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ALR WELCOMES CONTRIBUTED ARTICLES AND REVIEWS WITHIN THE FRAMEWORK OF AN OPEN CONCEPT OF SOCIALISM. CONTRIBUTIONS SHOULD BE TYPED, DOUBLE SPACED, ON A4 SIZE PAPER OR SMALLER. MANUSCRIPTS WHICH ARE NOT CLEARLY TYPED AND EASILY LEGIBLE WILL NOT BE CONSIDERED FOR PUBLICATION. UNUSED MANUSCRIPTS WILL BE RETURNED IF ACCOMPANIED BY A STAMPED ADDRESSED ENVELOPE. MAXIMUM WORD LENGTH FOR ARTICLES IS 4500 WORDS, AND REVIEWS 1500 WORDS.
Ever since the declaration of a State of Emergency for the Springbok Tour of 1971, the political strategies of Joh Bjelke-Petersen have been intimately connected to the issue of law and order. He has scarcely been alone in this in Australia. But the heady success of the Petersen machine is illustrated by the memory of some of the lesser conservative figures who sought political advantage in the same way — Askin in NSW, Bolte in Victoria, Court in Western Australia. Law and order politics does not explain Petersen's survival, but it has been indispensable to his projection of himself as the embodiment of all that is good for Queensland and the intractable opponent of enemies within the state and beyond.

For this reason, the Fitzgerald Inquiry into the relation between police and criminal activities has the potential to affect considerably more than simply the future administration of the Queensland Police Force. Opportunities for contesting the links between the National Party government and the “fight against crime” are now presented daily. Doubtless the National Party will, during the rest of the inquiry and in its aftermath, be placing a high priority on reconstructing these links. It seems all the more important then that the implications of the inquiry and its resolution be widely understood.

What has the inquiry revealed so far? Commentaries like this are not bound by the extraordinary rulings in the Queensland Parliament — and which enhance that institution’s reputation for political irrelevance — which prohibit questions or comment on any aspect of the inquiry. What public debate there is at the moment is largely being conducted by journalists and editorial writers, with a handful of letter writers adding their queries about policing priorities in Queensland. Briefly, though, the Fitzgerald Inquiry has so far heard three bodies of evidence.

First, there was opening evidence from the state’s senior police officers on police administration and police-government relations. Although the inquiry is examining a broad range of criminal matters, the focus of attention was on prostitution. Senior police agreed that policy in relation to prostitution was one of management rather than suppression of brothels and massage parlours. That policy was long-standing and, according to the Police Commiss-

tioner, Sir Terence Lewis, was endorsed, even directed by the government. It is still unclear whether the inquiry will proceed to test this claim by questioning ministers past and present. Given other extensive evidence of the government’s intervention in other policing matters in the last two decades, it seems unlikely that the Commission of Inquiry can avoid the question of political direction raised by this early evidence.

Second, a number of the figures allegedly involved in organising prostitution and illegal gambling have given their own accounts of their activities and relations with police. The fact that the objects of the inquiry’s attention have successfully managed to appear as somewhat “hard done by” is a measure of the inquiry’s transformation. The administration of the police force and the question of policing priorities have become far more important than the matter of the existence or extent of “vice” in Queensland. Most recently, however, the evidence of the prostitute “Katherine James” has raised for the first time some broader questions about the conditions which characterise organised prostitution in Queensland and, in particular, the physical violence of those who control it and the wage exploitation of those who work in it.

The detailed evidence of “Katherine James”, given over six days, about how police management of prostitution is organised, has highlighted the third and latest phase of the inquiry. Attempts by the Premier to undermine the status of James’ evidence by reference to her activity in prostitution have failed miserably. Resignations and admissions of corruption on the part of senior police have pre-empted the need to corroborate James’ account of the intimate relation between organised prostitution and sections of the Queensland Police Force Licensing Branch. One of the more surprising features of these events is how quickly the house of cards is falling. People living in Queensland are accustomed to obduracy, cover-ups and denials that anything is
wrong in most areas of government and public administration. Corruption inquiries here, as elsewhere in Australia, have been characterised more by painstaking and often speculative gathering of evidence. The current Queensland Inquiry has certainly had its share of painstaking investigation, but seems rapidly to be establishing an air of moral authority inducing confessions on the part of the corrupt.

It is difficult at present to tell why the fortunes of the inquiry are going so well. The explanation may be simply that Queensland is now so badly administered that the secrecy and lack of accountability which have characterised police affairs and those of government departments alike have generated their own conditions of destruction. The incapacity to remedy government or administrative abuses or bad decisions produces a lot of cynicism in Queensland, but it also produces a lot of anger when those abuses become intolerable. Policing is not the only area where incompetent or corrupt and abusive administration has produced widespread dissatisfaction leading to reversal of government decisions and undermining credibility.

On the day before the resignation of Assistant Commissioner Parker, formerly of the licensing branch and more recently in charge of crime control, the Premier officiated at a police social event. The occasion produced the standard Petersen speech of confidence in the police force — which is, he says, "the thin blue line between anarchy and us". For Petersen, the face of anarchy in Queensland has many forms. In the light of the inquiry evidence so far, it is worth recalling some other policing functions and their relation to the political agenda in Queensland.

Public order policing was, for many years, a central feature of the Petersen political strategy, from Vietnam through the Springbok Tour to the street march campaign of the late 1970s. Changing political contexts have made it less central in recent years — now National Party Senators march against the Australia Card. But in 1985, the sacking of the SEQEB electricity workers was bolstered by anti-picketing legislation which the police were directed by the government to use.

Public order policing has been regarded as the chief example of the politicisation of the Queensland police force, but political direction of policing priorities has been evident in areas closer to the subject of the current inquiry. The Greenslopes abortion clinic raid in 1986 and the recent removal of condom vending machines in Brisbane's two universities were both carried out at the behest of a government which equates permissiveness with anarchy. Hence, not the least important result of the Fitzgerald Inquiry will be its
shortage of money to spend on elaborate public relations and a glossy Annual Report with three-dimensional graphics and extensive photographic display. The police bureaucracy and the police unions are adept at creating a widespread impression of under-policing. But reported crime (except for fraud!) in Queensland is low relative to most other states, particularly NSW and Victoria. The Fitzgeral Inquiry raises the possibility that the perennial claims for more police and more powers will be stripped of their veneer of legitimacy. If so, then the future questions about policing in Queensland may become those of political and social accountability, and of setting priorities which genuinely meet the community need for protection against violent and anti-social crime. It must be admitted, of course, that such developments seem inconceivable under a regime which has seen policing always in terms of advantage to its own political fortunes.

Mark Finnane

A (Not So) Distant Mirror

"Market euphoria greets poll" trumpeted Wellington's evening paper following the new Zealand Labour Party's victory of August 15. Labour's victory led to a surge on the stock exchange and in the value of the NZ dollar. The election results are instructive about changing class attitudes and Labour's policies since 1984. There are lessons, too, for the Australian labour movement.

Side-by-side with Labour's commitment to a nuclear-free New Zealand and South Pacific has been a radical "restructuring" of the economy, based on deregulation of the finance sector, a 10% goods and services tax, and the ending of subsidies to the farming and manufacturing sectors. Justified as an unavoidable response to NZ's indebtedness, these measures have led to greater socio-economic polarisation, inflation levels of 19%, rising unemployment, and first mortgage rates of 21.5%.

The essentially "as-you-were" election result, with labour increasing its majority, by four to 19, in the 97 seat single house, disguises some important features. Voting is not compulsory in NZ, and ministers most identified with Labour's economic policies (Lange, Palmer, Prebble, Douglas, Tizard) saw a 25% fall in their vote in their safe seats. On the other hand, Labour failed by just four hundred votes to take the wealthiest seat in the country: the equivalent would be the ALP winning Andrew Peacock's seat of Kooyong.

In a revealing pre-election analysis of voting intentions by socio-economic status, it was shown that professional people intended to vote Labour by 56% to 24% and managers and business people by 47% to 33%. At the other end of the scale, the semi-skilled intended to vote National by 36% to 35% and the unskilled by 35% to 31%. The latter groups, historically (and in 1984) Labour's back-bone, feel betrayed, and some ministers are now insisting that Labour's new priorities must be education and social welfare. Among the new MPs, too, are several experienced women trade unionists (about one-quarter of Labour's caucus is now female). Lange, on the other hand, was more delighted with
Nothing to Bragg about?

Labour's inroads into wealthy areas and dismissed the slump in the working-class vote with the quip that “these people would vote for us even if we machine-gunned them”. Well, many working-class people do feel under attack and voted, or abstained, accordingly.

The decline in Labour's votes in sale seats was, of course, paralleled, to a lesser degree, in Australia, and is one key lesson from NZ for the ALP. The other is NZ’s experience of the privatisation, now put firmly on the political agenda by Messrs. Hawke, Button and Dawkins. NZ shows clearly the socio-economic impact of “restructuring”

Lange, like Hawke, despises the left and is “good mates” with financiers and speculators. At the same time, in NZ as here, the 1980s have seen the expansion of a large “under-class” of people abandoned by Labour governments and neglected by most trade unions; in particular, the unemployed, welfare recipients and the young. The issue in both countries is whether a left coalition can be moulded from these groups and others which are committed to peace, social justice and genuine equality of opportunity for all ethnic groups.

Peter McPhee

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AFTER THE GREAT CRASH

No smugness is intended in recording that the worst has happened in the weeks since the analysis of the world financial markets in my article “Sale of the Century” (see pages 8-16 of this issue) was written. Or maybe the worst is yet to come, as the dominoes from the Wall Street crash continue to fall.

Reactions are interesting. President Reagan says that “the system is working”. Yes indeed: if he means by that that crashes as well as booms are an integral part of a system of free markets.

Others have argued that the crash is the way the markets tell the US administration that it must cut its deficit. Surely there must be a better way! And why, in that case, did the markets continue to soar throughout the period when the deficit was blowing out?

The first important requirement is that the process of deregulation of major aspects of our economic life must end. There probably will be some deregulation. The issue will be rather what kind — for there are more economic ways than one to serve the interests of the wealthy.

On the political side, Mike Steketee observes of the Federal Opposition that behind the calm exterior “lies a repressed elation at the course of events” (Sydney Morning Herald, Oct 30). The left should reject such a disgraceful and cynical reaction: on the one hand because it will be the working people who will bear the burden of yet another bout of “restructuring” directed from the right, though a few millionaires might bite the dust (or spatter the pavement). And, on the other hand, because economic crisis does not necessarily engender a swing of fortunes to the left, as the busting of the long postwar boom in 1974 proved.

It is still too early to predict what edifices will be brought down by the continuing rumblings from the crash, or to formulate a concrete left program. But if the only hope of avoiding another 1929 is of an enlightened, co-ordinated policy on the part of the political, financial and industrial leaders of the West, that, in the current circumstances, is a slim hope indeed.

What is required is an informed, powerful left intervention, both practically and ideologically. For the economists of the right will undoubtedly switch their attack to serve the interests of the wealthy in these new conditions without a qualm about dumping some of the nostrums they have only recently been proclaiming to be eternal truths.

— Eric Aarons.
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ALR 102
Profile

Angela Carter

If Angela Carter believed in her characters, believed them to be "real", she says they would become. Fevvers, the outlandish circus heroine of her most recent novel Nights at the Circus. Over six foot tall in her stockingled feet, bosomy and irrepressibly selfconfident, Fevvers is what Carter isn't.

Monstrous fiction that she is, Fevvers defies gravity with the aid of gargantuan purple red wings which may or may not really sprout from her bird-woman body. Her slogan shouts: "Is she fact or is she fiction?" Fevvers lives by making a spectacle of herself. She makes a fiction of her life, and her life out of fiction.

Carter, too, makes her living out of fiction. She is one of those few writers able to live on the money she earns from scribbling. Since the birth of her young son, however, she hasn't scribbled much. Nights at the Circus came out in 1984 and Black Venus, a collection of short stories penned in the early 'eighties, in 1985.

Being the breadwinner of the family, and therefore pricked by necessity, Carter has embarked, on other projects that pay. She enjoyed scripting the screenplay for The Magic Toyshop, for instance, a recent film adaptation of her 20-year-old novel of the same name.

Though not quite as unbelievable as her step-daughter Fevvers, Lizzie of Nights at the Circus too lives her own contradiction. Both witch and political materialist, Lizzie is a lot more like Carter - intellectually, emotionally and spiritually. Or so Carter says.

Lizzie is a tiny, wizened apparition with snapping black eyes and the curious dark brown accent of a London-born Italian. On the face of it, she seems nothing like Carter whose grey-blue eyes and ample height give her more the look of Fevvers (minus the wings, false eyelashes and the flirtatious mannerisms).

Lizzie works her homely magic backstage to Fevvers, whose rise from humble Cockney origins to the courts of a jaded, turn-of-the-century royalty is as spectacular as her winged ascent to the trapeze. Now and again, Lizzie interrupts Fevvers' flow of words, however, with her practical philosophy or with snatches of her own subversive activities.

These days Carter feels more maternal towards the heroines she fabricated in her youth, like Melanie, the pubescent heroine of The Magic Toyshop, who is young enough to be her daughter now. Back then, Carter took an unholy glee in whisking virgin Melanie out of her stolid bourgeois existence and into the grimy and incestuous underworld of her uncle's magical shop. These days, too, Carter feels more sympathy with her heroines as women, perhaps because she's become more conscious of sexual politics.

In Heroes and Villains, written shortly after The Magic Toyshop, the heroine finds herself in a situation that's just as frightening, and even more violent. Marianne is confined to her academic father's ivory tower and invents a "noble savage" out of her furious virgin nights. In the enclosed fairy tale worlds of Carter's earlier novels, desire rubs electric against the boundaries imposed on it.

All her characters are, Carter says, intellectual propositions. Like the savage Jewel, who is nothing more than the romantic image of the barbarian as constructed by the eighteenth century's age of reason. But what happens when you try to live with him? Marianne, to her chargrin, finds out.

Fevvers is an altogether different proposition. The situations and the choices confronting her — and that's what Carter would have us identify with — are part and parcel of the baggy nineteenth century novel, the rambling and discursive fictions of a society obsessed with the freakish and bizarre (witness the career of the Elephant Man) and fearful of female sexuality. Cue for Fevvers: is she freak or woman?

It's tempting to liken Carter, who digresses easily from one subject to another, to one of these nineteenth century fictions spreading its limbs and relaxing. Perhaps she's mellowing.

In her own sotto voce, nothing like Fevvers' voice that clangs like dustbin lids, Carter warns against taking the parallels too far. Trying new forms is just part of a writer's craft (she'd bore herself otherwise), and the fact that Nights at the Circus is written in the comic mode doesn't necessarily mean she is any happier nowadays. Not that she minds being happy. It can make her nervous, however, as she doesn't expect it to last.

Thinking of the writers whose scribbling she admires, she's appalled by the lives they led. Riddled with syphilis and near the end of his days, Baudelaire would bow as if to a stranger when he passed a mirror. And what of Dostoyevsky who, although quite good on the woman question, was unforgivably anti-Semitic.

But Carter believes that Christina Stead was content. Fame found her relatively late, by which time her moral fibre was far too strong to succumb. Nor was she too wealthy. While Fevvers' eyes may narrow to $5 signs at the sight of a diamond necklace, Carter wants nothing more than to be comfortable.

For all that Carter respects precise, intellectual writing, the adjectives keep dripping from her pen, she says. Like the diamonds hanging from Fevvers' ears, perhaps, they are multiple mirrors turning. Like Fevvers herself, and the novel she inhabits, they are always writ large.

