at present, little concern about the dangers of foreign ownership. On the contrary, there is a good deal of enthusiasm for it. In Hungary, for example, it is recommended that sales of state enterprises to foreigners be encouraged as a means of reducing the foreign debt which, in per capita terms, is one of the highest in the world. Equally, foreign ownership is welcomed because it would bring in much needed managerial and organisational talents, new technologies, and provide international markets for domestic products. Moreover, the presence of foreign firms will provide direct competition and will have favourable demonstration effects. Given these perceived advantages of foreign ownership, it is not surprising that new foreign investment laws in Eastern Europe give preferential treatment to foreign producers. The new laws offer lower tax rates on profits and larger tax holidays to foreign and joint ventures than to local producers.
Another dimension of the problem of privatisation that the reformers must face is the issue of concentrated versus dispersed ownership. Proposals have been made in Eastern Europe to give the workers shares in their own enterprises and/or to give the citizens shares in state enterprises which they can keep or sell to another or to institutions. Critics of these proposals argue that worker-ownership delays the much needed restructuring of old and obsolete industries. Moreover, the dilution of ownership would reduce both the interest of shareholders in enterprises and management's accountability to share owners. In any case, it seems in Hungary, at least, the problem has been resolved in favour of concentrated ownership. The Hungarian Law on Business Association which was passed at the beginning of 1989 has the effect of promoting concentrated rather than dispersed ownership. The law sets the minimum price of a share in joint-stock companies at one million forints (A$1=55 forints). In addition, the law exempts from taxation part of the income of those who participate in such companies. Clearly, under these arrangements, the rich will get richer. Quite apart from the question of equity, though, the effective exclusion of workers from the opportunity to purchase the property that they might see as in some sense their creation, could lead to instability if the legitimacy of the new ownership has not been demonstrated ethically.

Yet another important argument against rapid privatisation is that it might leave inadequate time for the creation of durable incentive structures for efficiency. Without market liberalisation many of the state-owned enterprises would simply be transformed into private monopolies as happened with some privatisation in Hungary. It may be possible to subject the newly privatised enterprises to foreign competition. But it seems more logical to promote competition first to establish more realistic price signals that can be used by the state to restructure the enterprises, and to privatise them afterwards.

Finally, rapid privatisation is likely to reduce the revenue from the sale of state assets if the supply exceeds the demand. In any case, given the shortage of managers and entrepreneurs in Eastern Europe, it is pointless to rush into privatisation. It is unlikely that the newly privatised enterprises would be managed by people with the required skills. There would be little to gain in efficiency from the whole process. On the other hand, slower, more deliberate and controlled privatisation will improve the chances that enterprises will be managed by those who can prove their ability in the newly emerging market economies. In short, before rapid privatisation can proceed on a large scale, it is necessary to train the various types of manager required for a well-functioning market system.

It is quite clear that reformers in Eastern Europe are faced with some difficult dilemmas in their choice of the pace and sequence of reforms. On the one hand, they want to see their economies market-driven as soon as possible—partly for political reasons (to stop the anti-reformers from interfering with the process of transition) and partly for strategic reasons (to shake the populations out of their old habits). There are also the economic benefits of dismantling the old costly system and installing the more efficient market system in the shortest possible period. On the other hand, rapid transition carries the danger of increasing costs, both economic and human. It is also likely to lead to faulty institutions and second best solutions. There are definite disadvantages in moving very rapidly in some areas if the preconditions have not been established. Haste for the radical reformers has a logic but it has also enormous costs.

Alternatively, a gradual strategy on the one hand could minimise the costs of transition and, more importantly, would be likely to lead to the establishment of sound institutions and social arrangements, simply because more care and thought could be taken in building the foundations. Of course, a gradual approach might be used as an excuse for procrastination and unnecessary delays, and vested interest groups may succeed in frustrating the reform process. Unnecessary delays can also lead to missed opportunities. Time is required to formulate sound policies and make crucial decisions, but the timeliness of decisions is also important.

**Marketism has triumphed over Communism**

Accordingly, while it might be desirable to dismantle the old system as quickly as possible in order to make way for the new market system, it is in the nature of systemic changes that they require sufficient time to be established and function well. Not all the required changes can be implemented simultaneously. The dilemma of logical sequencing has been illustrated with the problem of privatisation. The problem of sequencing can be solved more satisfactorily if sufficient time is taken to introduce the other related market institutions.

In short, it seems to me, on the whole, that a gradual approach is preferable. Rapid transition may not be the road to a well-functioning market, but a costly detour. The headlong speed with which Eastern European countries, notably Poland, are heading towards the market—a strategy urged on them by the IMF and other economists in the West—does not guarantee that the new system will function well.

The success of the economy depends not just on how markets work but also on how well economic organisations work, and on the wisdom of the policymakers, their creative and refined skill of managing the economy. The failure of the planning system in Eastern Europe, after all, was due in large measure to the failure of planners.

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As the tank tracks fade, commentators have put the spotlight on Gorbachev’s responsibility for the August Soviet coup. Graeme Gill thinks history will be rather kinder to Mikhail Sergeyevich.

The attempted Soviet coup in August raises many questions about the course of reform in an authoritarian system. Among these questions, one of the most important is the charge made against Gorbachev by many in the West, as well as by some prominent figures in the USSR, that he was at least indirectly responsible for the coup.

This argument has two main variants. The first, most recently enunciated by Eduard Shevardnadze, is that Gorbachev had been warned about the coup, and had failed to take action to counter it. This view, which focuses upon the presumed lack of judgement of Gorbachev, has some weight, but it concerns the immediate events triggering the coup and tells us nothing about the underlying forces which brought the coup about.

The second sort of argument relates to the role Gorbachev has played in the reform process since his election in 1985, and is reflected in many of the criticisms made of him by radical democrats in the Soviet Union in the last couple of years. The heart of this argument is the charge that, ever since coming to power, Gorbachev has temporised, refusing to take the radical measures necessary decisively to break with the past. Instead of forging an alliance with the more radical proponents of reform and using this to force through substantial change, he has preferred to introduce half measures which have had the effect both of leading reform into a blind alley and enabling anti-reform forces to consolidate their positions. This raises the more general question of the role of the centrist in the introduction of reform. Is the centrist doomed to fail both personally and in effectively guiding society through the shoals of reform to a new future?

Since his election as General Secretary in March 1985, Gorbachev has been on a steep learning curve. His initial prescriptions about what was needed to overcome the Soviet crisis were soon superseded by more radical solutions, and this process of radicalisation has continued. One need only compare the sorts of policies he favoured soon
after coming to power with those he has espoused in the last 12 months. In the economic sphere, he has moved from favouring a streamlining of the central command system, to support for replacement of that system by one based on the market. Politically, he has moved from support for the continued leadership role of a monolithic communist party to a situation in which that party is to be at the most only one of a number of parties within a democratic structure.

But the radicalisation of the Gorbachev program has not proceeded smoothly, but in fits and starts. Two factors seem to have been significant in this.

The first is the limit to Gorbachev's own vision. The General Secretary was a product of the system in the sense that he had risen to prominence by way of an orthodox career through the party apparatus. But unlike many of his
based on the radical reformers, a democratic political system was essential to the survival of the whole reform program. The ultimate aim of the radical reformers, a democratic political system based on a market economy, could not be achieved without the destruction of the old system.

Gorbachev's centrist role was essential to the reformers' survival

One charge against Gorbachev made by both reformers and conservatives is that his measures have led to the downward spiral of the Soviet economy and the disintegration of society. For the conservatives, these resulted from the implementation of fundamentally misguided measures which disrupted basically healthy structures and processes. For the reformers, they reflect the failure to push through the needed reforms, thereby neither completely transcending existing structures, nor putting in place new ones to replace them. There is some truth in both of these charges. The effect of Gorbachev's measures was often to create confusion and to disrupt the operation of existing structures and processes, contributing directly to the erosion of the established command structure, without putting anything effective in its place.

All of this had a deleterious effect on economic performance and social cohesion and harmony. Of course it isn't clear that in the absence of such measures, similar results would not have been attained by the general process of economic decay which had made reform necessary in the first place. Nor is it certain that more radical measures would have produced different results. However, Gorbachev's role should not be seen only in this negative light. It may be argued that the Gorbachevian centrist strategy was in fact the saviour of the whole reform program. The ultimate aim of the radical reformers, a democratic political system based on a market economy, could not be achieved without the destruction of the old system.

But that destruction was not something that could be achieved easily. The value of the centrist strategy is that it kept both conservatives and radicals in the game while the position of the former was being eroded and that of the latter strengthened. Gorbachev thereby provided a shield for the reformists until their power and position had been consolidated sufficiently to enable them to rebuff the inevitable conservative reaction when it came. Had the coup been mounted in 1989, the result would have been very different. That it did not occur until the middle of 1991 is partly a function of the role played by Gorbachev in keeping the conservatives on side.

The radical democrat may respond that Gorbachev could have decisively tilted the balance in a reformist direction earlier by unambiguously cutting his ties with the conservatives and throwing his weight firmly behind radical reform. But this runs into the problem of vision noted above. By pursuing his centrist path, Gorbachev had effectively deprived himself of a firm power base. By failing to submit to popular election in 1989 or early 1990, he lacked popular legitimacy. The party he headed and the legislature of which he was chair were both overwhelmingly conservative in disposition and therefore could not constitute a real power base for a reformist leader.

He could not play the nationalist card like Yeltsin, and the fledgling democratic movement lacked the sort of organisational structure which could act as a base for him. Even the presidency, with the enhanced formal powers it gained in 1990, was deficient in this regard — as Gorbachev's inability to ensure implementation of his decrees shows. Given these constraints, his strategy makes some sense.

If the above argument is accurate, the centrist role played by Gorbachev was essential to the survival of reformism and the failure of the conservative attack. It does not assume that this was a clearly-defined game plan by Gorbachev. It may be that he sought to play his balancing role in order to defend the reformists while they gathered strength, skilfully tacking to the conservatives when necessary in order the better to protect the reform process. There is no evidence that this was how Gorbachev saw the situation. Indeed, all of his public statements suggest that he believed that his centrist course would ultimately be successful; his belief in the reformability of the communist party reflects this view. Nevertheless, objectively, his role did have this effect.

All of the foregoing is now history. Now, in the wake of the defeat of the coup, with the conservative forces discredited, there can be no excuse for continuing on with a centrist course. The coup seems to have opened Gorbachev's eyes to the real limits of the attempt to continue to carry the conservatives with the process of reform. It must now be apparent that only full commitment to reform can produce the results to which he aspires. The time of the centrist, while essential to the success of the radical reformers, has now passed.

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A very Russian COUP

In the wake of the Soviet drama, many observers concluded that the coup plotters were half-hearted from the start. Peter Feeney concludes that, on the contrary, they were determined and ruthless, but just too late.

For many observers the biggest surprise of the attempted ‘coup’ in the USSR was not that it happened but that it fell apart so rapidly. Tentative explanations have emphasised the sloppiness and stupidity of the coup leaders, and contrasted it with Yeltsin’s near-faultless performance and the undoubted bravery of those youths in Moscow who demonstrated their willingness to risk all for their belief in Russia’s, till now, faltering and uneven progress out of totalitarianism.

But stupidity and people-power could have been counterbalanced at any time by a massive and pitiless show of force. The failure of the self-proclaimed Emergency Committee to ensure obedience via repression was not the result of humanitarian restraints. The committee was let down by its own security forces—the army, the KGB and the MVD (Internal Ministry)—and the coup leaders’ hesitation, dissension and ignominious end are all attributable to this failure.

The possibility of military interference in the reform process in the USSR haunted observers of perestroika from the beginning. Nevertheless the likelihood of independent military action against perestroika, a coup d’etat, pure and simple, was always slender. Excepting 1917, when the remaining original fragment of the old Tsarist Imperial Army was swept aside by its disaffected rank and file, there had been no tradition in Russia of direct military intervention in politics. More importantly, the process of glasnost and perestroika were, from 1985, increasingly making inroads into the military’s integrative forces of discipline and solidarity. As perestroika proceeded it became more and more obvious that the Red Army, just as the rest of society, was divided within itself, and therefore lacked the institutional solidarity to act alone.

From late in 1990 a second scenario did look more plausible. This was the possibility of the military acting as
the backbone to a combined conservative reassertion. On the face of it such a reassertion stood a fair chance of success. Top military leaders shared with like-minded creatures in the KGB and party apparatus a dislike of the changes wrought by perestroika, and a veritable horror of the changes to come. Their institutional power-bases were discredited but still largely unrefounded and—at least on paper—still powerful. These conservatives had potential allies among traditionalist forces in society: blue collar workers fed up with constant and aimless social upheaval, servile peasants, military-industrialist employees fearful of their privileges, and so on. Such a coalition might summon up the legitimacy to reassure waverers in the army. The conservatives had already had their dress rehearsal in the crackdown of January 1991. Then, as on previous occasions (Tbilisi and Lithuania), elements within the army proved themselves positively eager to crush civilian resistance.

The coup leaders believed that their appeal would extend beyond the dusty bulwarks of the old order they represented to reach a largish chunk of the public. Their assumption was a sound one given the psychological exhaustion of the Soviet people. There have been no shortage of public opinion surveys that have charted a growing public yearning for order throughout the USSR. This is not to suggest that crowds were ever likely to throng the streets in support of the State of Emergency; rather the committee was gambling on tacit acceptance. By immediately promising an end to shortages, ration coupons, rising prices, and the housing crisis the emergency committee demonstrated its sensitivity to the mounting anger in society over the increasing difficulty of everyday living. The coup leadership was also counting on the unpopularity of Gorbachev and the inability of the democrats to work together in the past.

The counter-argument to the committee's thinking is that the Soviet Union is no longer a suitable subject for totalitarian rule: the polity is better educated, less homogeneous and more aware of the importance of democratic freedoms. These traits are, however, not incompatible with the kind of 'wait and see' attitude that the coup conspirators gambled on. Even the intelligentsia who physically defended Yeltsin see him not as the national saviour but a man who, despite his serious faults, represents the only alternative to Gorbachev. (It is precisely because Yeltsin was for so long the only credible opposition to Gorbachev that groups of widely divergent views have been attracted to shelter under his umbrella. Now that he has become involved in the sordid business of actually governing we should expect his political support and popularity to diminish somewhat.)

So, on the whole, the committee's gamble on the public mood was well founded (excluding some difficult republics such as Georgia and the Baltics). On the whole, active resistance was left to a very small number of politicians and intellectuals. It was the fact that these figures for several days were seen to be able to go about their business unmolested that overcame people's fears and brought them out onto the streets. The longer-term durability of the coalition of social forces which the junta hoped to champion was left unexplored.

Along with people-power, plain old incompetence has also been suggested as an explanation for the coup's failure. Yet both charges actually have their roots in the failure of the coercive organs that the coup leaders relied on. Stupidity is a difficult factor to quantify, but there is no amount of it that a good dose of ruthlessness cannot rectify.

The coup had actually been carefully planned to strike hard at centres of potential opposition, while still maintaining the pretence of legality. The willingness to descend into brutality was there, but the means were lacking. The junta was able to make some arrests, but only of lesser figures, while important persons—Sobchak, Popov, Kalugin and Yeltsin—were left alone. The resultant feehlessness of the media crackdown, in the absence of reliable troops to enforce it, was particularly damaging. Had a curfew been imposed on Monday instead of Wednesday, and the media gagged, Russians would have been left isolated, uninformed and leaderless.

The failure of the coercive organs might seem surprising since the coup leadership represented a core of conservatives grouped within centralised, coercive organisations: the party, KGB, military-industrial complex, and the Ministry of the Interior (MVD). The problem was that this hard-line consensus at the top simply did not exist at lower levels of the hierarchies the conservatives led.