Lyndell Fairleigh
Privatisation is a crucial battle for the left. But before we can take it on, we need to get our own ideas in order.
The government's flying of the privatisation kite has met with a strong initial rebuff from the labour movement in defence of traditional policies and values. This provides good conditions for the left within and without the Labor Party to emerge from its long period of defensiveness and to reassert a radical challenge to the economic ideas and practices of existing society.

The adoption by the ACTU of Australia Reconstructed — a document which contests prevailing policies and attitudes on a number of important issues — can also make a substantial contribution to developing such a counter-offensive.

Some years ago the left held much of the high theoretical and moral ground on economic issues in its own view, and even in the view of many of its opponents. It has lost that position in the last decade or so, a period roughly coinciding with the end of the long post-war boom (which, ironically, many expected would create conditions for a swing to the left). It has been lost through the left's inability effectively to counter the offensive of the Right (and especially the New Right) has mounted against the radical ideas of the late '60s and '70s.

The reasons for left/socialist decline are complex, but stated in the most general terms they arise from the fact that the left has lagged in its responses to changed social, economic, political and attitudinal conditions, its thinking often dominated by answers which had worked, or appeared to have worked, in the past. It has not faced up fully to the lessons of the experiences of various actual attempts to put its ideals into practice.

Nowhere is this more evident than on economic questions. And here the left should seize on Hawke's call for the debate on privatisation to be informed and not based only on past ideological stances. For even though the latter might still have enough "oomph" remaining to repel the immediate assault, by itself it will not be able to stop the roll of the deregulation tumbril towards the guillotine of complete reliance on market forces. This is the real issue at stake. And in conducting the debate, neither Hawke, Keating, nor any other advocate of deregulation should be allowed to forget that theirs, too, is an ideological stand, concealed though it often is under the cloak of so-called "economic rationalism".

The public sector

Stated in its most general terms, left advocacy of the public sector has been based on mitigating or suppressing anarchic market forces seen to produce cyclical booms and slumps, on lessening or removing exploitation of the public and the given body of employees by greedy capitalists (especially in monopoly or near-monopoly situations), on providing services such as transport which private enterprise would not do because it was not profitable enough, and on being the vehicle for delivering at least a modicum of social justice through education, health and social services.

Socialists, while recognising the limitations of any or all of these in a society otherwise dominated by capitalism, have supported the public sector because it pointed somewhere in the direction they wished society to go.

The case against the public sector has been based on a belief in the superior efficacy of market forces, on real or supposed inefficiencies of and "feather-bedding" within its enterprises and institutions, on the growth of the bureaucratic apparatus of government and on the cost to "the taxpayer" of sustaining it. Each of these contentions, pro and con, needs to be examined, but this should be done within the basic framework of planning/regulation versus market forces.

Frederick Engels began his book Anti-Dühring (1878) with the words: Modern socialism is, in its essence, the direct product of the recognition, on the one hand, of the class antagonisms existing in the society of today between proprietors and non-proprietors, between capitalists and wage workers; on the other hand, of the anarchy existing in production.

The "anarchy" takes the form of fluctuating discrepancies between supply and demand which occur because in a society based on private ownership of the means of production, distribution and exchange, there can be no social plan to match them. These fluctuations periodically take on a generalised form, with most or all areas of the economy affected. These are euphemistically termed "business cycles" where a mad rush to expand production in boom times leads to general over-capacity (coal is the example of the moment), then sacking of workers and further reduction of demand, giving rise to a downward spiral. This spiral is only reversed when the accumulated disproportions are discharged from the system, and when new investment can profitably begin again on a higher technological level, initiating the boom phase of the cycle once again.

Some capitalists are ruined, which are of increasing weight in bones. We see this clearly in Australia today, and it is no accident that the "new money" people who are doing the bone-picking by takeovers and other means are the main proponents of the New Right philosophy. Nor, in the post '74 climate of economic crisis and recession is it any surprise that the free-market philosophy which endorses this cannibalistic restructuring process has been revived.

Major business cycles, economic crises, recessions or depressions spread worldwide because international markets, which are of increasing weight in economic life, as a whole are even less amenable to countering influences than are national, "home" ones.

And here it should be stated that, even if all the good recommendations in (for example) Australia Reconstructed were put into operation (as they should be), and Australian industry became as a
result more up-to-date, efficient and innovative, this would count for little in face of major international economic downturn, which almost everyone agrees — when they can bring themselves to talk about it — could occur at any time. More of this later.

The socialist answer to these problems has been public ownership of the means of production, and planning — planning so that supply can be closely equated with demand, and a planned balance struck between consumption and allocation of resources to further expansion of production and subsequent increases in consumption down the line. All this to occur with no class or section of society enriching itself at the expense of another.

This remains the ideal. But even the most blinkered of socialists (now including some of its previously most dedicated exponents in the Soviet Union) are being forced with mounting economic problems to recognise that the practice is a different matter. (It is interesting to explore the theoretical reasons for this, and I hope to do this in a later article.)

But for now we can note that the experiences of the socialist countries reveal the following phenomena, despite the fact that they may have widely differing economic starting points, histories and traditions, and may be in conflict with each other:

- Some disproportions have been removed, but others have appeared. Some of these are due to lack of intermediate inputs too detailed to be adequately taken into account by even the biggest planning apparatus. Others arise from the difficulty of avoiding fluctuations in the rate of new investment, giving rise to political as well as economic repercussions.
- Pricing problems, particularly those of getting a broad correspondence between prices and the actual costs of production, are of concern, however much prices may be modified for other reasons.
- Where governments fund any discrepancy between the expenditure and receipts of an enterprise, and where the incomes of those involved remain the same whether they work well or badly, have technological foresight etc., even an originally strong will to work for the benefit of society will be quickly weakened. This will be all the more so if bureaucratic control and nest-feeding at upper levels further alienates the workforce.
- Such factors have a major bearing on the quality of products, which becomes more important as living standards rise. Where there is no competition in which the participants do well or not so well according to the judgment of the customers on the actual social usefulness of their respective products, quality will suffer even if quantitative plans are fulfilled.
- Large state enterprises are
Market forces are rather well suited to dealing with many of these problems.

were, the problems must be taken on their merits. And in any case it should be evident that market forces are far from the same when private economic activity is predominant compared with when it is absent or plays a subordinate role.

So the general issue should not be approached on an all or nothing basis — markets or planning. The issue is the role to be played by each in the given conditions (history, tradition, degree of development of economy, international connections etc.).

In existing socialist countries the measures being taken to tackle these problems include allowing/promoting competition between enterprises (even if they are all state-owned) so that customers for their goods have a choice. Enterprises which perform badly then suffer losses and may eventually even be unable to carry on — in effect, go bankrupt.1

Various forms and degrees of self-management are being tested to promote workforce involvement in the fate of the enterprise, though the impact of such innovations and its connection with general openness and democracy within society is viewed by millions of bureaucrats with trepidation. More scope is being allowed for private and group initiative in filling gaps left by state planning and in provision of services. The whole battery of economic means including taxation, interest rates, etc. is being increasingly and more discriminately applied.

Since each country is starting off from a unique historically established situation, their individual experiences and policies cannot directly inform socialists elsewhere on the best concrete balance between plan and market, the most appropriate forms of self-management, or what the most beneficial forms and degrees of continuing private enterprise might be.

This is especially where economically developed capitalist countries are concerned. There, in general, the issue today is not so much how to design the future economy, but how to intervene more effectively in the existing non-radical climate so as to renew the socialist challenge in the course of responding to the actual issues and events of the times. Non-dogmatic, creative thought is the order of the day. For us in Australia, the issues include the privatisation thrust and implementation of major policy orientations contained in Australia Reconstructed.

The market

The fundamental philosophy of the market was elaborated more than 200 years ago by the Scottish economist Adam Smith. Briefly, that philosophy holds that the public good is not only served, but best served by pursuing private interest.

This is a nice way of saying that not only is personal acquisitiveness good for you — the most important person in the world, as the ads have it — but that it is the best way to help your brother and sister humans. An invisible hand — that of the market — ensures this fortunate result.

This is not complete nonsense. Marx himself often stressed that the capitalist system constantly revolutionises the productive forces and enormously increases the sum total and range of goods, making them (in our day, at any rate), widely, though not universally, available.

Capitalism has done this by advancing self-interest, the making of private profit, and money in general to the dominating position in social life and society's general outlook.

Marx notes with passion the way in which capitalism conquered societies of an earlier type:

The expropriation of the immediate producers was accomplished with merciless vandalism, and under the stimulus of passions the most infamous, the most sordid, the pettiest, the most meanly odious. (Capital, Volume I, Chapter 32.)

It was even worse with colonised peoples, such as the Aborigines, seen as inferior, if indeed human at all. And, in the Communist Manifesto:

The bourgeoisie... has left no other nexus between man and man than naked self-interest, than callous 'cash payment'. It has drowned the most heavenly ecstasies of religious fervor, of chivalrous enthusiasm, of philistine sentimentalism, in the icy water of egotistical calculation. It has resolved personal worth into the social consensus so dear to the Prime Minister's heart. Still less is it
conducive to advancing humanistic and socialist ideals. It is true that small “I” liberals such as Ian McPhee do not believe that market forces should be given absolutely free rein. There is also a nascent movement for “ethical” capital investment (in activities which are environmentally sound, for example). It is true also that Old Right ideologists such as Santamaria recognise the importance of moral questions. But it is the gung-ho New Right which is today setting the ideological pace.

The connections between social philosophy and economic system are neither one-dimensional nor one-directional, but they are nevertheless intimate.

The emphasis on the pursuit of personal material consumption-oriented goals and of power over other people is easily seen as being on the rather rapid increase today. This trend is undoubtedly fed by, and feeds, the economic deregulation which, sad to say, has proceeded more rapidly under Hawke than it did under Fraser. It certainly works against a climate favoring even mild reforms in accord with left ideals, let alone more radical ones.

This is another important reason why the present debate over privatisation should be pursued with vigour and in an offensive spirit, with the ideological aspect well to the fore.

In some otherwise excellent material on the issue, the ideological side is largely absent. This weakens rather than strengthens the campaign which cannot be won by promoting only a better “economically rationalist” case than that of those promoting privatisation (though that case is important, too).

The present battle — a prelude to many more — cannot be won without the emotional conviction that only a strongly-held and well-though-out social-philosophical content can engender.

But, just as socialists have often elevated planning and government ownership and control to a point where they lost sight of other factors, so they have often stressed the collective, social aspect to the point where they appeared to, or in fact did, stand for suppressing individual strivings and initiative. This, too, needs to be taken into account in renewing the socialist vision.

Returning now to a more concrete consideration of the role of the public sector, we should note first of all that the internationalisation of production, trade and financial operations (particularly) has proceeded at an exceptional rate.

Two and a half years ago, journalist Maximilian Walsh quoted Fortune magazine to the effect that the volume of funds “awash” in the international arena was two million million dollars. (The figure could have easily doubled since then, especially with the recent explosion of Japanese finance onto the scene.)

The nature of the foreign exchange market where there are no controls can best be described as manic depressive with wild swings in sentiment. The slightest tremor of concern is almost immediately transformed into an earthquake of alarm ... Inevitably the system is institutionally neurotic because it is frequently more concerned with irrational aspects, such as mood, rather than an analysis of fundamentals ... The exchange-rate factor feeds back viciously into the domestic system. (Sydney Morning Herald, 21 February, 1985: emphasis added.)

In another article on the corporate gambling game which reaches a daily volume of $A75 billion in Tokyo alone, he says:

We are seeing financial and property assets being bid up in the open markets of the world to levels that are historically unsustainable ... The conventional way of pricking an inflationary boom in stock and property markets is a credit-squeeze. Such a policy at this stage would be counter-productive allowing (the corporate gamblers) to flow in (to Australia) and pick up bargains.

His conclusion?

That raises the prospects of reintroducing exchange and foreign investment controls. (SMH, 7 September.)

And even from Paul Keating and Bob Hawke we occasionally hear that “the markets” have taken a misguided, short-term or wrong-headed view.

Yet we are told every day how “the markets” expect/require that the budget deficit be reduced, wages cut, government expenditure on anything in general and welfare in particular slashed — or else. The “or else” is that the financial tycoons will sell their Australian dollars or withdraw their capital and we will be faced with a new crisis.

The economic prescriptions dictated to us in this way are presented as the conclusions of disinterested scientists like the astronomers who survey the heavens and tell us of the latest supernova discovery. In fact, the particular economic doctrines promoted for the time being are dictated by the self-interest of dedicated pursuers of private profit. They will change (and have repeatedly changed) when new conditions dictate new directions in policy to the same end.

This does not mean that economic doctrines are manufactured at will, with no regard at all for facts, common sense or logic, for that would only the more rapidly discredit them. Rather, particular aspects of an almost infinitely complex economic life are emphasised in order to lead analysis in particular directions. At one time it is Milton Friedman’s money
Australia’s Foreign Debt

The Reserve Bank not only has the custody of currency and gold reserves. It still has extensive powers over the whole financial system, powers which are voluntarily being ceded or left inoperative in these deregulation days.

For example, the Reserve Bank could direct that a certain proportion of bank deposits be made available for certain purposes at certain interest rates. (This, indeed, used to be the case for savings banks in relation to housing, and there are still minor measures in this direction.

It would be possible to submit private borrowings, especially overseas borrowings, to scrutiny to minimise unproductive/speculative activity such as takeovers and maximise new, especially innovative, investment and the promotion of Research and Development.

The Reserve Bank also takes custody of the so-called Statutory Reserve Deposits, whereby a certain percentage of bank deposits have to be handed over at a certain (low) rate of interest. These, however, while retained despite a campaign for their elimination, seem now to have more the role of revenue raising than a measure for exercising a degree of control over the economy. Such measures - and others are available to the Reserve Bank - would, of course, be roundly denounced by financial magnates and others who assert that deregulation and the entry of foreign banks have greatly benefited all of us.

The Commonwealth Bank is on the hit-list for privatisation, although it is Australia’s biggest bank and could play a much more substantial role than it does in promoting public policy. For example, by directing its loans, as a matter of priority, towards desirable productive investment and by increasing its already considerable housing loan activity.

It could do this and continue to make profits of hundreds of millions of dollars a year which could be used in part to extend its capital base as necessary and, in part, to fund other public sector activity.

A bank is an instrument for collecting lots of small and relatively small amounts of money into investible-size lumps. It is rather strange, then, when a major excuse for selling Australian Airlines is the difficulty of finding the necessary capital to make them more efficient and competitive, it is proposed that a major instrument for mobilising such capital is also slated to be sold for a “one-off” return.

A major proposal in Australia Reconstructed is to overcome the lack of private investment for industry development by establishing a development fund by an allocation of 20 percent of superannuation funds. This has aroused much ire from free
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marketees who assert that the task of these funds is solely to make the most profitable investments, and nothing else — certainly not to make a policy intervention in the investment area.

This is argued despite the fact that most mutual insurance companies (AMP, for example) dispose of huge amounts of "members" funds in ways often determined by their congenial business relationships, including their occupancy of various cushy directorships.

What they really fear is that, in this area, for so long the preserve of capital alone, there will be competition from an economically powerful area into which there could be a substantial input from the labor movement, both economically and ideologically.

When ethical considerations (investment in South Africa, or in environmentally harmful activities, for example) are also taken into account, as well as the fact that employees may wish their funds to help create jobs and a better life for their children and the country as a whole, it is nonsense to say that they should be compelled to adopt the anti-social values of the class they work for.