Until the time of the coup, officers and conscripts alike in the armed forces remained restricted to a monotonous diet of anti-perestroika articles in much of the military press. Despite this (or because of it?) the bifurcation in attitudes between senior and lower ranking officers was very marked, constituting a fault-line running contrary to integrative forces of discipline and institutional solidarity within the armed forces. Numerous surveys indicated that the majority of the officer corps at the grass roots level was aligned with civilian reformers on the question of radical military reform including—despite the fact that 75% of the officer corps was, until recently, communist—the issue of depoliticisation. In addition, the army had quite literally been under attack from perestroika for many years. By the time of the coup its morale and prestige was at a near-critical low. There were powerful anti-military sentiments among the young, in many ways reminiscent of America during Vietnam; discipline was poor, with 250,000 weapons 'lost' in 1989 alone; junior officers and NCOs shared the social burdens of the people, and many of them were recently returned from service in Eastern Europe to atrocious living conditions back home. The bulk of the army was therefore of highly questionable value to the junta. If pressed to do the work of internal policing many army units would have been rent asunder between the conflicting loyalties of family, nationality, military honour, and basic principles of democracy.

The forces of the Ministry of the Interior were potentially the junta's most loyal troops. In Moscow, the MVD Dzerzhinsky Division (10,000 strong) remained disciplined, but reluctant to move on Yeltsin. The biggest surprise came from the KGB—the happy home of centralism one might have thought—which turned out to be fragmented not just on generational lines but territorial.
ones as well. The KGB top leadership in Moscow supported the coup but officers lower down deliberately sabotaged their directives. The KGB had also begun to exhibit territorial sympathies. The Leningrad KGB declared against the coup; KGB officers of the Lefortovo prison in Moscow referred to Kryuchkov and his crew as "senile reptiles". Ordinary police retained strong local sympathies in defiance of the committee's wishes (the core of Yeltsin's defence force was initially policemen). A great many army commanders remained neutral throughout. Many may have been sympathetic to the conservative cause, but aware of the disunity among their troops were unwilling to risk active involvement.

In the long run, obedience to the emergency committee could have been restored via extensive personnel sackings, but of course there was not time. In all arms of the security apparatus the chain of command tended to disintegrate at the middle and lower levels. The rot of perestroika had come to infect the armed forces and even, so it turned out, the KGB. Unfortunately for them the coup leadership only appears to have discovered these weaknesses after the coup began.

On the operational side the key to the success of the conservatives' gamble was that popular resistance should be minimal, and that any such resistance that did crop up be snuffed out fast by special troops. This would allow the bulk of the citizen army to remain in the barracks with their conflicting loyalties (to uniform, family, republic and the constitution) safely untested. If neither of these two conditions were met a large chunk of the army, with its doubtful loyalties, would become involved. The result could be civil war.

The coup thus called for an accurate judgment of the public's mood and the utmost in ruthlessness from the coup leadership once committed. As I have argued the first condition would have held if the second had been applied. It was not. This was not through lack of trying but simply because the troops who were counted on turned out to be unreliable. Special troops—of the KGB or MVD—were always more likely to obey orders. They should have been turned to early, on the night of the 19th-20th, when there was a chance they might do so. Regular troops should have been left right out of the action.

The coup leadership was obviously badly out of touch with the mood of the organisations they led. But there is a further explanation for their overestimation of the reliability of the security apparatus, and that is that previously elements of it had performed well. In January in Lithuania the Black Berets had split blood without wavering. And in Moscow in March 50,000 men of all branches of the security forces had controlled pro-Yeltsin protests. In the former case, however, the operation had been small-scale; the latter operation had been conducted clearly within the bounds of the law.

At Tiananmen in 1989, conservative communists were content to destroy the flower of China's youth in order to protect their selfish prerogatives. Arguably, that willingness was also present in Moscow last August within the emergency committee. Disturbingly, only a very few, and relatively young, army commanders—Kobets, Shaposhnikov (Air Force) and Grachev (paratroops)—came out early against the coup; very many officers of the rank of colonel and above, judging from opinion polls taken prior to the coup, must have sympathised with the emergency committee. But, despite these attitudes, the bulk of the army, whatever its views, remained true to tradition, and sat out the coup on the sidelines. This neutrality may just have easily worked out to the junta's advantage, had they been more ruthless, more decisive and more lucky.

The outcome of the coup has been a profound vindication of the process of perestroika. Although that process never envisaged the complete emasculation of the party that occurred following the coup, it did nurture the power of the democratic movement and undermined the effectiveness of the forces of coercion, breaking down their chain of command.

Perestroika is now unequivocally over, and the USSR looks primed for thorough-going change (assisted, one hopes, by the West). Nevertheless, the Red Army as a prominent Soviet institution is not about to disappear. Thanks to the committee's bungling, the forces of conservatism in Soviet society seem to have well and truly cooked their goose. By contrast, the prestige of the armed forces may have recovered somewhat thanks to its actions—or rather inactions—during the coup. In fact, with the attack on the party which followed the rout of the conspirators, the army remains, alongside the infant democracies in the Republics, about the only credible pre-perestroika institution left. This is a problem because in its own way the Soviet military's sheer institutional weight is as much an obstacle to change as the conservatives or party were. Soviet society still devotes by peacetime standards an obscene amount of its resources to military productions: the Red Army even now maintains a standing complement of four million troops, 21% of the best and brightest of the USSR's industrial workforce works in defence industries, and perhaps as much as 15% of GNP (up to half the all-Union budget) goes on defence spending.

The time is overdue to take on this resource-hungry leviathan but this remains a complex task. The military's new post-coup leadership were promoted on the grounds of loyalty, which is not always the same as liberalism. The linked problems of military reform and a reduction in the defence budget together represent a major obstacle to further reform. The end of the centralised Union may assist the break-up and destruction, piecemeal, of this ungainly colossus. Then again, if the break-up is accompanied by tension, defence spending is likely to remain high. Despite the involvement of so many of the top brass in the August coup, much of what the Red Army has come to stand for during perestroika may be preserved in a post-communist environment for some time to come.

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ALR made the running with its series of articles on the Labor Party’s age of anxiety. Now those articles, along with others especially commissioned, have been published as a booklet by ALR in conjunction with the Fabian Society and Pluto Press. Labor’s Troubled Times features contributions by Bob Hogg, Sue McCreadie, Bob McMullan, Robert Ray, Marian Simms, Lindsay Tanner and others. It’s available to new or existing subscribers for just $3 with your subscription or resubscription to ALR, post free.
Greens in THE POST

The Left nowadays loves the green movement, but isn’t nearly so sure about postmodernism. That’s odd, thinks McKenzie Wark, because the two have more in common than is often imagined.

Nowadays, when most people hear the word postmodern they probably reach for the remote control to flip channels as fast as possible. But please indulge me here, because I want to argue that it is a buzz word on which the battery hasn’t entirely gone flat, as it gives us a handle on the rise of the green movement.

What does green politics have to do with postmodernism? What do either have to do with the traditional interests and concerns of the left? In the case of a lot of green politics, quite a lot it would seem. Most of the Left has rushed to annex most of the green politics which have sprung up around it on the grounds that the Left has always been concerned about the environment and can stake some claim to have had a hand in nurturing the nascent green movement for many years before its current flowering.

On the other hand, many on the Left take great pains to distance themselves from anything remotely ‘postmodern’. I can remember hysterical tirades against postmodernism from the floor of the first conference of Socialist Scholars held in Sydney a year ago. Postmodernism seemed to have become at that moment the great fearful ‘other’ of that distinctively leftist kind of paranoia. This kind of paranoia might be justified when the enemy one fears and attacks is unchecked capitalism, the casual violence of bureaucracies, patriarchal violence, or any more of a number of solid traditional Left fears and hates. But postmodernism? How does a vaguely-defined style of architecture, philosophy and video clip decor add up to something as fearful as all that?

The reason for the hysterical reaction to postmodernism by the Left seems to me to stem from the fact that postmodernism is a genuine outgrowth of leftist thinking, one which got more than a bit out of control. Postmodernism, like the green movement, has some things which it holds in com-
mon with the Left, and some which it doesn't. The difference is that while the Left wants to claim more of the green movement than it can comfortably accommodate, it wants to hack out postmodern thinking root and branch.

On the face of it, this looks sensible. Environmentalism is good, solid, morally sound stuff. Real politics. Even, if you can pardon the often unacknowledged pun, a grassroots movement. On the other hand, postmodernism is a bunch of academics, artists, media brats and pop musicians doing weird things with ideas no-one understands, cultural technologies everyone is afraid of or insidious Yank pop culture. A very mixed bag, but all of it bad. What seems to have escaped attention up until now is that these seemingly polar opposite aspects of contemporary culture and politics might actually be deeply related to each other. Even, as we used to say, 'dialectically' implied in each other. This is the idea I want to develop here.

The influence of green politics is broad but shallow

Postmodernism appears as a set of descriptions of surface details which are either celebrated or denounced, depending on one's taste—and often it is little more than taste that is involved. Yet these surface details seem to me to point to something quite fundamental. Capitalism is an open-ended system, a 'perpetuum mobile', as Marx called it. It constantly develops new forces, not only of production but of communication as well. If the postmodern amounts to anything much, it is an intuition that the development of the vectors of communication has not only led to a quantitative increase in the volume and velocity of information in circulation, but it has also had qualitative effects on culture itself. Increasingly, everyday experience, historical memory, world events, subcultural or ethnic identities are all mediated through a vast and global network of media vectors, which is growing in influence and strength relative to all the traditional structures which circulated, developed, or preserved cultural forms.

I'll give an example. As the last federal election showed the influence of green politics and culture on public opinion is broad but shallow. Many, many people feel instinctively that the green perspective is fundamentally right. They might not have a clear idea how the whole shebang comes together, but they know something is rotten in the state of the world. They feel strongly about the destruction of rainforests, the termination of whole species, especially cuddly ones, and even more strongly about things which affect them personally, like the quality of air and water. They may not be prepared to sacrifice either of the family cars yet, but they're beginning to feel guilty enough to buy the unbleached toilet paper they saw on TV.

This last is the crucial determinant here: people react to green issues because they have seen them on TV. The green movement has had influence out of all proportion to its actual organisational size, in large part because of television. This comes in part from a conscious use of TV politics. Taking a few pages out of Saul Alinsky and the yuppies' training manuals, a number of green movements have developed a highly effective form of direct action which does not always directly stop the bastards from bulldozing everything in sight on the ground but which gets hundreds of thousands, sometimes millions, of people thinking that the greens are probably right—and all through directly invading the terrain of television.

Sometimes they don't even have to organise meticulously planned and heroic actions to produce this effect. An oil tanker or a nuclear power plant cracking up is a propaganda coup all on its own. Incremental erosion of our conditions of life has very little effect on how people think. Someone once told me that you can put a frog in a pot of water on the stove and that, if you raise the temperature in the pot slowly enough, the frog simply adjusts its body to the temperature change as if it's normal until, voila! Boiled frog. I think this is exactly the effect that the idea of a football field worth of rainforest disappearing every second has on people. We can listen to stuff like that until we're boiled frogs. A good, violent disaster, on the other hand, makes sense.

The third source of green consciousness in popular culture is fictional narrative and documentaries. I lump these together because I think their effect is much the same. When they work, they tell a story which people can relate to, get angry about, but not feel powerless about as a result. The great critical theorist Theodor Adorno once said that the most important thing is not to let the power of others, or our own powerlessness, stupefy us. He said that in the context of World War Two and the holocaust, but it is more true today. The dark side of the enlightenment Adorno feared is alive and well. It dominates nature and people alike with its technologies of extraction and control. Yet a well-aimed narrative like The Emerald Forest or Silkwood or The China Syndrome can make you feel not only that something is wrong but that something can be done.

In sum, the green movement is effective because it touches people's vital interests and attacks forms of power that are demonstrably wrong. This is why very small organisations have had such an enormous effect on popular consciousness. Yet the means through which it has its effects have been—shock, horror—thoroughly postmodern. The green movement is a postmodern movement in that it relies for its effects on its power within the sphere of popular media culture.

It may be argued that the green movement is 'really' a small, dedicated band of people organised in grass roots organisations. This is indeed true, but such organisations only produce effects because they are taken up in the media sphere. Whereas most powerful forces occupy space in the media in proportion to their organisational power and size, the greens do it through the staging of spectacular events,
through the telling of effective stories and through the knock-on effects of the inevitable disasters caused by the kind of insane exploitation of people and nature that passes for civilisation.

Hence, to understand green politics and to practise it effectively, we need to understand the workings of the terrain on which it draws mass support and legitimacy. This might also help in the struggle against the co-option of the motifs and images thrown off by the interaction of green politics and popular consciousness by business interests.

'Greenness' seems like nothing more than a kind of product differentiation strategy nowadays. You can bet they've got it worked out in clever demographics. They've still got those old fashioned brands of soap which are proudly part of industrial culture for consumers belonging to demographic groups still too tied to industrial culture to switch. Then there are the younger, better educated ones for whom everything from soap to disposable packaging is now, by some miraculous perversion of the language, 'environmentally friendly'.

Just as in the 60s, every image and slogan which is charged with political meaning, arising out of events and struggles and recorded in popular memory, ends up as a jingle. As John Berger noted 20 years ago, 'revolution' became a way to sell panty-hose. 'Freedom' was somehow steered away from association with, say, civil rights and connected up via expensive marketing to feared jeans and roll-your-own tobacco. Greenness will, likewise, become a commodified parody of itself, unless green politics keeps up the media side of its game and plays these postmodern games as well, if not better, than the enemy.

The only way to avoid the complete co-option of a politically charged vocabulary and image-repertoire is to keep moving, keep making it up, keep varying the themes and styles, and to avoid any kind of fundamentalism which can become doctrinaire or too easily have its more popular edges shorn off and appropriated for other uses. The only way to do this is to develop the already impressive and sophisticated media-politics of the movement even further. There are, unfortunately, some obstacles which stand in the way of this.

I don't want to take up organisational issues here.

From the point of view I'm outlining now, the organisational form of green politics is only part of the picture, and in the long run not as important as its media politics. The cultural aspect of green politics seems to me more important, but the limitation here is a repetitive adherence to well-worn cultural styles. By some historic accident, a whole bunch of pop cultural images and styles put in circulation in the late 60s are still being recycled as the cultural wrapping of green politics, as if it were somehow an authentic expression of that politics.

This association of a significant and world-historical movement with a bunch of long-haired pop cliches can only be harmful, making green politics an easy target for the media monopolies. Why not develop a more diverse and sophisticated linkage of green issues with a much more widespread range of cultural styles? Cultural styles are the modes through which loose and fuzzy sets of otherwise quite alienated people make contact and community with each other in a postmodern media culture. The more of them that green politics can be wrapped in, the better.

Political struggle these days is connected closely to what Stuart Hall has called the struggle for cultural leadership. The old forms of progressive political organisation have not done terribly well in this struggle in recent times, but fortunately there has been a massive influx into the culture industries of people both talented and ideologically street-smart. Now there is no way that the diverse and pluralistic impulses of the progressive forces in the culture industries are ever going to be organised into any kind of party or movement. Those are structural ideas from a pre-media age, when organisations had a proportionally far greater effect on popular consciousness than they do today. In any case, being bound to a dogma and obliged to turn up to branch meetings strikes most people today as the most fundamentally useless form of political action imaginable. Thus new ways of tapping into the power, skill and goodwill of the culture industries is a fundamental task for making the little skeleton staffs which actually operate movements and organisations today effective. It is also the only way to make them answerable, via the feedback loop of the media, to genuine popular opinion.