Employers often blether about how much they desire to have employees with a monetary interest in the companies in which they work. Certainly they want the employees' money, as well as the illusion of "partnership". What they don't want, however, is a set of objectives and priorities contesting with their own from a position of some strength.

In raising this proposal, and in stressing the importance of industrial democracy, Australia Reconstructed meshes with the anti-privatisation campaign. In particular, it pinpoints the fact that "the market", left to itself, has not raised the level of investment in Australian industry despite the rapid rise in profit levels and the profit share of the Gross Domestic Product.

It stresses the fact that, without a rise in such investment, the increasingly brittle reliance on export of primary and mining products will continue, that there will be no bigger economic cake, that it will not be possible substantially to reduce unemployment and that inroads cannot be made into the balance of payments deficit through an increase in exports and a reduction of imports.

It should be added that overseas borrowings by the private sector, much of it for takeovers, is responsible for about two-thirds of the total debt. Tax deductibility of interest payments on these loans, moreover, has greatly diminished the revenue from company tax.

No ID card will catch these tax dodgers, for the dodge is sanctioned by present taxation law. There is, of course, a good case for tax deductibility of interest payments when the loan is used for productive purposes, since the interest enters into the cost of production. But there is no reason why such deductions should be allowed on the interest on loans for takeover or speculative purposes, since the interest enters into the cost of production. But there is no reason why such deductions should be allowed on the interest on loans for takeover or speculative purposes, and the borrowings themselves should be closely scrutinised to see whether they help or hinder national development, and increase or lessen the degree to which Australia is at the mercy of international finance.

Other important social benefits could flow from the public sector. For example, setting the pace in developing industrial democracy and beneficial technological innovation, both by the public sector itself and support through the purchasing policy of private sector enterprises pursuing this path, and by ensuring that its activities are environmentally sound in the areas upon which they impinge.

All large organisations tend to suffer from bureaucracy. Public sector enterprises and departments are no exception, though it is a myth that they are in general more so than are private enterprises. Anyone who has had to deal with a large private company, bank or insurance company, for example, will have experienced, from time to time, their bureaucratic officiousness, lack of concern for the small customer, and inefficiency. On the other hand, many public "servants" have at least some appreciation of the ideal of "public service", and consider the plight of the poor, sick, homeless, unemployed, young, in humane and society-oriented ways that are foreign to the free marketees.

However, while there have been some, probably beneficial, changes made in Public Service organisation and practice by the Hawke government, none has so far addressed the issue of combatting the bureaucratic/hierarchical way of doing things or of raising the level of employee involvement. Yet to do so would raise "public service" consciousness to a qualitatively new level, break down the campaign from the Right to denigrate the public sector, promote different values in society at large, and place pressure from this source too for the expansion of democracy at the workplace level.

The campaign against privatisation and to implement major proposals contained in Australia Reconstructed has only just begun. It has the potential to repel the New Right, to halt the government's deregulation binge, to benefit the Australian economy and to set the left on the path to formulating a new, relevant and viable economic program, thus making an essential contribution to the process of socialist renewal.

NOTES:

1. This, of course, should be taken as indicative, rather than prescriptive. There are circumstances where a limitation on competition will be more efficient economically than its promotion. To take one example close to home, only a monopoly on basic telephone services can provide the cross-subsidisation between city and country needed for equitable costing.

2. Banks do compete, as big producers of commodities. But they do so more in peripheral ways than in basic ones such as offering lower costs or interest rates.

ERIC AARONS is a member of the Sydney ALR collective.
DANGEROUS CUSTODY
Black Deaths and the Bicentenary

Mike Kennedy

No issue strikes closer to the heart of the Bicentenary’s guilty conscience than black deaths in custody. And it’s an issue as old as white invasion itself.
Thea Astley’s 1974 novel *A Kindness Cup* contains a pivotal scene which brings together a number of issues relevant to the current debate about the Bicentenary and the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody. Astley’s novel is set at the turn of the century in a small North Queensland town, Taws, which is celebrating its progress in “Back to Taws” week. Twenty years earlier, some of the men who have now become Taws’ leading citizens had taken part in a massacre of local Aborigines and the local schoolteacher at the time returns to the town for the celebrations, determined to expose the massacre.

In the midst of its orgy of reminiscence and self-congratulation, the town does not want to be reminded of that part of its past, particularly the suicide of an Aborigina woman who, having been “captured”, leapt off a cliff clutching her baby after seeing the men in her tribe shot down in cold blood.

The crucial scene occurs towards the end of the week and involves a conversation between Buckmaster, knighted for services to the sugar industry and father of the Native Police officer who supervised the massacre, and Dorahy, the avenging schoolteacher:

“Why don’t you go back?” he (Buckmaster) asks, genuinely curious. “That or fall in with the spirit of it, eh? Why I’ve just left the happiest crowd I’ve seen in years out at the showground. Massive picnic. Ring events. Side shows. The lot. They love it and they’re loving each other.” He presents himself reasonably, his large wine-stained face seeking sense for the moment.

“You know why.”

“But that’s over a long time ago. God, you make it all repetitious. Can’t you see that?” … “Look,” he says, turning a curiously worn countenance on Dorahy “let’s talk this out. Man to man. There are things I regret. Naturally, every man has those. But I — all of us have been trying to live those moments down. No one’s proud of them. They just happened in a natural course of events. It’s part of history.”

“History has two faces.”

“What do you mean?”

“I mean your view may not necessarily be the right view. There’s another side to it. I want the other side to be seen.”

“After all this time you still believe that?”

“Yes.”

Buckmaster gulps at his tea. “Then there’s nothing I can say that will bring you to your senses.”

“I’m very much in them.”

Buckmaster says gently, “You’re not, you know.”

Dorahy does not fall in with the spirit of it, of course, and the novel ends with him being beaten senseless outside the local hall on the week’s last night, while the crowd inside sings Auld Lang Syne. The lynch mob mentality, the violence underlying the veneer of civilisation, the intolerance of an alternative point of view have triumphed yet again. And even for those with a social conscience, Dorahy’s protest and violent silencing will fade eventually and become just a footnote to the week.

Whether the real life Mr. Justice Muirhead has more success in bringing home to the mass of white Australians the cost to blacks of white “progress” than the fictional Dorahy did, will surely be one of the major tests of whether the Royal Commission into Black Deaths in Custody has been worthwhile.

The events which gave rise to the Royal Commission are well enough documented in recent media reports not to require detailed elaboration here.

The pressure for an inquiry on a national level into black deaths in custody has been building steadily in recent years; the Committee to Defend Black Rights, for example, has been pressing for a Royal Commission for at least four years to my knowledge. Announcing the Royal Commission in August, the federal government quoted figures of 44 Aboriginal deaths in police and prison custody since 1980, with 14 deaths since December 1986 — eight of those in Queensland.

These figures were immediately attacked by Aboriginal groups as understating the level of deaths in custody. Questions were also raised about the structure of the commission, the number of Aboriginal research staff who would be appointed, the availability of legal representation for the families of the dead prisoners, and the very reasons why the government had finally agreed to establish the commission.

While the death of Lloyd Boney in a Brewarrina police cell on August 6 and the community reaction to that death undoubtedly played a part in persuading the government to act, there were also wider political considerations, apart from possible Bicentenary embarrassment. It had been widely reported, prior to Hawke’s announcement, that the UK-based Anti-Slavery Society intended to take a case on behalf of Aboriginals to the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting in Canada in October, and that a United Nations working party on indigenous people had had the question of Aboriginal deaths in custody drawn to its attention. To a lesser extent, the attacks by the French media on Australia’s treatment of Aboriginals as their response to Australian condemnation of the assaults on Kanak protesters during the recent referendum in New Caledonia must have added to the government’s international discomfort.

It is relevant to ask why governments have not acted before now on the wealth of material already available on the public record in relation to this question. The range of reports of inquiries and select committees as well as individual court cases and academic research has made the area well-trodden ground, even if little of that material has made the transition across and into white popular history or culture.

One point that most Australians would generally concede is that Aborigines are represented in the prison population in numbers wildly disproportionate to their numbers in the general population. Any attempt to collect accurate national imprisonment data for analysis has so far been impossible, since Queensland and the Northern Territory do not publish information concerning Aboriginals in their state prison systems.
Successive Queensland Prisons Ministers have defended this policy on the basis that the keeping of such statistics is essentially racist. The last Liberal Prisons Minister went so far as to say that Queensland did not keep statistical records of the race of a prisoner because “if a government starts a policy like that, it will end up with statistics based on religion and political beliefs”.

Criminologist David Biles has even suggested that the most important factor in explaining the different imprisonment rates in Australian states is the proportion of Aboriginals living in each jurisdiction.2

A Western Australian inquiry on imprisonment rates reported that the percentages of total annual penal receivals who were Aboriginal were 54.4 percent in WA (1979/80) and 30 percent in SA (1979/80). These figures need to be read in conjunction with the percentages of the prison population who were Aboriginals on census day. 31.8 percent in WA (30.6/80), 5.9 percent in NSW (1.3/81) and 14.3 percent in SA (30.11/80). The report estimated the percentages of Aboriginals in the total populations of these states as WA three percent, NSW 0.8 percent, and SA 0.9 percent.3 These figures probably understated the numbers of Aboriginals who spend time in custody. People held on street or alcohol offences in watchhouses or police lockups would not be included in these statistics.4

The deaths which will be covered by the terms of reference for the Royal Commission. Astley acknowledges a debt in relation to source material to the report of the Select Committee on the Native Police Force, Queensland, 1861.

The Queensland Legislative Assembly Votes and Proceedings, which contain the Queensland Select Committee report, contain a number of reports of black deaths in custody about this time.

To take just one example, a subpoenaed white civilian witness gave evidence about the arrest, by a party of draymen, of an Aboriginal called Gulliver for whom a warrant on a charge of murder had been issued. He had been made drunk to stop his escape, was bound hand and foot, and handed over to the Native Police who were hunting him in the area. The police had taken Gulliver out of the witness’ dray and tied him, still drunk, to a tree, after which the witness had continued on to the nearest station.

Not long afterwards, the police party arrived at the station without Gulliver and, when asked where he was, a white officer “said it was one of those things which ought not to be talked about”. The police story that emerged locally later was that Gulliver had been killed while trying to escape, but the witness’ evidence was that, given the time factor, Gulliver’s state of drunkenness and the security of his bindings, this was impossible. The final report makes no mention of this or other similar cases referred to in the course of evidence before it.

Without wishing to canvass any of the specific cases which will become the subject of evidence before the Muirhead commission, it must be stated that Gulliver’s case bears a striking resemblance to at least one of the better known deaths in more recent times.

It is impossible to quantify these deaths in custody or even to put an accurate figure on the murders of Aboriginals more generally in the last half of last century. The killings were usually done on the excuse of “depredations” but in reality were an attempt quickly to clear the land for grazing purposes. The Native Police were constantly involved in such “dispersals” in North Queensland up to 1896 and, in practice, there was little to constrain white settlers from using force against and or killing Aboriginals without police involvement. One tentative estimates that at least 4,000 Aboriginals died as a result of frontier resistance in North Queensland between 1861 and 1896 although the estimate is qualified by a disclaimer that it is probably so conservative as to be misleading.5

Subscribers to the view of history espoused by Astley’s Buckmaster would doubtless claim that these murders are now part of an ancient (in white Australia’s time scale) past which the nation is now proceeding to live down. Yet the pattern has continued into this century. For example, in November 1928, The Sydney Morning Herald carried a report that Alice Springs police had killed eight Aboriginals alleged to have been involved in the murder of a white dogger. By the following day the death toll had grown to seventeen. The constable in charge of the party stated that he had shot to kill because he did not know what he would do with wounded so far from “civilisation”. A subsequent Board of Inquiry found 31 Aboriginals had been shot, but found the police had acted in justifiable self-defence and no further action was taken.6

Many Aboriginals’ more recent contact with the criminal justice system would lead them still to see a police mentality operating in some police behaviour. For example, last century a police/squatter posse would be formed in response to a report of “depredations”, either the reported killing of stock or the reported attempted or actual spearing of a white were sufficient reason. The Aboriginals would be “dispersed” (officially for “killed”) on the basis that it was impossible to identify the individuals responsible and arrest them, so summary punishment had to apply to the entire group. Compare the dynamics of that situation with those applying at a recent end of year dance for an Aboriginal football club in suburban Brisbane.

The police story is that a mobile
patrol car with two police attended at the hall for a noise complaint. They claim that when they arrived, bottles or cans were thrown at them from the darkness (they could not identify the individuals) so they retreated to the police car and called for help. Within a matter of minutes, dozens of police cars had arrived from all over Brisbane and police proceeded to clear the hall.

Evidence given at the subsequent trial of the Aboriginals charged as a consequence of the incident revealed that police had used batons and police dogs indiscriminately on old people and women and children, had used racial insults in dealing with the clearing of the hall, and had been out of control in the darkened grounds surrounding the hall. The police, like their predecessors a century earlier, claimed to be acting in self-defence and to have used only “reasonable force”. Local independent white eyewitnesses denied that there was undue noise and were not aware of the alleged barrage of missiles which police claimed triggered the attack.

It seems clear, in retrospect, that an overreaction on the part of the first police on the scene led to the general call for help. What is more relevant in terms of Aboriginal/police relations is the numerical strength of police who answered the call, the speed with which they assembled, and the vigour with which they set about their task of dispersing the dancers. There was, of course, no loss of life on this occasion, although that may have been fortuitous given the indiscriminate batoning of old people and children in the shadows of the grounds.

The use of police violence as a routine part of police interaction with Queensland Aboriginals also emerged in police evidence to the Lucas inquiry into criminal law enforcement in Queensland in 1977. The report contains the following transcript of a taped conversation between a police inspector, a uniformed police sergeant, and a civilian. The inspector was aware the conversation was being tape recorded, the others were not.

**Sgt.** The old blacks are still playing up?
**Insp.** The blacks.
**Sgt.** Hey?
**Insp.** Yeah, um, yeah.
**Sgt.** Want a bloody good waddy over their nut.
**Insp.** Orh they have done the wrong thing by those people you know.
**Sgt.** What?
**Insp.** They've done the wrong thing by those people.
**Sgt.** What, by the blacks?
**Insp.** Yeah.
**Civ.** Ha, ha, ha.
**Sgt.** Didn't kill enough of the buggers. [...
**Sgt.** Oh. the good old days are gone with the blacks. You can't give them a bloody razzle dazzle like you used to be able to.
**Insp.** No?

I am not aware of any similar published evidence or reports on prison officers' attitudes towards Aboriginals. However, from my own
observations while in Boggo Road jail and in the course of my involvement with the Prisoners Action Group in Brisbane, I received a great deal of anecdotal material which suggested that many prison officers could have slotted into that conversation without any difficulty at all.

Anecdotal evidence again suggests that prisoners, both black and white, feel less threatened in jail than they do in police custody for a number of reasons — the sense of isolation is less in jail, a support group of sorts is generally available among other prisoners, and your family and friends outside know where you are. While these factors might lessen the impact on a jailed individual of racial insults or random violence, when prison officers' attacks lead to the death of a prisoner, as is claimed in some of the Western Australian cases, prisoner solidarity will be used by the prison system to suggest a conspiracy to malign either the officers or the reference, to examine some of the
treatment of blacks as did of Alwyn Peter.