I've said a lot about what the green movement 'should do' and 'shouldn't do'. Armchair talk, to be sure, but meant as part of a dialogue. Or rather, a transplanting of the dialogue that is already well underway about the future of both 'red' and 'green' politics out of the old terrain of organisational deckchair-shuffling onto the terrain of communication. I don't really care how many new parties and movements there are, all with their own offices and meetings and standing orders. I wish them all well. What I think matters just as much is a politics on another terrain altogether, the mediated terrain of postmodern culture.

Survival in a media ecology poisoned by the holding companies is vital for the green movement, if you will pardon the irony. We too might end up extinct if we don't keep innovating and diversifying. As much as the postmodern might appear distasteful, as an unwelcome change of the ground rules we were all getting so comfortable with, one can't just argue these changes away. They have to be confronted in reality, in forms of political action and cultural persistence. This is why the Left needs to understand the postmodern as a description of rapidly changing socio-historic dynamics as much as it needs to grasp the significance of the green movement as a critique of one of the fundamental aspects of that dynamic gone wrong.

McKENZIE WARK's essays are due to be published by Verso Books next year.
Life after Aunty

Bureaucrat, broadcaster, writer, feminist—Wendy McCarthy was one of Australia’s most prominent women of the 80s. After her unsuccessful make-or-break bid for the chair of the ABC, she’s taking stock. Kitty Eggerking spoke to her in Sydney.

Wendy McCarthy began her working life in the 1960s as a teacher. Since then she has been a newspaper columnist, film consultant, author, and radio commentator. She was for six years the executive officer of the Family Planning Association. From 1983 to 1991 she was deputy chair of the ABC; she is now the executive director of the National Trust.

Do you regret announcing that you would leave the ABC if they didn’t make you chair?

No. At least six months before the end of my term I’d thought very deeply about where I wanted to be in the ABC. I decided there were no more challenges in being deputy chair. But I also felt it would have been churlish of me not to put my hat into the ring to be chair since I’ve spent half my life telling other women to do that. It wasn’t an entirely attractive proposition for me because I thought, as chair, it would be very difficult to make some of the changes I would want to make in the ABC. But when I decided to apply I had already made my own commitment to changing other parts of my life if I got the job.

The only pain was parting with an organisation that I love very dearly, like an old friend or lover. There was no other regret. If I’d continued as deputy there would have been no control of who else was on the board. I’ve always had a strong view that the ABC board should represent the interests of the nation that it serves but also of the constituencies it serves. The ABC has an extraordinary investment in ideas and the arts, so top people on the board should be those with a good history in music and the arts and in ideas.

In business, they put people in as deputy to train them for six to eight years. Not only does that give you experience, you also get to know the culture of the organisation, you get to know where the gremlins are and where the good fairies are, and you find out where the resources are. People can’t trick you. You have your finger on the pulse. I had my finger more on the pulse of the ABC than any other board I’ve been on. But that’s not how appointments happen in the public sector.

Is the ABC becoming management-heavy, at the expense of bright and creative young people?

I’m not sure about that. I said when I stopped being a director in June that I wouldn’t sit and offer advice from the sidelines. But my observation in general of creative corporate structures like the ABC is that there is a tendency to manage the creative people and be accountable. I’ve always taken the view that the ABC at its best is in a state of harmonious anarchy. Everyone knows what to do and how to do it, and you don’t need a lot of top-heavy management. You never have, any more than in a good advertising agency. Advertising agencies which corporatised in the last five years and went for high-paid, high-profile management have mostly gone broke or have gone back to smaller, creative units.

A paper was recently circulated within the ABC on the employment and promotion of women in broadcasting. It seems to have been hotly debated in the ABC; some men have been saying “we’re not back to this again are we?”

Well, we are, and they’d better remember it. The greatest contribution that’s been made to women and broadcasting recently is Monica Attard. In the first place it was an extraordinary achievement for Monica to get to Moscow—and Heather Ewart to Washington—because they are very coveted posts. Neither of those women would want to acknowledge that it had anything to do with their gender. They are extremely competent, and it was good that they were women.

I am surprised at the reaction to that internal paper, but then I suppose I shouldn’t be, because what happens when one or two women get up into positions is that people sit back and say, “they’ve had their turn now”. What that piece of research shows is the insidious sexism at the junior levels where people are struggling to make a basic wage in an area that they love. They’re not necessarily trying to be the high flyers.

The men are threatened, and rightly so, because there are an awful lot of extremely talented women who want to do things that they could never have dreamed of in another life. They’re going to be better than most of the men because they’re so determined. There’s a strong network of women in ABC radio and TV now, and they won’t let too many people walk over them.

Perhaps they’re not so preoccupied with egos and power.

That’s right. It’s the same with women teachers. They were always interested in being extremely good in the classroom, less interested earlier on in being principals, but now of course they can see that the reason for being a principal is to make things happen.

Issues like child care and abortion are cropping up again; it makes one wonder if anything at all has changed. Have women made many gains over the past few years?
The changes are twofold. The psychic culture has changed so that child care is now a legitimate topic to discuss and take action on. I resented having to keep pushing it for a couple of years because I was sick of being the only woman doing my bit in all-boy gatherings. I felt resentful, too, when people thought that was all I could do. In a way they used that to denigrate my other skills. I found that very irritating and so I gave it a lower priority for a year; but I found when I ducked it for a year or so the issue started to slip away again.

I decided it was going to happen in the ABC, and it has happened in the ABC. I decided that I had to pursue it and show that it could happen. Otherwise I was going to be seen as another waft of hot air, a temporary aberration, that came across the scene and changed nothing. That’s the real challenge for women who get put into positions of influence. It’s very hard because you’re constantly denigrated for sticking up for women.

Does it distress you that in 1991 we are once more having an abortion debate?

There’s no end to this campaign — and the approach is much more sophisticated this time around because they’re just looking to close down the private clinics. Most people don’t have access to the experience of South Australia or the ACT, where abortions are conducted in public hospitals. They don’t know how hard it is to get a pregnancy terminated in a public hospital. Many chief executives of public hospitals are very much part of the Catholic public service base; they’re mostly very conservative, mostly male and mostly one-industry experienced people. They won’t make things happen in an area that has anything to do with philosophy or morals. They just want a straight accounting equation.

The interesting thing is that they think they can wear out a generation like mine. But I know my daughter will fight independently for those rights too and I know she’ll march with me and be proud to do so. I actually think my sons would too. It’s a less passionate thing for them but they’re philosophically on side.

How much do you think young people know of the old fights and struggles?

I don’t think they are greatly aware of them, and certainly not aware of the passions they aroused. But I don’t think that matters too much; what matters is that they recognise when the rights that were won for them are threatened and when they must stand up and defend them. Their fights will be different in degree and style. Child care is still a very big issue. When I was marching in the streets with my first-born, I remember women saying “you’ll be lucky if you get child care in her lifetime”. At the time I thought they were hopeless pessimists, but it’s true; she’s now 23. It will be a very big battle for women her age if they decide they want to have children. It hasn’t become much easier at all.

Do you worry that this generation is losing any sense of optimism that it might have had?

The interesting thing is that we are now parenting for much longer, in order to keep that optimism there. That’s fine for people like me who have good jobs and enough money to do it, a house and a reasonably secure emotional life. But what about the parents for whom life is a struggle, who are unemployed and so on? The mothers are mostly the ones who have to manage all that emotional baggage. How they cope under that great stress, I don’t know.

Perhaps one problem in Australian society is that people feel powerless?

I grew up believing you couldn’t change anything, that it was all pre-ordained; it came as a great surprise to me when I wanted to start changing things that the changes happened. And I’ve had a great run at being able to change the things that I passionately wanted to change. Is it just that I’ve been lucky? Is it harder for other people? The first two areas where I tried to change something were a residents’ action movement and abortion law reform. And later in childbirth education. I suspect that people feel not so much powerless as over-governed now. That might be the difference. I certainly still believe I can change things.