The basis of the defence case was set out in the opening remarks of Alwyn Peter’s defence barrister, Des Sturgess (now Queensland Director of Public Prosecution):

Our case is shortly this: in Queensland, there have been created communities in which the incidence of homicide and very serious assaults is amongst the highest that has been reached and published anywhere in the world. It is, for example, thought to be at least equivalent to that which is found in the poorest and most violent ghettos of New York. Now, Deirdre Gilbert, the deceased girl, and Alwyn Peter, the prisoner, were members of one such community, and they were shaped by it and each has been destroyed by it. Now I should tell your Honour that to be a member of such a community one does not have to be mad or bad. but one has only to be an Aborigine ... The sad fact will emerge from all this that this young man in the dock your Honour, has no hope and is without hope.

What emerged was a picture of appalling social conditions on reserves, of high unemployment, low household income, overcrowded living conditions and poor health care. It was a lifestyle further strained by jealousy and alcoholism. The earlier forced removal by the Queensland government of the Mapoon Aboriginals to Weipa South had contributed to the destruction of traditional Aboriginal society and the consequent eradication of traditional ways of relating to each other.

The defence submitted that the result was community disintegration, purposelessness and feelings of personal worthlessness with the inevitable result that people became violent towards others and themselves.

Evidence was led of the internalisation of anger and violence by Weipa South aboriginals, especially when drunk. A social worker, Anne McKinnon, had, without much probing, compiled a list from perpetrators of, or witnesses to, recent widely known cases of self-destructive acts in the community. She lists twenty-four cases ranging from shooting oneself in the hand or foot, to cutting oneself with sharp objects, to causing lacerations by smashing glass louvres, to pouring petrol on oneself.
The reserve manager's opinion that these were acts of people "looking for sympathy" is not borne out by the fact that most of these acts were carried out at the height of anger and frustration, the shootings and cuttings were spontaneous rather than premeditated and, most often, medical treatment was not sought for the resultant injuries.

A psychiatrist, Harry Eastwell, gave evidence that there was very little to give the Aboriginals a source of self-esteem or positive feelings about themselves. With specific reference to Alwyn Peter, Eastwell's opinion was that this frustration, stress and self-contempt generated an aggressive drive that often turned a person in on himself or herself.

Significantly, the defence team was unable to uncover instances of suicide in traditional Aboriginal communities; in cases where suicides were found, it was where the traditional ways had been broken down.

A more recent Queensland report on black deaths in custody also points to many of the abovementioned factors. The report, compiled by the deputy Chair of the Aboriginal Community Council and an officer of the Department of Community Services, points to poor training and equipping of community police, overcrowding in sub-standard housing, unemployment, poor health care, alcohol and drug abuse, and the erosion of traditional culture as contributing to the problem.

The report also addresses the Minister's widely reported view that the Queensland deaths were part of a "copy cat" syndrome in the following terms: "it is probably not a 'copy cat' syndrome as to why they were imprisoned but the 'copy cat' idea could well come into calculations after the depression starts to settle in." This conclusion is supported by James Cook University's Dr. Joe Reser who has been conducting cross-cultural research on Aboriginal deaths in custody and similar deaths among American and Canadian Indians. Reser's view is that here, as in America, the suicide "cluster" phenomenon is complicated by the way it seems to feed on the attention it attracts. However, he believes that the publicity can precipitate more deaths "not because of a simplistic 'copy cat syndrome' but because suicide becomes a disturbing preoccupation and a more salient 'option' for disaffected, depressed and demoralised young people".

This will pose another intriguing problem for the Royal Commission. Like McKinnon's list of self-wounders referred to earlier, the list of cases before the commission will involve people who were mostly young and, as far as I am aware, male. (McKinnon's list does contain one woman — she was Alwyn Peter's sister.) On this point, Paul Wilson has recently suggested that at least some of the deaths in Queensland were a protest, at a very personal, psychological level, against their environment and their treatment at the hands of the authorities.

To what extent the proceedings of the Royal Commission cut across next year's Bicentenary sanitising of Australian history remains to be seen, but there are some readily apparent ironies even before any evidence is taken. The commission's report will be an account of fifty-three people whose stories have never been told, but only the most optimistic would predict that it will have a circulation anywhere near the official "people's history". In Queensland, the position will be even worse, because the report will be competing for a place in popular consciousness, not only with the official Bicentenary hoop-la, but also with the Expo 88 circus.

And given the failure of government at all levels over 150 years to act on the reports I have considered here, ought we hold out any hope that the Muirhead report will be acted upon, that the destructive cycle will be broken? Am I being overly cynical in suspecting that, ultimately, reality will mirror Astley's novel ending, and Aboriginals will still be literally and figuratively being kicked to death in the dark while those in the light shed a tear for Auld Lang Syne and relegate Muirhead's report to another footnote for the Tricentenary?

NOTES

1. As this article was being typed. The Sydney Morning Herald, 2 October 1987, carried a report that a Sydney meeting convened by the NSW Deaths in Custody Watch Committee had been told by Senator Duncan Kerr on behalf of Minister Gerry Hand that the government now conceded that there had been at least 53 deaths since 1980.


3. Statistical tables 1.7, 1.9, 1.10, 1.12, 1.13 in Report of the Committee of Inquiry into the Rate of Imprisonment (WA), 1981.

4. Again, as this article was being typed, a report appeared in The Sydney Morning Herald, 3 October 1987, of a study by WA criminologists into Aboriginal imprisonment rates. The WA census day figure is now 33 percent although the state's Aboriginal population has remained static at three percent. The report quotes the claim of one of the study's authors, Rod Broadhurst, that Australia's black imprisonment rate is higher than South Africa's and represents the greatest level of incarceration of an indigenous people in any country.


MIKE KENNEDY is a member of the Brisbane ALR collective.
GORBACHEV'S THOUSAND DAYS

Monty Johnstone

Seventy years after the first, Gorbachev's revolution seems to have reached a new, critical stage. Has it become irreversible?

The recent far-reaching Law on State Enterprises, designed to replace old stalinist forms of economic organisation, represents an important milestone on the Soviet Union's road to radical renewal.

Since the April 1985 Central Committee plenum, on Gorbachev's initiative, the USSR has resumed the process of reform which began from 1953 very unevenly and inconsistently under Khrushchev, but which came to an end in the Brezhnev era.

In the Brezhnev period and, above all, from the mid-seventies, stagnation grew along with the "immobilism" associated with an increasingly gerontocratic leadership. This resulted in a decline in economic growth rates, particularly in labour productivity, especially serious in the more modern branches of industry demanding the application of high technology. While official propaganda proclaimed an unbroken tale of successes, apathy, alcoholism, corruption and crime grew — though their statistics, like those of the falling grain production and rising infant mortality, were suppressed. As one of the editors of Moscow News told me recently: "The population were told that victorious socialism was bringing rising grain production and falling crime rates. In fact, the statistical curves were in the opposite direction!"

Andropov, who succeeded Brezhnev as general secretary after the latter's death in 1982, attempted to mount a campaign against "accumulated inertia" and corruption in high places. His more dynamic, if largely technocratic, approach began to produce some positive changes, reflected in a limited improvement in economic growth rates. Unfortunately, during half of his 15 months' tenure of office, he was on his deathbed, ending his days in 1984 at the age of 69.

His replacement by the 73-year-old, sick, and utterly undistinguished apparatchik Chernenko effected the distaste felt by the majority of the Politbureau (on whose recommendation the Central Committee elected him) for the shake-up Andropov had begun. They clearly feared that Gorbachev, his obvious successor among the younger members of the party leadership, might take things even further though few, if any, guessed how far.

The pathetic television pictures of a dying and incapable Chernenko, following on those seen earlier of the moribund Brezhnev and and faltering Andropov, were deeply damaging to the standing of the Soviet leadership at home and abroad. It was no doubt the recognition of the need to recapture respect and dynamism that led to the failure of 70-year-old Viktor Grishin's attempt to replace Chernenko on his death. In a situation now recognised to have been acquiring "pre-crisis forms", 54-year-old Mikhail Gorbachev was elected as general secretary. Conscious, as he was to put it later, that "restructuring was necessitated by the mounting contradictions in the development of society", he began at the April 1985 Central Committee meeting energetically to put forward proposals for accelerating economic growth. He started where Andropov had left off with efforts to ensure the implementation of the economic "experiment" already adopted in 1984, involving greater autonomy and incentives for the directors of some enterprises. Along with this, he undertook harsh measures against alcoholism and corruption, and proceeded to initiate an increasing number of personnel changes, along with important foreign policy initiatives. At this stage, the measures taken remained generally within a technocratic framework.

The first serious changes in that respect were to show themselves in the period leading up to the 27th Party Congress called for February/March 1986, exactly thirty years after the 20th Congress at which Khrushchev had exposed Stalin's rule of terror. The pre-congress discussion, reflected in the press, was much more critical and hard-hitting than had previously been the case. The high point of this was the publication by Pravda in February 1986 of extracts from letters which, under the title "Cleansing", attacked special shops and other privileges enjoyed by party and state leaders. Although recognising that Pravda was criticised (by Party Secretary Ligachov) at the congress for having
gone too far with some of the letters, the paper's editor, Viktor Afanasyev, writes in a recent booklet: "On the whole 'Cleansing' achieved its objective: to promote the mobilisation of public opinion in the struggle against phenomena alien to the essence and spirit of socialism. The issue of Pravda in which it appeared was literally scrambled for, and passed from hand to hand. It was reproduced, read and discussed. The paper received about two thousand letters in response to it, some of which it published. The taboos of decades were beginning to break down.

At the congress itself, Gorbachev made a hard-hitting and self-critical report. He referred to the harm done by the "escalation of bureaucracy" and emphasised the need for "radical reform" of the economy at what he called an "abrupt turning point" in its life. While speaking of the need for "a further development of all aspects and manifestations of socialist democracy" (as indeed had Brezhnev's congress reports), his remarks on the theme tended to remain fairly general. He did, however, speak of the need for
"corrections" in Soviet electoral procedures, as well as tentatively making suggestions for councils of work collectives and for women's councils. For the first time since the early 'sixties, a woman, Biryukova, was elected to one of the top party posts, becoming a Central Committee secretary, though not a member of the Politbureau. A Central Committee was elected in which 40.7 percent of the full members and 68.6 percent of the candidate members were new.

At the end of the congress it still seemed an open question whether the reform course which it had approved would remain predominantly technocratic — which, in itself, would represent an advance on the bureaucratic/gerontocratic inertia of the Brezhnev era — or whether it would acquire a really democratic character.

Last summer and autumn saw the beginning of a turn to democratisation which has, since then, acquired increasing momentum. On his journeys throughout the USSR, Gorbachev began, more and more, to emphasise political democratisation as a condition for economic success, making specific proposals for drawing the working people into the decision-making process, encouraging them to criticise bureaucratic leaders, and promoting great openness (glasnost) in the press. If the first steps in the restructuring (perestroika) process had to come from the top, Gorbachev now made it increasingly clear that its successful continuation would be impossible without popular involvement from below. He clearly understood that the traditional appeals to work harder had become devalued. So long as the democratic provisions of the constitution remained a formality and people felt powerless to influence the decisions of party leaders and industrial ministries, the change in mentality that perestroika required would never come about. Moreover, people would need to see a radical improvement in what is referred to as the social sphere — amenities which, he emphasised, were grossly neglected by industrial ministries and factory directors concerned only with their production targets. Such technocratic tendencies came increasingly under attack both for their neglect of the needs of working people and for their damage to the environment. Gorbachev made his position most explicit at the Soviet trade union congress in February when he said that "the new role of the trade unions in conditions of perestroika lies above all in their becoming a counter-balance to technocratic tendencies in the economy which, it has to be said, have become rather widespread recently, and in enhancing the social significance of the economic decisions taken".

At the Central Committee plenum in January, Gorbachev went much further than he had done at the party congress in a number of important respects. Firstly, in his criticism of the past and his recognition that "the problems that have accumulated in society are more deep-seated than we first thought".

Secondly, in his emphasis on democratisation as "the party's urgent task" in bringing about the "drastic changes" needed to overcome these problems. Thirdly, in the specific proposals that he put forward to promote this democratisation. The most important of these was his proposal that the election of the secretaries of Communist Party committees below Central Committee level should take place by secret ballot with every member of a committee having the right to enter any number of candidates. This would stimulate much more initiative and active involvement from below and help to promote younger, reform-minded men and women, and overcome entrenched bureaucratic resistance to change. Its implications, however, are wider. Its implementation would make significant inroads into the long-standing nomenklatura system, under which candidates for responsible posts in the party, the state and public organisations have to be recommended and approved by party committees at different levels. This proposal of Gorbachev's was, however, not incorporated in the resolution adopted by the Central Committee, which spoke only in general terms about "further democratising" procedures for such elections. This is only one of the indications that Gorbachev wants to push ahead faster than the majority of the Central Committee is prepared to go. What arguments were used in the committee's debate we do not know, as glasnost has not yet gone as far as to enable the press to carry reports of the thirty-four other speeches. Gorbachev did, however, secure agreement that a party conference should be held in June next year to discuss questions of further democratising the life of the party and of society as a whole. And since the January plenum, the press has been reporting a number of cases where party committees have elected new secretaries by the method proposed by Gorbachev.
At the January plenum, Gorbachev argued the importance of democracy at the workplace as a crucial element of socialist democracy and referred to a new draft law on state enterprises, which would be submitted to nationwide discussion, along with two other important bills on the protection of citizens’ rights and on the protection of national sovereignty. Discussions on new legislation there are seen as closely linked. Under it, autonomous and “completely self-financing” enterprises will manage the public means of production allocated to them within the guidelines of a central plan much less rigidly defined than has hitherto been the case. Self-management will be introduced into enterprises with the election, by secret or open ballot, of the factory director by the workforce for a period of five years, subject to endorsement by the appropriate ministry. Shop managers, forepersons and team leaders will similarly be elected by their workforces for up to five years. In addition, councils of work collectives will be elected for two to three years by a general meeting or conference of the enterprise.

A number of factories have, this year, already been given the opportunity of electing new directors. This appears to have been welcomed by their workers — though with some surprise, as shown by a letter to Pravda. “If anyone had told me a few months back that I would be taking part in an event like this,” wrote a worker at an Omsk gearbox factory, “I’d never have believed him. Just imagine, we’re electing our director ourselves...”

Indeed, it is not so long ago that all talk of self-management was rejected as a Yugoslav or anarcho-syndicalist deviation, self-management being considered only appropriate to the higher stage of communism. It is now recognised that the Yugoslav self-management system, which pioneered the election of managers, was taken into consideration when drafting the new Soviet law. Soviet representatives stress, however, as did the Czechoslovak reforms of 1968, that they have been at pains to avoid going as far in decentralising the planning system as the Yugoslavs have done, with their consequent unemployment problem.

The law on the protection of citizens’ rights gives legal enactment to a provision of the Soviet constitution adopted in 1977 laying down that officials guilty of suppressing criticism should be liable to punishment. The Soviet press in the recent period have highlighted a number of cases of persecution of people who have exposed abuses. The new law lays down a ten-day limit by which complaints against officials violating a citizen’s rights must be examined by a court.

The third recently adopted law provides for the submission of major questions of state life to nationwide discussion. Introducing it, veteran Soviet President Andrei Gromyko said this was necessary because the country had experienced a period of “deformation of a number of aspects of socialist democracy”. Although there had previously been discussions on new legislation there had been serious inadequacies. Many of them were “overorganised and in many ways a formality”, and many of the proposals made in them had been ignored. The point now, he said, was actually to reflect opinions expressed in the decisions finally taken.