KITTY EGGERKING works in the Centre for Independent Journalism at the University of Technology, Sydney.
Cosmetic Solution


Naomi Wolf has written this book, I suspect, with an intention to shock. If Western women were lapping into complacency about the liberation and equality they have achieved in the past 20 years, Wolf certainly provides a jolt of evidence to argue that such complacency is unwarranted.

She concedes that second wave feminism has been an important period of social change in which women have experienced greater opportunities to escape the constraints of domesticity and redefine their roles as more than wives, mothers and homemakers. However, she argues that women's new freedoms have been countered by an even more cruel and oppressive form of social control that has escalated in the last 20 years— the 'beauty myth'.

The beauty myth refers to those cultural practices and values which designate a woman's appearance as the most important criterion by which her femininity, her sexuality, and even her right to be considered a normal acceptable human being are judged. The book exposes the beauty myth through a detailed critique of those industries whose survival is dependent upon the construction and maintenance of the myth: that is, those industries concerned with fashion and cosmetics, dieting, health and fitness, cosmetic surgery, advertising, women's magazines, and pornography.

Wolf relentlessly documents the statistics on eating disorders, the economic drain of personal maintenance, the degrading effects of pornography, the mutilation of cosmetic surgery, the imagery and propaganda of advertising and examples of women's willingness to submit themselves to beauty practices which consume precious time, energy and money. She paints a picture of women's entrapment in an oppressive and vicious circle of self-hatred, anxiety, pain, shame, humiliation, hunger, weakness and disability. The injustice, she argues, is not only that such negative states in women are tolerated, considered normal or unproblematic and often even applauded, as exemplified by the frivolous cliche that 'beauty knows no pain'; it is that the myth promotes the notion that women's access to love, attention, warmth, security, sexual pleasure, social value, social acceptance and self-esteem is contingent upon their conformity to certain prescribed standards of femininity. While women have to earn their right to sexual identity and pleasure, for men such things are inalienable rights and unquestionable givens.

Wolf claims the beauty myth has grown more potent in the last generation because women's self-assertion and pursuance of their rights have brought the sexes "too close for the comfort of the powerful". By seducing women into a way of thinking and behaving which focuses their attention on what they look like, the beauty myth ultimately reinstates their subservience to men and to cultural values that limit female freedom. As such, the beauty myth is "a violent backlash to feminism," and a means by which the sex war is sustained. Instead of women's homes existing as their prisons, now it is their bodies, a more difficult place from which to escape.

Wolf does not present a very pretty scenario of the position women are in right now. She depicts women as victims of the beauty myth and as unwitting participants in a form of social control designed to subordinate them. She speaks of "beauty addiction" and builds a picture of women as helplessly and uncontrollably dependent upon activities and products which offer only false or temporary pleasure and fulfilment. The image on the front cover is of a naked woman bound in shackles—an image which Wolf sustains with use of language such as entrapment, imprisonment and enslavement to describe women's relation to the beauty myth.

This imagery is a problem, however, because it assumes that all women are on the receiving end of a one-way process of oppression, discrimination and victimisation. Wolf gives no consideration to the ways in which women themselves negotiate situations where their bodies have become a very significant site of political struggle. For example, when she deals with the topic of eating disorders, she fails to engage with what is now quite a substantial feminist body of knowledge about the resistance and rebellion enained in anorexia nervosa. Instead, she likens dieting behaviour to the trances and chants of bizarre religious cults, suggesting that women are brainwashed and indoctrinated into ritualistic bodily transformation. In so doing, she reduces the complex nature of eating disorders to instances of "thought control".

At the outset, Wolf denies that she is suggesting a conspiracy theory; however, throughout the book she gives the reader every reason to see conspiracy. Sometimes the conspirators are men in general—but mostly it is the beauty industries, who cleverly pummel women into a state of severe dissatisfaction with their bodies. Advertising is a major culprit in this state of affairs. Wolf claims it leads to obsessive and irrational responses in otherwise competent and successful women who nevertheless remain "painfully receptive" to what their magazines tell them. Yet this argument ignores a plethora of representations and subjectivities (feminist and otherwise) which has been shown this kind of causal connection between media images and human behaviour to be simplistic and deterministic. To depict women as passive sponges who soak up advertising propaganda is to refuse to allow any agency, or power of negotiation to the female consumer.

Despite the absences and problematic assumptions and conclusions of the
Beauty Myth, Wolf's book is unique and therefore valuable for the way in which it brings together a host of updated statistics, survey findings, reports, medical research and other evidence of women's engagement with the beauty industries. For instance, she draws upon a range of sources to provide evidence of the extent of eating disorders in America. She cites figures suggesting that one million American women each year become anorexic or bulimic; 150,000 American women die of anorexia annually; on college campuses up to 20% of women students are anorexic; 20% of college women binge and purge on a regular basis; 5-15% of hospitalised anorexics die in treatment, giving the disease one of the highest fatality rates of a mental illness and 40-50% of anorexics never completely recover. Until Wolf's book, this type of documentation of evidence from multiple and various sources was hard to find.

Despite the picture of gloom and doom she paints in the first seven chapters, Wolf ends her book on an optimistic note in chapter eight. Called "Beyond the Beauty Myth", here she suggests some ways out of this horrible prison in which women have been interned. The essence of her solution is for women to find: "a new way to see", to refuse to accept that beauty is their passport to confidence, sexuality and self-regard and to find pleasure in themselves and each other by appreciating and celebrating the multitude of dimensions of their female selves. She does not advocate that women abandon beauty altogether but, rather, that they work towards "a pro-woman definition of beauty". This will happen when the high stakes which now rest on physical appearance are removed and that practices like adornment simply become play—something that doesn't matter.

How to get from here to there is not clear. Wolf seems to suggest that subversion will happen when women become aware of the myth and can consciously fight the ways it operates against them. The conclusion seems too optimistic from the arguments presented in the previous chapters. For if women are as successfully duped as she suggests, and given the relatively small number she will be able to influence through her book, then this feminist subversion is looking rather like an uphill battle, if not a lost cause already.

The Beauty Myth is aimed at a popular audience and is not intended as an academic text which, to some extent, accounts for its theoretical limitations. However, the problem remains that feminist attempts to politicise beauty still need a more subtle and sophisticated analysis of the problem than Wolf provides. This does not have to mean esoteric and inaccessible academic prose. Rather, there needs to be an exploration of the possible multiple interpretations of women's engagements with beauty practices; a recognition of the ways in which women already negotiate and resist their sexual objectification and subordination; and a consideration of the ambiguities and contradictions in women's everyday lives as they actively take part in the construction of femininity and its meanings in contemporary Western culture.

ANNETTE CORRIGAN teaches in humanities at Griffith University.
Trending Down


At the 1990 election, as its centenary year approached, the ALP received its lowest primary vote for 60 years. At the same time Labor was undergoing one of the most divisive debates of the Hawke government: whether to privatise a number of longstanding public corporations.

Within the party there was a crisis both of morale and of numbers. Membership had dropped to a very low level and complaints that branch members are ignored are far from confined to traditional critics from the Left.

Andrew Scott's valuable book charts the measurable dimensions of Labor's crisis - the trends in membership and social composition. The author was given access to membership records in a number of states, and they form the foundation of the book. However, while the raw figures tell a tale, there is also an important context.

In modern Australia the proportion of wage and salary earners within the population is greater than ever before. But as Scott points out "They have been increasingly fragmented along the lines of occupation, gender, ethnicity and age. Inequalities within their ranks and between them and welfare recipients have been visibly multiplied." Poverty is now most often the consequence of family breakdown or age, rather than being a semi-permanent feature of working-class life.

Yet Labor has been grappling for decades with problems that have a familiar ring - without success. Even Arthur Calwell in the 1960s was saying that Labor had to accept "new hopes, new tastes and new desires", and to understand that "the age of the affluent society ... poses a whole new range of problems for the Labor Party". (Though he went on to state that "we view with bewilderment the expenditure of vast sums on trivia and gimmicks", and to deplore "the materialist outlook" which was, "sad to say, quite marked among many of our young people").

Yet it's not all bleak. In spite of the continued domination of older Anglo men, the 1980s saw women for the first time voting Labor in the same proportion as men, while the 1970s had seen Labor cement majority support among migrants from non-English speaking backgrounds.

But these changes are not generally reflected in the kind of people who join the ALP. True, women are now a higher proportion of members than ever before. Yet, as Scott points out, this has been connected to a quite separate phenomenon: the disproportionately large number of professionals and semi-professionals who have joined.

Some migrant groups have joined in large numbers, yet often this is connected to branch-stacking exercises where family and ethnic community networks are rolled out to provide numbers for one faction or other. Because this is so much a part of the traditional Labor culture of patronage and favours, it might be argued it is no different from the enrolment of blue-collar party faithful for the same purpose in the 1950s and earlier - but somehow I find it more artificial and cynical.

In terms of membership participation as a whole Scott paints a picture of protracted decline. While population has grown steadily and the Labor vote has at least grown in absolute terms, party membership has been static. That is to say, in relative terms it has fallen drastically.

Scott rightly attributes this in part to a decline in the belief that politics and parties can make a difference to people's lives, and partly in a failure on Labor's part to culturally adapt. The starkest figures are those for membership by occupation. (The following figures are from NSW, but the Victorian figures are comparable.) In 1961, the proportion of "professionals and paraprofessionals" in the ALP was roughly equivalent to that in society as a whole (9% and 7% respectively). By 1981, however, the same group comprised 24% of ALP membership but only 10% of the workforce. In 1961 plant and machine operators, drivers and labourers comprised 23% of Labor's membership, and 16% of the workforce; in 1981 the respective figures were 11% and 14%. The proportion of tradespeople in Labor membership likewise more than halved between 1961 and 1981 (23% and 10%), while the proportion in the workforce fell only marginally (12% to 10%). At the same time the blue-collar membership of the ALP has aged steadily.

The pattern among migrant members is perhaps less gloomy. In 1961 only 7% of members in NSW sampled had recognisably non Anglo-Celtic surnames; by 1981 the figure had risen to 14% in NSW and by 1986 to 22% in Victoria. However, as Scott notes, "this is less spectacular than the
The title, *Amongst Women*, suggests that Moran may only exist inside the definition of the group of women which makes up his family. Moran’s violence is a response to his fear of female power as described through his son Michael’s first sexual experience. When Michael’s girlfriend Nell is:

...ready for her own pleasure... such was her strength that he was frightened. She shouted, seized him roughly at the hips and forced him to move.

Michael can’t “comprehend” Nell’s behaviour. It is Moran’s fear of being engulfed by a female essence he cannot comprehend that brings him to his hideous use of emotional and physical violence within his family.

*Amongst Women* is a brave and disturbing novel. Brave to deal with the difficult issue of the dynamics of violence and power within a family, and disturbing because I am not convinced the author is aware of the frus- tres in his text which vent this terror and fear of women through the exploration of the violence and control of the central character of Moran.

JANE SUTTON is a Sydney freelance writer.

There is a crisis of what Labor stands for, as well as of what it means in practical political terms to stand for a range of progressive values. Part of the solution lies in analysing why it is that Labor’s declining primary vote has not simply swung over the conservative parties. Rather it has been expressed in support for independents and the Democrats. But teasing out the scope of this phenomenon is understandably beyond the scope of *Fading Loyalties* — as it is of this review.

DAVID MCKNIGHT is a researcher for ABC TV’s *Four Corners.*

**Fear of Women**

*Amongst Women* by John McGahern (Faber and Faber 1990). Reviewed by Jane Sutton.

*Amongst Women*, shortlisted for the Booker Prize in 1990, is a disturbing novel. The opening descriptions of the preparations for Monaghan Day at the Moran household in Broadmeadow, an Irish village, suggest a sweeping tale of political and family life, or a detailed exploration of Irish village life will follow. But *Amongst Women* is actually a telling and claustrophobic study of a patriarch and the emotional and physical violence he inflicts on his family.

John McGahern is a writer interested in the dynamics of power and control between men and women. *Amongst Women* is at its most powerful and disturbing in its exploration of these dynamics.

Moran, the central figure, is an Irish Republican and had been a figure in the IRA. However, the connection between the fierce emotional tensions of family life and the Irish situation provide a background but not the sinister focus of the book.

The women of the title are Moran’s new wife, Rose, and his daughters Mona, Sheila and Maggie. Moran’s mood swings and physical violence towards his sons keep the women in a constant state of fear.

The rituals of the Catholic religion, such as the saying of Grace and the Rosary at times of the day dictated by him are the ways in which Moran exerts his control over the women.

The reader is given a disturbing sense of the psychic as well as physical space in which Moran, his wife and daughters live, and the means by which Moran makes the house his domain. Not only does he create the sense of place by which they measure their lives by the use of the Catholic ritual; he also constructs and controls the space in which they live.

Following a fight with Moran, Rose retreats to the bedroom and closes the door. Moran insists his daughters open it. He proceeds to declaim the Rosary in his wife’s hearing, thus negating her separate existence outside his mental space.

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DAVID MCKNIGHT is a researcher for ABC TV’s *Four Corners.*
Traffic Snarls


It was probably the television series The Young Ones which first gave Australians a taste of Ben Elton's humour. Who can forget the episode when Neil was sneezing great gobs of green goo into plastic garbage bags which the others had affixed to his head? It was a zany show featuring exaggerated characters and more blatant, uninhibited one-liners than most of us have had sexual intercourse. It was addictive, too, because beneath all the over-the-top gags ran an undercurrent of truth. We all recognised little bits of ourselves in Rik, Mike, Vivian and Neil, and those who were willing to recognise the most doubt laughed the loudest.

Elton's second novel, Gridlock, has, in common with all his previous work, an uncanny understanding of human weaknesses and an ability to wring them for all they are worth. It is the story of a spastic scientist, a cripple, a bum-licking politician, the bigwigs of the American auto industry and, in a nutshell, it is about cars. Lots of cars.

Anybody who has spent any time in a traffic jam will know that the practice of sitting, alone, in a car, behind countless other cars all going to roughly the same place and burning up kilolitres of fossil fuels in the process is an absurd way to conduct one's life, and Elton pushes the idiotic mentality of his fellow humans to hitherto unknown extremes. Geoffrey Peason, the spastic scientist—obviously with more of a finger on the pulse than the rest of the human population— invents an engine which runs on hydrogen: an engine which could change the course of history. The only problem with his invention is that quite a lot of people—mainly those growing fat on the profits of oil, steel and all the other bits which make up cars—would dearly love to see both Geoffrey and his ideas burn eternally in hell.

The many sub-plots range from Geoffrey trying unsuccessfully to have it off with his crippled friend Deborah, to MP Digby Parkhurst's attempts to come to terms with having his homosexuality scrawled all over the Sunday papers. Elton has always got a lot of mileage out of grotty little people trying to plook each other, and Gridlock continues this tradition. In other words, don't be put off if you don't like the idea of a hilarious book about cars—the hilarity has long enough tentacles to cover pretty well everything.

Like every good thriller, Gridlock has plenty of murders, weaponry and action to keep the punters amused. Geoffrey's plans change hands many times in the 360-page battle. The last chase scene (which involves an injured man, a pistol and a mad New Yorker in a wheelchair) is played out against the backdrop of a huge gridlock which cripples Londoners, their cars and London itself for three days.

Elton's comic wizardry makes Gridlock an entertaining read but, as with all good humour, it is the author's concerns regarding the more serious aspects of his subject which turn it into cutting satire. Nowadays in a position where he could make a fortune simply by producing autographed toilet rolls, Elton has instead chosen to use his powerful imagination to again produce an intricate and thoroughly entertaining story. If you read it and find yourself scratching your head and thinking, "Why the hell are we all such fools?" or something similar, you're not the only one.