The development of Soviet democracy today is bound up with the moves being made, extremely unevenly, towards the development of a civil society genuinely independent of external state and party control. The spheres in which, to date, this has gone furthest are in the media, in the arts and among young people.

As in Czechoslovakia in 1968, the media are in the forefront of the democratisation process. Newspapers, with wide variations, have become more informative in their news reporting and more outspoken in their exposure of abuses. The press, including the party’s official daily, Pravda, have been encouraged by Gorbachev and party secretary Yakovlev to exercise their own judgment without going to the party for instructions. “Publish what you consider best — we’ll let you have our opinion afterwards”, they told editors. So, apart from checking on matters that might involve military secrets, they exercise their own discretion (which still involves
certain self-imposed limitations, rituals, etc.), much to the confusion of some communists at home and abroad who had always looked to the Soviet press to give them a clear official line.

The new approach was reflected in the full accounts (after a lengthy initial delay) of the Chernobyl nuclear disaster and the quick (though incomplete) reporting of the riots in Alma Ata in December after the replacement of Kazak party secretary Kunayev by a Russian. Previously taboo subjects such as drugs, prostitution and homosexuality are now discussed in the media, and AIDS is now receiving increasingly frequent treatment. The previously suppressed grain and infant mortality figures are now published, and crime statistics are expected soon. *Moscow News*, which appears in Russian and four foreign languages, aroused enormous interest when it reproduced in full, from the French rightwing daily, *Figaro*, a letter from ten prominent Russian emigres criticising the Soviet reforms as inadequate and saying that the proof of genuine glasnost would be if their piece were published in the USSR! Soviet television, which has become much more lively, now has phone-in programs enabling members of the public to put their queries and complaints to ministers and leading officials. Uncensored round-table discussions and interviews with foreign politicians (including Thatcher) have become increasingly common. The jamming of some, though not all, foreign radio stations has stopped.

Equally rapid and remarkable have been the changes in the cultural scene. Following a curtailment in the powers of *Glavlit*, the state bureau that used to exercise censorship over the publication of books, a number of novels dealing with previously suppressed themes, including (like Rybakov's *Children of the Arbat*) Stalin's mass repressions, are now appearing. Contentious films, which had been held up for years, have been released. They include Abudadze's *Repentance*, a chilling exposure of totalitarian repression evoking the stalinist past, which has been seen by millions of people, and Podniek's strikingly frank documentary on young people in Latvia. *Is it easy to be young?* Film censorship has been ended, according to the film makers' union new first secretary, the well-known director Elim Klimov.

At the writers' and journalists' congresses there were lively debates on both cultural, social and, indeed, political questions. (In the Soviet Union they are all inextricably linked.) The writers' congress played no small part in mobilising public opinion and leading the government to abandon its ecologically unsound plans for the diversion of Siberian rivers. The journalists' congress heard a plea from the well-known political columnist Alexander Bovin to put an end to all jamming of the airwaves. The film makers' congress saw free elections throwing out the old conservative leaders by new progressive ones.

There has been an increasing growth of what are called "informal organisations", to which Soviet sociologists have been devoting special attention. They have particularly bored many young people who have been more and more getting together under their own steam to pursue a wide variety of leisure time interests, particularly in sporting, open air and cultural fields. Rock groups have experienced a striking upsurge and are now increasingly featured on late night TV. The Komsomol (the communist youth organisation), with its nominal membership of 41 million, had to recognise at its congress in April the need to end bureaucratic forms of organisation which had alienated many young people from it. Above all, it has accepted that the "informal organisations" are there to stay and that the Komsomol should view them positively and respect their autonomy.

The idea of women's councils, first mooted by Gorbachev at the party congress, has now caught on. All over the country they have been set up. With wide local variations, they appear to be seeking to find their feet and work out the most appropriate role for themselves. Their representatives came together in January at a national women's conference, at which the Soviet Women's Committee was elected. There has till now, however, been no sign of any widespread critical debate on the position and role of women in Soviet society in which feminist arguments are featured and international experiences considered.

The largest "social organisations" — the trade unions — with their 140 million members are, unfortunately, still one of the most conservative. Gorbachev felt impelled to complain at the trade union congress in February about "some trade union officials dancing cheek to cheek with economic managers". And he insisted: "Union committees must consistently defend workers' interests." And he went on: "To be frank, poor working conditions at many enterprises, insufficient health care and inadequate rest rooms are something that trade union organisations have grown used to in many places. This still occurs very often." Since the congress, the press has carried reports of trade union actions in a number of places against high-handed and negligent managements. Such trade union initiatives would still, however, appear to be fairly limited.

Perhaps more than in any other country in the world present-day politics in the Soviet Union are intimately linked to the assessment of the past. Gorbachev has emphasised that there must be no "forgotten names or spaces" in the country's history. In July, he urged the representatives of the media "never to forgive or justify" the stalinist purges which reached their height in 1937-8 and "inflicted heavy losses on the cadres of the party, the intelligentsia and the military cadres". Khruschev began to lift the curtain on this terrible period at the 20th (1956) and 22nd (1961) party congresses which condemned Stalin's "mass repressions", but after 1964 their scale and significance were increasingly downplayed. When *Moscow News* published a hard-hitting speech by the historian Professor Yuri Afanasyev criticising historical apologetics and urging a more honest, balanced and critical
attitude to Soviet history, it received, along with letters of support, others testifying to the persistence of classical stalinist attitudes. Thus, one letter from an assistant professor of history who had been a party member since 1947, demanded that the paper be “more circumspect in selecting and elucidating material on problems of party-history science”. He complained that “attempts to draw us into discussions about the past can divert us from the tasks of reconstruction”. Another letter alleged that Afanasyev was “too emotional and his class stance too blunted ... Peaceful discussion clubs in periods of historical cataclysms are a utopia”.

A crucial historical question which has still to be tackled is the Moscow Trials of 1936-38, in which some of the most prominent revolutionary leaders were condemned (mainly to death) on charges of terrorism and collaborating with fascist powers against the Soviet state. The main accused, including Trotsky (in his absence), Bukharin, Zinoviev and Kamenev, have still not been cleared of these charges, although these have now been undermined by the rehabilitation of other defendants whose “confessions” were pivotal to some of the other sentences. It is to be hoped that, with the celebrations of the 70th anniversary of the October Revolution, and a new party history being prepared, justice will be done to the memory of these victims of stalinist repression, their role in Soviet history objectively assessed and their writings made accessible to the Soviet public.

In June, local elections to the 50,000 local Soviets were held. In the great bulk of them the practice of only one candidate standing, which has been increasingly recognised to need changing, continued. However, the first timid steps were taken towards giving voters a choice. Already in April, a Supreme Soviet resolution had announced that a new “experimental” system would operate in 76 district, 47 city, 87 settlement and 859 rural Soviets. In these selected Soviets there were more candidates nominated than there were deputies to be elected. Those not elected were treated as “reserve” deputies. They will be invited to take part in meetings of the Soviet but without voting rights. I have seen no evidence of contests in which the electors were presented with policy alternatives. Yet the effective development of democracy must surely entail not only a big increase in multi-candidacies, but also the opportunity to make political choices. This need not imply the formation of competing political parties, which existed and were considered normal in the early years of Soviet power, but are clearly not on the cards in the USSR today. It does, however, require the opportunity for candidates to represent different views within the framework of the Soviet constitution on such questions as nuclear energy, particularly in an area where it is proposed to build a nuclear power station. This would favour the development of a socialist pluralism (an expression now used by Gorbachev) where the Communist Party would base its continuation as the leading force in society on conviction won in an open battle of ideas.

A reform of the Soviet legal system is now under consideration and is seen by Gorbachev as a crucial element in the process of democratisation. The Soviet press has revealed some horrific miscarriages of justice, including the extraction of confessions by “measures of physical pressure”. A Supreme Court conference condemned the continuation by some judges, constitutionally “independent”, of the stalinist practice of phoning regional party officials for instructions before passing sentence.

The release of 140 imprisoned “dissidents”, as well as the permission given to Academician Sakharov to return to Moscow from internal exile in Gorky, seemed to represent a welcome change in the official attitude to the expression of opposing views. It has, however,
unfortunately not been followed by the freeing of hundreds of others still in prison, corrective labour colonies, exile and psychiatric institutions. Most of them were sentenced under Articles 70 and 190/1 which make "anti-Soviet agitation and propaganda" and "defaming the Soviet state and social system" criminal offences. These articles are now being reviewed, but official opinion seems to be divided between those who favour making their provisions milder and those who see the retention, in any form, of such catch-all laws, seventy years after the establishment of Soviet power, as incompatible with democratisation.

It is encouraging to see the publication this year of the first articles in the Soviet press arguing for the abolition of the death penalty. This is one of the issues, alongside the ecological ones already referred to, on which one might expect to see the development of lobbies and independent campaigning bodies as features of a developing civil society.

Another issue for concern is the continuation of special shops and other nomenklatura privileges despite the public criticism expressed in the pre-congress letters published in Pravda — which is quite a separate question from increased income differentials now being generally promoted to stimulate production. After Moscow carried through the shake-up in Kazakhstan following the Alma Ata riots, the press reported that luxury dachas built by party leaders there at state expense were confiscated to provide hospitals, children's homes and hotels with places for two thousand people. It was also revealed that hundreds of people employed at Alma Ata University were related by blood or marriage. The existence of such privilege and patronage, which nobody seriously believes are specifically Kazakh phenomena, is deeply resented by working people. Most of them, however, did not see what they could do to change it in Kazakhstan or feel able to act to end it where it still exists elsewhere. The problem of changing attitudes and restructuring the whole social dynamic to stimulate changes initiated from below is still far from being solved. Until it is, talk of narodovlastia (people's power) will remain pretty hollow.

In the country, perestroika's strongest backers are to be found among the creative intelligentsia (including journalists), the technical specialists and more skilled and younger sections of the working class. In the party apparatus, support comes above all from the abler and more forward-looking sections of the younger and middle generations, whose initiative was thwarted and promotion blocked in the "period of stagnation".

Among young people generally there is particular appreciation of greater cultural freedom and an impatience to overcome more rapidly the bureaucratic paternalism that still confronts them. One source of discontent, particularly among students, is the virtual impossibility for most to visit the West, or even enter and travel around other European socialist countries with the comparative ease of their opposite numbers in the West. There are now hopes that this will change. Above all, Gorbachev's bold and flexible peace initiatives have won wide and enthusiastic support among the Soviet people, although it is no secret that military leaders have felt that some of his concessions to promote agreement with the West have gone too far. However, the recent replacement of the Soviet defence minister and other top military leaders show that the armed forces are clearly under political control.

While there may not exist an organised opposition to perestroika, there are certainly strong resistances which function as a "braking mechanism" on it. Soviet theoretician Anatoly Butenko has drawn attention to the background and dangers. "Many previous mistakes and the braking mechanism that has arisen," he says, "were directly linked to the phenomena of the 'thirties and Forties which arose in the conditions of the cult of Stalin's personality ... I think that perestroika is proceeding so slowly at present because precisely those forces which did not fully implement the decisions of the Twentieth Congress of the CPSU (1956) do not want changes and are applying the brake to them. If we do not fully expose the essence and positions of these forces and do not fight them, perestroika will be derailed and the process of change may even go into reverse." (This is a fear that I have heard expressed by others during two recent visits to the Soviet Union.) Today, says Professor Butenko, "we see that the bureaucracy represents the main social force of the braking mechanism".

There are today 18 million people in the administrative apparatus. Tatyana Zaslavskaya, the extremely influential president of the Soviet Sociological Association, argues that they should be reduced to four or five million. Those who now see themselves described in the press as "superfluous managerial parasites" regard perestroika as a most unwelcome threat to their privileges and comfortable life style.

However, there is mistrust or, at best, uncertainty expressed in a wait-and-see attitude towards perestroika on the part of many workers who have muddled through working at a slack pace while a blind eye has been turned on their minor "fiddles" by managers often getting away with major ones. Perestroika entails ending these practices and boosting efficiency and labour productivity. This will bring better pay for the more skilled and motivated while others who contribute less to production and social welfare are liable to find themselves worse off — especially if (as is being considered) the substantial subsidies on basic foodstuffs are gradually reduced. Already, more stringent quality control has led to many losing bonuses with which many had, as a matter of course, supplemented their low basic wages. On the other hand, decisions have been taken to raise the incomes of teachers and doctors, a large majority of whom are women, to the levels of skilled workers over the next five years. An expansion of the much neglected service sector is being encouraged. It is envisaged that it should absorb millions to be
made redundant by industrial restructuring and the axing of a swollen bureaucracy. An acid test of perestroika for working people will be how far it appreciably raises their living standards, housing, welfare and quality of life. However, Gorbachev, much more realistic than Khrushchev in his time, has no illusions that this can be achieved quickly.

The big hope is that the rapid introduction of workplace self-management under the new law, along with the development of much more far-reaching democratisation throughout society, will in the meantime call forth a positive response from millions of working people still distrustful or uncertain about perestroika. The experience of Czechoslovakia in 1968, even allowing for its background of a much more developed civil society, is relevant and encouraging in this respect. Within a few months — certainly much more quickly than we can expect in the Soviet Union — and without time to yield any significant material benefits, the bulk of the initially hesitant workers had been won as enthusiastic supporters of Dubcek's reform course through a rapid democratisation program which included the election of Workers' Councils at workplaces.

A long, hard and complicated road lies ahead. There is a vast accumulation of problems to be overcome and there will undoubtedly be sharp political struggles. Anyone expecting quick triumphs has learnt nothing from history and is courting disappointment. But the striking developments initiated over the last two and a half years have already gone considerably further than any of us expected. They should give socialists everywhere cause for cautious optimism and a determination to make our contribution to achieving the disarmament so important both for the peace of the world and for the success of perestroika.

NOTES:
2. Interview with Moskovskaya Pravda, 7.5.87.
3. Interview with Weg und Ziel (Vienna), July/August 1987.

MONTY JOHNSTONE is a member of the British CP's Executive Committee, and of the editorial board of Marxism Today.
Born in St. Louis, Missouri, in 1928, Maya Angelou began her literary career as a poet, but is best known for her highly-acclaimed autobiography, of which five volumes have been published so far. The first, I Know Why The Caged Bird Sings, was published in 1970; the fifth, All God’s Children Need Travelling Shoes, is now available in Australia. Jackie Kay talked to her about her life, her work, and her politics.

I Know Why The Caged Bird Sings was first published in the States by Random House; it wasn’t published overseas until 15 years later. I would be very interested to know exactly what was the response when it was first published in 1970?

Well, within a week it was on the bestseller list, the national bestseller list, and it stayed there for some time.

When did you start writing?

Almost immediately. I mean my papers are at Lake Forrest University in North Carolina, letters from folks and important papers. Now I have papers, poems and prose I wrote at nine years old, which had been sent to Lake Forrest. Admittedly it may have been the worst poetry west of the Rockies, but there is something, you know.

I was interested to read that you refer to the Maya in your autobiographies as the “Maya character”, is that right? You think of her as a “Maya character”, not exactly the same as yourself? How difficult is it to maintain this distance?

Yes, very good. I didn’t read that in any article. I don’t believe anyone has ever asked me that. The person I was yesterday is not exactly the same as the person I am today, understandably. So, if that is so, then the person I write about 20 years ago knew only that much. Now, writing today, about somebody 20 years ago, one has to impose a kind of distance, otherwise I will imbue that person with the wisdom I have today.

That is the difficulty, in really writing autobiography as literature. You have to keep that distance and not even imply that this person knew what she was doing from the vantage point of 1987. No-one in the world has ever asked me that. The difficulty is probably the horn, the unicorn horn, of the dilemma from which I spin, to try to keep that distance. And what is lively, and I’ve never thought about this before, is that in writing poetry I can write from today. I can admit that I have now got wrinkles and now got this, and I now know better than I knew 20 years ago.

I think I am the only serious writer who has chosen the autobiographical form as the main form to carry my work, my expression. I pray that in each book I am getting closer to finding the mystery of really manipulating and being manipulated by this medium, to pulling it open, stretching it.

Memory is a fascinating thing, memory and time. You must be constantly thinking about how we edit memory, and that whole subject.

Well, it’s fascinating. In truth, when I set out to write, I choose some sort of “every-human-being” emotions, themes. So I will choose generosity, meanness of spirit, romantic love, loss of love, familiar love, ambition, greed, hate. And then I will set myself back in that time and try to see what incidents contained that particular theme. I may find seven. Some of them are too dramatic, I can’t write them without being melodramatic, you understand, so I say no, I won’t write that one. Some are too weak. But I find one and I think, aha, this one. Now let me enchant myself back to that day or that month, or those months, so I can remember everything about that one incident. In that way the work is episodic, you see, but if I’m lucky and work hard it should flow so that it looks like just a story being told.

Protest is integral to your work and your life. Can you tell us what first politicised you? Or do you believe that black Americans have no other choice than to be fighters?

Well, there is no choice if you want to stay alive, otherwise you ally yourself with death and the end of action. Nothing in life stops, nothing. I don’t know. I think we’re all politicised and I couldn’t say what was the first incident. It starts so early and it’s so consistent.

So when you say you don’t tolerate fools, that applies to you when you were young as well, doesn’t it?

You see, what will happen, unfortunately, if we tolerate the fool, a person who really acts foolishly, will be that we ally ourselves with them. Sometimes a person will insult you, and if you respond he says: “Oh, I was just teasing.” Now quite often the person really wants you dead, maybe just for four minutes, and then he would resuscitate you. But what he means by those vicious remarks is die. Well, as soon as I hear it from anybody anywhere I say: “Stop it, not me, this is my life, this is all I’ve got.”

In the 1960s, you worked alongside Dr. Martin Luther King as a civil rights campaigner. I’d just like to hear more about that period from your point of view.

The period was absolutely intoxicating. The streets were filled with people who were on their toes, figuratively, with alertness. There was a promise in the air, like a delicious aroma of a wonderful soup being cooked in the kitchen on a cold day when you are hungry. It really appeared as if we were going to
overcome racism, sexism, violence, hate.

So while it was strident, it was hopeful and it was as if there was a heaven in the air. It was a wonderful time.

And what has happened to the civil rights movement?

Well, it was derailed, understandably, by those, to quote Miss Margaret Walker: "who tower over us omnisciently and laugh".

Angela Davis was recently in London, invited by the ANC. What do you remember of the time when she was on America's Ten Most Wanted People's List?

Well, naturally, a number of people were involved in keeping her secure, because we knew it was a put-up job, just one more way to kill one of the leaders. After she was apprehended, Margaret Burnam, who is now a black judge, but was then a young lawyer and a sister friend of Angela's, got me in to see her. The way I could go in person was to be credited as a legal adviser. She was in a "facility" which was designed by Frank Lloyd Wright — pink and blue nestled in the hills. What artistry! So I asked her once: "Here you are, in this pretty palace, and what do you think?" She said: "Girl, the joint is the joint." And when she finally won her freedom, I interviewed her.

There was a popular television series in the States; the host gave it up for a year and six of us took it over. I could interview anyone I wanted for those six. So I interviewed Angela in her sister's kitchen. We just sat over coffee and biscuits and it was really sweet.

In August there was a rally in London to commemorate the 1956 South African women's march to Pretoria. That was just a year after Rosa Parks refused to go to the back of that bus in 1955. Do you feel you have a responsibility as an artist to record our heroes and heroines, our Rosa Parks and Ruby Doris figures?

Well, let me come back before I answer that, please. One of the challenges for any radical (and I use the word to mean revolutionary, reformer) is to remain human and not take on the trappings of the opposition and become dehumanised. That's very important. That's one of the gifts that black American women have, and try to share; always the humanity, the sweetness. And under oppression, kicking butt and taking names, they are still laughing sometimes and hugging. Very important.

Everything we do, I mean I don't know how broad that landscape is, is an action of recording. The impetus to record, I don't know whether that comes from the artists or whether artists are the recorder. That's two different things and yet they serve the same end. If I set out with the idea that I ought to record, then maybe my artistry suffers; if I set out with ... I don't know. It's a very complex question. I do know that people live in direct relation to the heroes and she-roes they have.

In Caged Bird, you tell us that, as a young girl, you took responsibility for your rapist's death — which was the reason you became mute. Child abuse is now talked about more than it was then. Do you think this changes anything?

Well, more often than not, the victim, especially if you are a member of a depressed class or gender or sex, is loaded with the guilt for that action against herself or himself. It is always so. The young girl today is no less made to feel guilty or feel no less guilty than I did 40 years ago. And I know. I know too well, that the girls feel as much involved in the crime as the criminal.
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When you were younger you never thought of white people as being real people; you thought that if you put your finger through them it would come out the other end. I find that fascinating and funny because it had such a strong spark of survival in it.

Well, they didn’t act like people in my little town in the South, they were so mean, you know. People laughed and people cried and people hugged each other and people got mad at each other and people rocked on the back porch or the front porch and sang and people loved children and they’d: “Come here girl” and hug you all the time. Well, they didn’t do anything like that, so I thought they weren’t people.

In a recent article you describe a celebration you attended for four new black British MPs. You said the solidarity between black and white people gave you an incredible high. How important do you feel alliances with white people are?

We will all survive together or we will die together; it is imperative that we make alliances, sincere alliances. But, you see, the difficulty is, only equals make friends; any other relationship is out of bounds, so if the white thinks that he is better than the black or the Asian, then the relationship can never be peer, then there can never be any friendship. If the black woman thinks she’s better than the white woman there can never be any serious meeting point.

In the early 70s, Amiri Baraka wrote such things as the woman’s role was to be feminine and submissive. How far do you think black male attitudes have changed since then, since the Black Panther movement?

That was an aberration which took place and black women for a while said: “Okay, we’ll see what you do with this”, and it didn’t happen. Black women said: “No, babe, we don’t take it like that”, and we don’t. We haven’t. We were sold together, bought together on the African continent, lay spoon fashion in the filthy hatches of slave ships together, and got up on the auction block together, stood together, sold again together, got up before sunset together, worked those cane fields and cotton fields, and the mines and all that together. Please, we are equal.

In your latest book, All God’s Children Need Travelling Shoes, you describe being in Ghana at the age of 33. You say: “We had come home, and if home was not what we had expected, never mind, our need for belonging allowed us to ignore the obvious and to create real places or even illusory places, befitting our imagination.” This reminds me of a V.S. Naipaul story where the narrator says: “All landscapes are in the end only in the imagination: to be faced with the reality is to start again.”

You can never go home again, but the truth is you can never leave home, so it’s all right. And yet it is innate in human nature to try to go home again, and it may in fact be what life is all about: getting back to home, back to death, and then out of death and back to life.

Many black British people today possess a kind of myth of return. They think that by returning to Africa, once they set foot on African soil, they will suddenly become whole again.

Everything will be all right!

Don’t you think that’s dangerous?

I think it’s important, though it’s good to have that, and it’s good to go back. A part of that is true; you find that mores, customs, attitudes, melodies, rhythms which you thought came from Jamaica, or even from Britain, actually had their origins on that continent.

And somehow you are made more strong. But you also find out, ah, I really am an American, I really am an African as well. But I am a new type of African, I am also an American, or I am also British, or I’m also Jamaican... I’ve found the source of so many things that I had not known to be other than black African, or even that I thought had originated due to slavery, you see, and that is encouraging and uplifting.

At the beginning of this interview, you said it is important to maintain the distance between who you are now and who you were then. Does the language you use in Gather Together to describe an encounter with two lesbians (“lecherous old hags”, and “dirty things”) relate to how you felt then? Has your attitude towards lesbians changed over the years?

Oh, yes, of course, but I mean I was 18 and they were old! They were 28. To me, I thought, well, at 18 you think anybody over 23 is a crone. I think I wouldn’t have thought that, I wouldn’t have been so mean, had I not sensed that they wanted to take advantage of me. And I felt that about anybody, anybody who wanted to take advantage of me. That has not changed; it has polished a bit. Had they been two men, or two anybodys, who wanted to outwit me, I would have been the same. Even then I had an aunt who was gay, who was a lesbian, and who I loved, and who helped me raise my son, Guy.

When you were young, you had a fear of being a lesbian yourself, didn’t you?

Yes, I thought if I was going to be a lesbian I was going to live this sad life that was written about in The Well of Loneliness.

Loneliness and more lonelinesses!

I told my mum when I thought I was going to be a lesbian. I sat on the side of her bed and told her my vulva was growing. My mum said: “What, no, get the dictionary”, and she said: “This is very natural.” And so I was quite relieved. But about 10 years later, my son Guy came to me, he was about 10, and he said: “Mum, I want to ask you about something. What do you think about lesbians?” I said: “Lesbians, Jesus, I don’t.” He says: “Well, I’m going to tell you something: Aunt Lottie is a lesbian but if you don’t change the way you treat her I’ll never speak to you again!” Obviously, I support any group which means to survive and make a better world.

JACKIE KAY is a Black British poet.
ALR is opening up its pages to a discussion of attitudes on the left to the pleasures and past-times known to the theoreticians as popular culture. Here we open the discussion with a sceptical view of the 'worthiness' of soaps.

Q: If you could write a Country Practice for the next few weeks, what would you make happen?
A: A mad trucky comes through the town and franky [sic] tries to stop him but he gets killed so then they call in Mad Max to help get rid of the trucky. As he chases him the truck driver drops [sic] a bomb and blows the town sky high. But Vicki and Simon escape and go to another valley and get down to repopulating the country and then they call it Bowen Valley.

I have to admit a prejudice from the outset: this is my favourite passage from the recent book on the TV series A Country Practice. In it, a fifteen year old schoolboy devises a future plot for the series, filled with violence and mayhem and lots of begetting. At a contemporary reading, it cannibalisises and recomposes various other popular myths — mad truckies in news stories, a Mad Max type of hero, holocaust, exodus, and, of course, living happily ever after — or happily as can be, given the demands of getting down to repopulating!

Yet there is a curiously biblical flavour to this scenario — old testament in form rather than the more wishy-washy protestantism of the new.

As a story, the scenario is striking in its jigsaw of genres, narratives, “real” and “fictional” elements. It is produced as a fantasy, for fantasy can exist only by playing off those elements.

This is my central concern in this review/article. Soaps are fantasies — unenduring stories about imaginary people, places and lives. This is quite self-evident — at least to viewers of soaps. But something rather strange happens on the way to analyses of soaps, namely, a preoccupation with how and why soaps differ from everyday life. This discrepancy becomes the focus rather than an exploration of the fantasy world that is produced.

As a result, the conclusions of studies of soaps tend to be somewhat banal. Tulloch and Moran’s book concludes that A Country Practice is about putting social issues into stories in which issues unfold through characters, “showing people, rather than simply telling them” (p. 176). Ien Ang, in her book on Dallas, concludes that it shows us that “(t)he personal may be political but the personal and the political do not always go hand in hand” (a somewhat incoherent claim). Neither conclusion tells us very much about soaps or viewing or social/political issues.

Why is this? There are three main reasons which are signalled by the physical organisation of these two books. Neither has “a conclusion” in the form of a chapter drawing together the threads of the books; indeed, quite the reverse. The “themes” of each book are given in advance, then each book branches out into a series of unco-ordinated chapters.

This might seem a trivial point. Yet I believe that it signals critical problems concerning (1) the types of studies, (2) the (mis)use of methods of analysis and (3) the choice of subject matter.
between these processes, they cannot
be combined as a coherent method.
And where connections between
the necessarily contradictory and
inconsistent processes might be
larged, more inspired hands than
těse are needed to do the job.

While *A Country Practice* fails
because of the incoherence of the
project, *Watching Dallas* overcomes
that incoherence by just taking
viewers’ accounts of their viewing
practices. The book was based on 42
replies (“from a few lines to around
ten pages”) to an advertisement
placed in a Dutch women’s magazine
called *Viva*, which read as follows:

I like to watch the TV serial *Dallas*, but
often get odd reactions to it. Would
anyone like to write and tell me why you
like watching it too, or dislike it? I should
like to assimilate these reactions in my
University thesis ... 

While this approach guaranteed
a more lively and interesting study,
due to — 42 replies out of millions
dallas viewers — raises a set of
serious methodological queries that
are simply side-stepped by Ang.

Methodology might seem a
rather boring topic for the general
readership of *ALR*, yet it does allow
me to simplify the issues so that
writers of studies of soaps might
finally take the point.

Academics are frequently
criticised for writing jargon for
specialist audiences. Recently, some
academics have attempted to write
with more popular appeal. Cultural
studies is an obvious candidate for
this trend, since it concerns itself with
everyday life.

Whereas early cultural studies
work tended to be heavily loaded
with theoretical sections exploring
how “ideology” could be studied,
newer work tends to dispense with
that and concentrate on “the
analysis” alone. *A Country Practice*
exemplifies this tendency. The
problem is that questions that should
be addressed are not and that
“conclusions” that are produced do
not warrant that status. I have
already addressed the incoherence of
the production/audience approach
of *A Country Practice*. Within the
audience section, I would question
the haphazard collection of audience
groups (those that the authors could
collar), namely nine Brisbane
households (p. 237), ten TAFE
teacher-trainees (p. 249), six
Normanhurst Boys’ High School
students (p. 260), twelve Wiley Park
Girls’ High School students (p. 266),
and seven other school groups (p.
260). As you can see, methodological
details are scattered throughout the
text possibly to evade (or tantalise)
the pedantic reviewer. Despite the
claim by the authors not to require a
quantitative framework or
justification but, instead, to see how
*A Country Practice* is read “in terms
of the cultural experience of its
audiences”, this precisely requires
that generalisations were made from
the chance answers from the
haphazard respondents: an art of
serendipity in no small measure.

For example, we are told how
“the unemployed” interpret *A
Country Practice*, where the
unemployed refer to twelve
schoolgirls from a migrant, working
class area whose response to an
episode on unemployment, subtitled
*A Health Hazard*, was that indeed it
was a health hazard. This empathetic
response was read as a response
appropriate to the unemployed and
contrasted with the more macho
responses of the six Normanhurst
boys whose responses, in turn, are
read as “middle classness” — why not
as gender-ness? or whatever.

Generalisations such as this are
tivial and made a nonsense of the
kinds of responses and patterns of
viewing that were actually going on.
For example, *A Country Practice*
notes that elderly respondents were
reluctant to discuss the show at all —
it was absolutely their show for their fantasy - that is, for these respondents, it was a private and not a public text. Other family respondents had to be continually prompted to watch the program and refrain from the side conversations and arguments that they seemed to prefer to actually watching the TV drama unfold.