ADAM KEREZSY is a Sydney petrol-pump attendant.

Judy Horacek

A Day in the Life of a Cartoonist

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>I ring one of my editors</th>
<th>We bounce around a few ideas</th>
<th>My cat died...</th>
<th>That's what I love about this job—the constant risks &amp; challenges</th>
<th>And the feeling that I'm doing my bit to change the world...</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>So what is there to joke about this month?</td>
<td>You do a cartoon about my dead cat &amp; you're a dead cartoonist</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>?</td>
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ALR: OCTOBER 1991
How to Improvise

It has been brought to my attention by my colleagues at the Improvisation Standards Board, Canberra Region, that all is not well in terms of spontaneous and creative cooking. People generally are not very good at having fun in the kitchen and producing something even vaguely edible at the same time. It is in response to this appalling state of affairs that the ISB has produced its informative booklet Recipes for Improvisation which, if followed precisely, will result in the manufacture of satisfying and totally spur-of-the-moment meals. It is this indispensable booklet that I now turn in order to teach you the proper way to do things. Sit up and pay attention.

Rule One
If you want to be the sort of person who can throw together a meal at short notice, you must be well-prepared. Just as no self-respecting sleazebucket ventures out without a condom in his or her possession when feeling adventurous, spontaneity requires organisation. Things must be to hand—and preferably to eye as well. A well-organised cook will have basics such as oil, rice or pasta visible or at least not hidden away at the back of a cupboard.

This rule about playing things safe has several sub-rules, according to the Improvisation Standards Board. Don't try to make sweet and sour anything when drunk. Don't get upset if your meal is not tasting as good as you thought it would. Don't be too heavy-handed with dried herbs in an attempt to make something taste like it was made with fresh herbs. Restraint is as important as generosity, and I speak as one who has eaten extra syrupy pears served with barbecued steak and mustard as an unfortunate attempt to replicate a meal the cook had at a restaurant.

Fresh herbs should proclaim their freshness to the kitchen and potential cook. If kept in the refrigerator they are likely to end up as compost. Such things are ready to use without preparation, whereas jars of dry legumes generally require overnight soaking and boiling for an hour or more. My suspicion is that legumes are solely responsible for the existence of fast food outlets. They look nice in jars but require too much intelligence to use properly. Writing "soak butterbeans" in one's filofax is perhaps a bit excessive—although it could perhaps be combined with the types of odd little symbols women use to keep tabs on the menstrual cycle. But don't get them mixed up, ladies. I find that sitting in a bath overnight does very little for my wellbeing and wrinkles up my skin.

Rule Two
"Let's start at the very beginning—that's a very good place to start." (The Sound of Music) Don't be too ambitious if you are a relatively inexperienced cook. This does not mean that you need a five-year plan which starts with boiling eggs and ends with doing nasty things with truffles. We all know that such overweening schemes are doomed to failure. However, successful spontaneity does require some humility, even if I say so myself. If you are a bit frightened of cooking without a recipe, start by changing one or two details in something you know well, and soon you'll find that you are less reliant on the written word.

Rule Three
Live with someone else who is a good cook, so that no one has to grind out meals when they don't want to. Drudgery is anathema to good food.

Rule Four
Live near a good takeaway; it relieves the tension.

Rule Five
The key to the great door of creativity is Mascarpone cheese. I just discovered it the other day and finally understand what was missing in my pathetically inadequate life. Mascarpone cheese is a near liquid, pale and creamy cheese to which I have decided to devote the rest of my life. I defy anyone to stand unmanned in the kitchen with a packet of Mascarpone cheese at his or her disposal. Its uses are myriad, but the following are laid down as legitimate by the Improvisation Standards Board (Fun Guidance Secretariat), and are therefore able to be attempted without filling in Form 195.

* Combine it with melted blue cheese over a low heat to make an instant pasta sauce. Sprinkle with parsley before serving.
* Mix it with eggs and honey and vanilla and pour over sliced apples in a pie flan to make a custard. Cook in oven until set.
* Use as a sandwich spread, ideally with sun-dried tomatoes.
* Use in casseroles along with rice and pre-cooked vegetables.

The secret is now out and you will be able to create heavenly meals in an instant. Your fame as a cook will spread. People will stop preparing meals for you because they think you will sneer at their slapdash ways. Perhaps you will. Armed with Mascarpone cheese you will become an artist of the kitchen and never again reach for those dubious microwave meals.

Copies of Recipes for Improvisation and the ISB's new and misleading publication 1001 More Ways to Have Fun in Canberra can be obtained by writing to them. I'll be at home playing with my cheese.

Penelope Cottier.
Public sector teachers across Australia are experiencing profound psycho-sexual malfunction on a mass scale.

I had a typical case last week. This teacher lassie was brought into my clinic on a stretcher. As soon as she saw me, she wailed, "Working in public schools is like working in a barber's shop. It's cuts, cuts, cuts— all the time!"

Budget constraints had forced the principal at her school to ration the allocation of chalk to one box per teacher, per term. When my patient got this 'chalk memo', she began to act like a furtive drug smuggler.

She started to hide pieces of chalk in little money belts strapped to her body so that other teachers could not find it. When she began to conceal the chalk in small plastic bags within her body cavities, she was brought to my clinic.

Patients, with due respect to the disability lobby's language policy, it must be said that blind Freddy can see that our state school system cannot cope with the current number of students. There just aren't enough books, chairs and exam papers to go round.

Of course, educational resources aren't absolutely essential for effective learning. There are plenty of eminent professors in independent think-tanks, funded from unidentified private sources, who'll argue that a poor, black kid who wants to learn and who is a 'trier', will do well sitting under a gum tree with a correspondence course and a copy of the Old Testament.

I respect these views. I respect any laddie or lassie who wears the same old school tie that I do and who skis at the same resorts. These are objective, scientific views that can be trusted.

However, while poor kids may do well learning under trees, the legitimate needs of the forestry industries are so pressing we just can't guarantee that there'll be enough trees to put them under in the twenty-first century.

Rational economic planning demands that we simply have to cull the kids—just like we do on the goat farm I established on the advice of my accountant, right down the road from my old macadamia nut farm. Scarce educational resources must only be invested in children who will pay dividends for the national shareholders. Tax funded equipment cannot be wasted on born losers.

We must take a Darwinian approach to education. Invest in the winners and abandon the losers to their evolutionary fate. The fittest will survive. Medical faculties have taken this approach for years—and look what it has done for the medical profession.

Let's not shilly-shally around. This culling can start in kindergarten. There is a simple way to sift out the dinosaurs from the species with a future.

The best indicator of a child's educational potential is the parents' choice of newspaper. If a child's parents subscribe to the Independent Monthly and the Financial Review, give them a fast tracked path to university entrance and a guaranteed place in an MBA course.

If the parents read a paper pitched at a reading age of ten, with a big-breasted woman on page three, let the child play a lot of sport at school and get your tailor to make them up a wardrobe of clothes with a lot of blue collars.

If a child’s parents read nothing except the TV guide to find out when Hinch is on, then the child should be allowed to smoke in the school toilets until it's old enough to be allocated a voluntary tutor. The tutor will teach them a subject that used to be called 'English' but is now called 'literacy'.

For older students in our crowded public high schools, here is another culling technique. Take the teenagers into the science laboratory and offer basic instruction in the use of bunsen burners and beakers. Then leave them unattended.

If a student uses the equipment to make bright colours and bad smells, as instructed, give them a ticket to the Higher School Certificate and a life of work beyond.

But if a student uses the bunsen burner to light a joint and make a slice of toast, then 'Newstart' is the euphemism for them in the economically rational 1990s.

Send your problems to Dr Hartman's secretary, Julie McCrossin, c/- ALR.
YOU READ IT FIRST...

ALR, February 1990

If you want to find out what forward-looking people on the Left are thinking, before it enters the newspapers, ALR is your only choice.

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