My own reading of this tendency of regular family viewers would be that the pleasure, or at least the place, of the program, is to construct a site, an arena, a context for having certain kinds of family conversations and contestations, rather than any intrinsic features of the program as such. But, instead, literal readings are made of makers and viewers as if conditions of representativeness, sampling, opinion equivalence, intervention/response, etc. were all met.

The book, Watching Dallas, has a similarly cavalier attitude to the legitimacy of its use of the 42 replies, which were obtained by an even more idiosyncratic process.

My criticism of such tendencies in cultural studies is not tempered by the claim that such studies are not sociological but "textual" analyses, since the unfortunate fact is that such analysts (trained in literature studies, or, in Ang's case, political science) have strayed onto the outfield of methodology and conveniently appropriated bits and pieces, just as conveniently ignoring the "difficult" bits and pieces. The result is "applications" that commit the very worst sins of "quantitative method" that earlier cultural studies condemned and sought to evade: representativeness, intention, evidence, etc. This is irony indeed.

What makes a topic worth studying? How do we know if a topic has more than its face value? Where do we draw the line in analytic pursuits?

These may seem like rather old-fashioned attempts to draw boundaries around topics and agendas of research, yet perhaps it is timely to question the haphazard meanderings of cultural studies towards, I fear, oblivion.

Recently, a spate of studies has appeared on soap operas. These focus on two issues: first, the form of soap opera as popular culture, especially in terms of popular appeal (= mass = working class audiences); and second, the idea that soap operas are "gendered texts" in the sense of addressing a "female" position of spectatorship.

These studies have followed the shifting agenda of cultural studies through condemnation as patriarchal hypnosis binding women into old-fashioned oppression to more recent attempts to see soaps in more positive lights, as "worth" texts that enable viewers to deal with everyday life. Thus, soaps are no longer seen as reactionary texts but as potentially progressive ones. But none of this work seems to me to come up with any convincing arguments about the "worthiness" of soaps. They remain trivial texts for trivial consumption just like a Minties' wrapper or TV Week - enjoyable, but precisely so because they are not to be taken seriously.

If soaps are to be studied at all, then the studies need to address the terms of the fantasy and the role of fantasy in viewers' appropriations of the world of soap, rather than the eternal preoccupation with the discrepancies between the fictional worlds of soap and the "real" worlds of everyday life. Such studies could leave the world of quantitative method aside and concentrate on rather more tantalising forms of analysis: playing with texts that play.

Compare the opening scenario of a mythic A Country Practice with the somewhat expiatory tone of one of the (adult) letters about Dallas:

*The reason I like watching it is that it's nice to get dizzy on their problems. And you know all along that everything will turn out all right. In fact it's the flight from reality. I myself am a realistic person and I know that reality is different. Sometimes too I really enjoy having a good old cry with them. And why not? In this way any other bottled-up emotions find an outlet.*

This passage directly acknowledges the fictional thrill of watching Dallas - whether viewers liked it or hated it, felt guilty about watching it, identified with it or rejected it, etc.

all emphasised that the pleasure of the text lay in the fantasy precisely because "It is a program situated pretty far outside reality". And yet, that pleasure can only be obtained by locating the program within a set of grids that establish fictional possibilities and probabilities against actual people and events. To quote from another letter:

... those problems and intrigues, the big and little pleasures and troubles occur in our own lives too. You just don't recognise it and we are not so wealthy as they are. In real life too I know a horror like J.R., but he's just an ordinary builder.

And how many people do we know who have been dubbed with a fictional or mythic identity: He thinks he's Clint Eastwood, She acts like Greta Garbo, etc.

Of the two books, Watching Dallas is the more successful at tackling head-on the fantasy of the fiction in its own terms - though the tension between the real and the fiction persists. Unfortunately, the book does not make what it could of these responses, instead treating "Dallas" as a sin to be measured against various yardsticks each of which serves to expiate the guilt of watching Dallas. As such, the book works as a confessional (and indeed is a handy prayer-book size). But because of its confessional structure, it works well. Readers (penitents) with their own guilty secrets about television viewing can exorcise these tendencies here, while indulging in still more of the suspect pleasure.

Watching Dallas is a good lively read and uses the substance of the letters in a titilating way.

Throughout both books, the term pleasure recurs. A Country Practice announces itself as being concerned with the multiple pleasures of A Country Practice.

This relationship of pleasure to the social aspirations and experiences of different groups in our culture leads to a certain ambiguity in the way each group calls A Country Practice "theirs" for different reasons.

Watching Dallas explains its project as "how these letter-writers
experience *Dallas*, what it means when they say they experience pleasure or even displeasure, how they relate to the way in which *Dallas* is presented to the public. This is explained as treating the letters as texts, to be read “symptomatically” in the “ideological context” in which “it acquires social and cultural meanings”, that is, in terms of “the relation between pleasure and ideology”.

The term pleasure has had a renaissance recently as a nice way to get around what used to be called the *problem* [sic] of false consciousness, that is, to account for why people enjoy the tacky products of “mass culture” in a consumption society. Pleasure can even account for the ideologically suspect activities of the masses, like Bingo, *Sale of the Century* and brown vinyl sofas. Fortunately for *Watching Dallas*, the respondents do not appear to come from the masses, but to come from that ideologically “aware” class of persons whose responses frequently pre-empt the symptomatic readings that are to be made of their responses:

I’m just hooked on it! But you wouldn’t believe the number of people who say to me, ‘Oh, I thought you were against capitalism?’ I am, but *Dallas* is just so tremendously exaggerated, it has nothing to do with capitalists any more, it’s just sheer artistry to make up such nonsense.

So where does this idea of pleasure get us? It was originally borrowed from psychoanalytic notions but has gradually lost that theoretical precision to become employed as a general explanatory term for any and all forms of consumption. Pleasure becomes anything that makes life bearable, the enjoyable bits of “the ideology of mass culture”. Pleasure is the Sandman’s sleepdust of the imaginative realm, that which keeps us tamed, subdued and oblivious to the wily ways of the world.

Since the idea of pleasure is a little elusive, it has been grounded in the idea of *populism*, a rather homely term for things that real, ordinary people think and do. It is a term that serves to make the participants of mass culture feel OK about so doing.

It celebrates individual tastes and pleasures, and you don’t have to feel guilty or shame about them.

This very pluralist attitude is quite disturbing in the complacency of the conclusions that such studies produce. This is even so when specific groups are the focus. In *Watching Dallas*, for example, Ang considers the case of feminist viewers of *Dallas*. Can feminists enjoy *Dallas*? “Is *Dallas* good or bad for women? She attempts to answer this by arguing that *Dallas* is a partially open text, that is, that multiple and different readings might be inscribed in it, and made of it.

But even in those open readings, structured by the seductiveness of viewing, do dangers lurk? Will feminists stray from the yellow brick road to “Utopia”?

The answer to this is a bit of a cop-out. Terry Lovell is cited giving the curiously paternalistic advice that soap-watching might allow women to be “good-humoured” both about their “oppression” and their “protest”, but Ang seems a little more concerned that the two activities may be incompatible or, at best, not entirely kosher.

Fundamentally, neither book deals with the essential feature of soap opera — the form of fantasy and how it works in consumption. Like the confessional, soap works as the semi-public expiation of guilt. Both involve repetitive (weekly) doses as part of the process of watching/confessing, but also ensuring that there can be no cure in sight or the practice would become redundant. In other words, just as the confessional works to legitimate the fact of sinning by the recognition of its act, indeed grants permission to sin, soaps do the same for fantasy. The illusion, compulsion and guilt of soaps, along with the essential fusion of real and fictional elements are the substance of soap. The melting-down and re-forging of the self in the fantasy of soap opera is the pleasure and the “reality”.

Ultimately, all that can be said is that soaps work as a joke on the self, as Lesley Stern acknowledged by titling a paper, *When I Grow Up, I Want To Be Sue Ellen!* If soaps are to be studied, the focus should be the joke of the fantasy and the fantasy of the joke.

NOTES:


JENNIFER CRAIK teaches in Humanities at Griffith University in Queensland.
Memoirs Of A Dutiful (Red) Daughter

Amirah Inglis

November 7 marks the seventieth anniversary of the revolution which established the world's first socialist country. Amirah Inglis recalls the imagery and iconography of the Soviet Union, as it entered the darkest days of stalinism, from a communist childhood in the 1930s.

I have seen the future and it works" exulted American reforming journalist Lincoln Steffens as early as 1919 on his second visit to Soviet Russia, spreading the excitement to radicals and socialists throughout the world. Australia was no exception. From 1918, pamphlets published in London, New York and locally were to be bought in bookshops in Melbourne and Sydney.


When Lenin died, the red flag flew from the Melbourne Trades Hall and a memorial service was held in the Sydney Domain; each Labor Council marked the loss, in a resolution, the Sydney one ending with these words:

(Lenin) vigorously maintained a working class state, which in itself is a beacon light to the workers of the world.

The lines between radicals were not yet sharply drawn. Labor Councils talked like that and the diversity of information about the Soviet Union was great. Frank Anstey's Red Europe and Leon Trotsky's History of the Russian Revolution and were sold and read by the same people.

But in the 'thirties there was a significant change of attitude among communists. The Soviet Union was not only "the Socialist Fatherland of the International Proletariat", its achievements a beacon, its defence an obligation, but, by the end of the decade, this Fatherland could do no wrong, had no faults and any criticism of any of its policies amounted to sacrilege. It was to remain like this for the next 20 years.

Many people not brought up as I was will ask, why did we not
compare the life around us with the vision that we gained from books? How is it possible that Australians could have been so misled by half truths (or lies), so willing to be dazzled by the light of the beacon that, like kangaroos on country roads, they failed to see the car behind the lights? I clearly had a taste for romance and visions of a perfect future, but many more tough-minded people than me shared the visions. I know that people who would change the world are prone to a belief in the millennium; it would be too hard altogether to take on something so obviously and deeply entrenched as a whole social system unless one had a vision to travel by. The harder the task, the more necessary the millennial vision.

I was a child in the 'thirties, of communist parents not long arrived from Europe and active in what they called "the movement". The earliest political education I received about Soviet Russia came through songs and stories. There was a strong radical and socialist tradition of songs which came to Australia from Britain and the United States, so that I grew up singing the Wobbly* songs Long Haired Preachers and Hallelujah I'm a Bum, together with March of the Workers, The Red Flag and The Internationale.

These were songs of the old Socialist Song Books produced by the socialist parties. Their song The Red Flag was the best known and most popular radical hymn in Australia. So much so that in the early 'thirties the Workers Weekly, which described itself as "the official organ of the Communist Party of Australia and of the Australian section of the Communist International" published the words of The Internationale because it wanted it to become as well known as The Red Flag, the anthem of the non-communist left — those whom the Workers Weekly was now attacking as "social fascists".

Other songs were introduced to Australia as communists returned from Comintern meetings and Comintern schools. Thus, at home we sang Bandiera Rossa, Warszawianka (which we called Whirlwinds of Danger), and songs about the Soviet Union. Later, songs came back from Spain.

What did I learn about the Soviet Union from the songs we sang? From the beginning, the Soviet Union had a dual role: as the model of a socialist society and as the leader of communist parties throughout the world. The Internationale which we sang so lustily was both the national anthem of the USSR and the revolutionary anthem of the world's communist parties.

The Soviet Union, as leader of the revolutionary movement, was the main theme of the songs we sang in the early part of the 'thirties. The headquarters of the Comintern was in Moscow and its anthem was sung world wide.

The Comintern Song

Arise, fellow workers, march forward to battle,
March forward to battle, march shoulder to shoulder.
Look well to your rifles and fill them with lead,
To battle you workers for freedom and bread. (Repeat)

With hammer and sickle, in Bolshevik manner
We march with the Soviets, beneath the Red Banner,
We fear not the Fascists, the terrors of hell,
The workers are rising, the world will rebel. (Repeat)

In Leninist teachings, our glorious beacon,
On with the struggle, we never shall weaken,
To battle ye workers, for freedom and bread
Our slogan — ye workers of all lands unite. (Repeat)

Sovietland was the best known Soviet song in Australia. It was sung by communists with the fervour of a national anthem:

Sovietland so dear to every toiler
Peace and progress build their hopes on thee,
There's no other land the whole world over,
Where man walks the earth so proud and free. (Repeat)

From great Moscow to the farthest border,
From our Arctic seas to Samarkand,
Ev'ry where man proudly walks as master,
Of his own unbounded fatherland.

Everywhere life courses freely, broadly,
As the Volga's ample waters flow,
To our youth now, every door is open,
Everywhere our old with honour go.

CHORUS

Day by day our happy land advances,
No one else on earth so free from shadows,
No one else so free to laugh and love.
But if any foes should try to smash us,
Try to desolate our land so dear,
Like the thunder, like the sudden lightning,
We shall give our answer sharp and clear.

Apart from songs, my earliest sources of information and inspiration about the USSR came from stories, pictures and travellers' tales. I was well provided with all three because my parents were both members of what we called Fosyou, which, I found later was the Friends of the Soviet Union (FOSU). Throughout the 'thirties, every political argument revolved around Russia. "Why doesn't the Honourable Member go to Russia to live?" heckled an opponent of Eddie Ward, the Labor member for East Sydney, in 1932. "If I were a younger man I would go to Russia, so anxious am I to obtain first-hand information of the greatest experiment that has ever been attempted in the history of civilisation," said Dr. Moloney, a member for Melbourne, in the same debate.

The Friends of the Soviet Union was formed in 1930, first in Sydney and later in Melbourne (as was the pattern even then) and aimed to cement friendship "between workers and sympathisers of Australia and the workers and peasants of the USSR". But it also had a clear revolutionary purpose. "Join the Friends of the Soviet Union! Become an active worker in the cause of the emancipation of the world's workers along the lines adopted by the workers of the Soviet Union" called the first number of The Soviets Today, "official organ of the

* International Workers of the World.
Australian section of the Friends of the Soviet Union in November 1931. It also called on Australian workers to go and help the USSR.

My father was one of those who decided to answer this call. He sold his share of a tiny handbag business to his partner, gave half the proceeds to my mother and, intending to settle, get a job and bring us over, joined the seven members of the "official" workers' delegation to go to the USSR for its May Day celebration.

As the first group of Australians travelling publicly to the Soviet Union, they were made much of by the Workers Weekly and Soviets Today and given good coverage, too, by the Melbourne Argus. All three reported their farewell gathering in Temperance Hall where the delegation was charged "with the task of securing for us full information concerning the progress of the workers and peasants of the Soviet Union and the form of government making this progress possible. We desire this information in order to guide us in the class struggle before us and in the task of Socialist construction with which we, too, will be faced"

They also reported the amazing demonstration at the side of the RMS Orsova on the day of departure when 200 (The Argus) or 2000 (The Soviets Today) raised banners, sang The Red Flag and The Internationale and collected a crowd of observers, some hostile. As the ship was about to leave, the excitement grew on the pier and when one of the passengers, hanging over the rail of the Orsova started to throw dirt down onto the singing demonstrators, six of them climbed up the side of the ship until they reached the boat deck, found the culprit, stopped him and climbed down again amid cheers. The police, who had been called, questioned a couple, then let them go.

I must have been there to farewell my father and I wish I could say that I remember the scene, but I'm sorry to say that I can't.

I was a child, seven years old, when my father returned from the USSR. I didn't read pamphlets or go to lectures, though we did have some at our house. But my father had returned with the agency for Mezhdunarodnaya Kniga, which meant International Books. Our house was soon full of Moscow News, USSR in Construction and books in English for children published by the Co-operative Publishing Society of Foreign Workers in the USSR. The books I remember best were The Moscow Theatre for Children, Moscow Has A Plan and Red Comet by Geoffrey Trease — who was later to become a famous writer of historical novels for children.

USSR in Construction, published in four languages by the State Publishing House of the RSFR (the Russian Republic) was the photo-journalist magazine which must have formed many people's image of the Soviet Union in the thirties as it did mine.

Photo-journalism was brand new and USSR in Construction which was first published in 1930 was the first of its kind to be seen in Australia. Less technically excellent and less sophisticated than the later Life (1936) from the US, or Picture Post (1938) from Britain, it was the paper equivalent of the newsreels which were then also new.

The great difference was that it told about a country never seen on newsreels, a country where factory workers, miners and peasants were treated like the film stars or society ladies of capitalist countries. It bubbled with optimism and in the very early issues did not give the date in the conventional way, after the birth of Christ, but, like the French Jacobins proclaimed, "the thirteenth year of the revolution".

By 1938, the language, like the architecture, had gone from plain to pompous, so that the year was given in Roman numerals, and the revolution became The Great October Socialist Revolution.

I was never short of books and magazines from Russia, or about Russia, and they were among my favourite reading. Martin Lawrence, the British CP publisher (which became Lawrence and Wishart in 1937), brought out two books which, with Geoffrey Trease's Red Comet and the large monthly numbers of USSR in Construction were the greatest literary political influences on my young life. From about the age of 10 The Red Corner Book (London, n.d. but probably 1934) and Martin's Annual (London 1934) were my beacon light, my bible stories and my Girls' Own Annual.

The Red Corner Book, wrote its editor, "endeavours to spur children's minds to the real issues life holds out — instead of drugging them with false glamour over ugly things. Two great forces are in conflict: they have children in their grip". In a clever comic strip form, of 33 neat catchy little verses, accompanied by illustrations, these forces were demonstrated:

See this fat man
Who knows no need
Grabs all he can
He's full of greed.

The fat man has a large house, a limousine, guzzles chicken washed down with champagne. On the other hand, there is the worker and a vivid account of working class families in depression England with priests, police and teachers keeping everyone in his place.

But look here!
Russia is the first great land
Where bosses and loungers have all been banned,
A land of the working class victorious,
Where a worker's life is free and glorious.
For it was Lenin that great man
Who showed how it could be done.

The schools, like the country, worked to a plan as children learnt How to help the weaker brother How to work for one another.

And there were the pioneer camps in the summer where everyone did his share of the work and reaped his share of the fun.

Working all unitedly
Me for you, and you for me,
Swiftly comes the great new life.
Peace and calm, an end to strife.
It was a Utopian vision. It was meant for children and it was very effective. About 40 years later, when I re-read these books in the British Museum, I found that I had remembered almost everything in them.

Like the Young Travellers series of today, the *Red Comet* was an educational travelogue but it was also political and the youthful reader took in the political lessons along with facts and figures in the lively descriptions of exotic scenery and Soviet life seen through the eyes of an English sister and brother, Joy and Peter, workers’ kids from a town in Lancashire where there are no jobs for them. They get mixed up with a mechanic who has designed and built a revolutionary short take-off and land aircraft — Red Comet — with money he won on the pools, but who can’t get any capitalist firm or the government to take an interest in it. Through a pal who is working in Moscow, he receives an invitation to take his machine there for a trial. Peter and Joy go too, and it is this device that enables Tress to take us on a flying tour of the USSR in 1935.

As they travel throughout the country, Tress describes all those scenes of Soviet life which I was seeing in pictures in *USSR in Construction*. The kids notice first that the red flag “the flag of the hunger marches”, they remark, here flies on all the public buildings. “Farm hands and factory workers, they’re the chaps who run things here” says the pal who is working in Moscow. They pick up a young Russian girl and, with her help, begin to see that St. Basil’s Cathedral is old, ugly and grotesque, while Lenin’s tomb, with its clean, spare lines is beautiful. Joy is delighted to see women taxi drivers and women tram drivers and she hears of the first woman sea captain.

Workers flats are going up all around. It is “the Plan” they are told, and it will make Moscow a wonder city. “Come back in ten years”, their young guide boasts “and see it!” It was infectiously exciting and uplifting. I was ten or eleven, I suppose. In particular, I loved the Parks of Culture and Rest, the Pioneer Palaces and Pioneer camps (I was an only child) — of which Artek was the best example — places where socialist principles were put into action: the model later for communist, EYJ and Junior League camps.

In the values it espoused and the basic information that it contained this children’s literature was providing me with a communist education. And I have the impression that, despite the almost 200 political books on the banned list between 1932-1937, there was a very large amount of material available in Australia about the USSR one way and another. When you add to the Communist Party and FOSU publications, *Proletariat*, the magazine of the Melbourne University Labor Club, *Labor Call*, trade union papers, books published by the Left Book Club, the journals and pamphlets published in the USSR and sold through various bookshops, the sheer amount of published information about the USSR was prodigious. It was also impressively cheap. *Soviets Today* cost 3d. a copy, *Workers Weekly* and many pamphlets cost 1d., *Moscow News* 3d., *Imprécis* 2d. The dearest was *USSR in Construction* at 3/- an issue, but that was more like a book. It was possible for a worker, so inclined, to collect a large library of information about the USSR.

In the early ’thirties, the tone of many of these publications was angry, sectarian and didactic as communists used that Comintern pidgin which clearly marked them off from all other radical Australians. *Moscow News* spoke in the original Bolshevik voice that all communists tried to emulate, and its layout was of whole broadsheet pages of closely printed type, occasionally broken by ringing headlines. I did not, at 11 or 12, pore over this publication nor, I suspect, did many adult Australians who bought it, perhaps even including my Latin teacher to whom I took a copy each week as part of my mother’s paper round. Though I should add that there were many more pages of more palatable, though poorly printed, items with pictures.

There was no unemployment in the USSR and this was stunning enough but, on top of this, was the excitement of growth, of size of the new, and the energy of the builders. The sense of building the future and the joy of labour; the excitement of socialist construction, of large-scale industrial development in the USSR may be difficult to comprehend today, but it formed a large part of the appeal of the USSR in the 1930s. Great names like Magnitogorsk (giant of steel in the Urals, biggest in the world!), Dniepostroi, the world’s greatest power station, and the Metro were featured so often in communist information that they became household words. You didn’t have to swallow great slabs of indigestible theoretical material to reach it: pictures, headlines and figures told an immediate story. “All Moscow is building the Metro!”

So-called a *Workers Weekly* headline in July 1934, and Intourist urged foreigners to come and see this socialist symbol, with stations that belonged, it was always made clear, not only to the Soviet people, they tried everything was new and everything excellent!

Not only were tractors, power stations, oil wells and underground stations being built, but new worlds were opening out before ordinary people: new social arrangements tried, everything was new and everything excellent!

All these Soviet achievements belonged, it was always made clear, not only to the Soviet people, they belonged to us as well, to the whole “international proletariat”, but especially to those who were communists and sympathisers. In far-off Australia we thrilled with pride at the achievements and, as they belonged to us, we were adjured to help defend them against traitors...
from within and imperialist enemies from without, who were ever poised to attack. Part of that defence was almost never to allow, in any publication over which the Communist Party had control, that any fault existed and then only after it no longer did; so that those of us who read nothing else about the USSR — like readers of motoring writers today — never realised that the earlier models had any faults until the new ones came onto the market.

After Hitler came to power in Germany in 1933 and the USSR joined the League of Nations in 1934, the passionate voice of its Foreign Minister Maxim Litvinov was heard at League meetings and reported in full in the pages of Moscow News and Australian communist publications. The combination of the war-like fascist countries, Italy and Germany, and their intervention in the Spanish Civil War brought real danger of fascist aggression and turned the policy of the communist parties towards a united front in a defence of the Soviet Union, not as the homeland of the revolutionary movement, but as the bulwark of world peace. World revolution became less important than world peace and Soviet foreign policy more important than domestic achievements; the strength of the Red Army even more compelling.

The fight for collective security, the Czech crisis, the Russo-German pact, the outbreak of war in September 1939, all look to a different period in my childhood. The 'thirties were over, the depression had given way to war, a new era had begun.

And that is another story.

AMIRAH INGLIS is the author of a forthcoming book on Australia and the Spanish Civil War.

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**The Future For The Left...**

*by Jade Bull*

**SCORPIO**
October 24- November 22

**SAGITTARIUS**
November 23- December 21

Welcome to “The Future for the Left". ALR’s new astrology column. If you’ve found that subjective analysis, opinion polls and the bourgeois media don’t give you a basis for political calculation (let alone conversation at parties), why not try “The Future for the Left”? Each new edition will bring you astrological projections for the next two months, and readings on prominent political figures from the past like Marx, Luxemburg and Blewett. (If Neal’s mum is reading this, could you send us his time and place of birth?)

**Where the planets are in November/December (and a word of warning about January)**

Probably the most significant influence is Pluto in the sign Scorpio. Pluto represents both the reforming and destroying urges. Could this hidden and mysterious planet (ruled by Hades, the God of the underworld) have been responsible for the delvings of the Fitzgerald Inquiry into police corruption in Queensland? Certainly, the simultaneous existence of Venus semi-square to Neptune at the time of writing (late September) suggests a strong linkage between crime, government and (for some reason) transport.

Likewise, Al Grassby’s Leo ascendant makes him particularly vulnerable, at this point in time, to unfortunate and unwanted legal matters. (Al, be warned, this aspect also will seriously aggravate your problems with dress-sense!!)

Could the deceptive influence of Neptune in Capricorn, the sign of structure, control and government, be the source of Ewart Smith’s startling discovery of the legislative faults in the 1944 Card Bill? (The astrologers would also welcome info on the time and place of birth of the magpies.)

On the subject of federal government stuff-ups (we are trying to avoid unparlable left jargon), the position of Jupiter (the planet of fortunes and finances) in Aries suggests that Comrade Keating may well have to redo his budgetary calculations on the basis of the untimely intervention of Neptune on the magpies.
Prominent Upcoming Political Birthdays

**SAGITTARIUS**

November 23 - December 21

**Sagittarians**

Charles de Gaulle, 22/11
Billy the Kid, 23/11
Walt Disney, 5/12
R.J.L. Hawke, 9/12
Bhagavan Shree Rajneesh, 12/12
Frank Sinatra, 12/12
Jimmy Carter, 13/12 (it was a Friday as well)
Louisa May Alcott, 17/12

The sun in this sign denotes an extroverted personality, who is fond of outdoors, sports and travel; your motto might well be “don’t fence me in”. (Or, in the case of Jimmy Carter, “Let my people go”.)

For ultra-left adventurists, fantasising about reliving the events of November the Seventh, be warned. The position of the moon (the emotional heart of the zodiac) in Taurus makes for a messy day of bits and pieces and on and off activities. We would strongly recommend you await a more favourable aspect for Saturn before attempting to seize state power.

Late November/early December will produce startling events as Uranus reaches the apex of the galaxy (an event that occurs only every 84 years). The last occurrence saw the Wright Brothers do their thing off Kitty Hawk; good news perhaps for you political high-fliers? On the aviation front, Uranus’ influence will also see the Queensland Premier purchase his first vertical take-off tactical fighter plane.

A Reading from the past: Leon Trotsky

For our first “reading from the past”, we have picked (sic) Leon Trotsky, one of the left’s best-known Scorpios.

Born at 10 pm on November 8, 1879, at Yanovka in the Ukrainian Province of Kherson, Lev Davydyovich Bronstein was destined to a life of controversy and radical political involvement.

The fact that Trotsky was born with his sun square to his moon gives us two invaluable insights into his character: first, that his parents were in conflict at the time of his conception and, second, that his ego would perpetually be in conflict with his emotions.

With a Scorpio square to his ascendant Leo, Trotsky was destined to experience a long history of bitter interpersonal conflict. (see, for example, his bitter struggles with Zinoviev and Bukharin at the Third Congress of the International in 1921. Likewise, the series of violent diatribes between Trotsky and his Red Guard barber, Igor Stakowski.)

On the positive side, Trotsky’s Sun in opposition to his Mars gave him an argumentative and eloquent determination.

A Note for January

January/February 1988 sees Saturn conjoin with the galactic apex. Saturn, a powerful ruling planet, last entered this position some 58 years ago, at the time of the Wall Street Crash and the onset of the Great Depression. Bad news for those with a large (albeit ethical) portfolio, and good news for those who have been waiting for so long for the next BIG crisis of Capitalism.

Coming soon...

**Venus in Aquarius:**
Epistemological ruptures for the post-structuralists?

Uranus in Sagittarius: the Archer’s arrow strikes suddenly?

Stalin for astrologers
and notable Aquarians ad nauseam....

JADE BULL is a Sagittarian.
Cliffhanger


Sydney is changing. It’s a city under the rubble of building construction and contentious issues — Darling Harbour, the monorail, the Bicentenary preparations. Debate rages over questions of US bases, conservation, pollution, the ID Card, AIDS, police corruption. But there’s something that not many people are talking about. Terrorism. Is it a threat?

Peter Corris thinks it is. Here is Cliff Hardy’s tenth and latest adventure, a cliff-hanging, fast-moving thriller set against the increasingly sophisticated Sydney of the here and now. Hardy is on assignment for politician Peter January and his assistant, Trudi Bell. Surveying the inner city, he says to Trudi:

This is one of the closest packed parts of Sydney. We’ve got every kind of ethnic group here, we’ve got people who’ve been let out of psychiatric hospitals. We’ve got trendy, we’ve got fascists ... I’ll bet there’s an illegal immigrant with a history of mental disturbance and a Family Court problem within a hundred feet of us right now.

She burst out laughing. “God, you make it sound dangerous.”

Cliff Hardy is a creature of his city, hard-nosed, quick to act in a difficult situation, prepared to face danger. In a world swinging to the right, his work for a leftwing politician puts him in the hot seat, especially when it takes him on a brief trip to Washington: “I had the feeling that all the mirrors were two-way, and all the glass was bullet-proof.” There he encounters highly-advanced security systems, bombings, threats, shootings — and killing.

But all these things are occurring in Hardy’s Sydney, too. Peter Corris draws the link between Washington and Sydney, pointing up the reality of the global village. Peter January’s “idea of oceanic zones of peace and freedom”, a South Pacific region removed from the world of “bases, tests, arms deals and mercenary contracts” is made to seem untenable, fraught with risks. The January Zone is pervaded by the acrid smell of (mostly male) sweat, and even January himself is unscrupulously corrupt and cynical.

Peter Corris’ Hardy series is becoming an institution. The January Zone contains all the familiar ingredients — a tightly constructed plot, the core of familiar characters, a situation clouded by intrigue and corruption, action that swerves repeatedly before accelerating to a climax and, of course, touches of romance. But this latest book plays before the wider backdrop of national and international conflict:

I turned the pages of a few copies of Time and the National Geographic, but it seemed like I’d read it all before — peace talks, famine, lost stone age tribe in Indonesia.

The thriller is a dominant genre of Western society, a form not concerned with theories about writing itself, but rather with the political and social reality that lies beyond the text. The sentences are short; the style is fast. The book gives information about the world to which it belongs in the most economical manner possible. The writing is transparent, you could say. We step right into Hardy’s gritty Sydney, where we’re given all the details, where there’s no time to sleep, where kidnappings, blackmail, bomb explosions and stake-outs keep you on the move, gasping for breath.

The thriller, though, is an assessment of society that goes one step further, opening up possibilities for hair-raising drama. Terrorism is not our most immediate concern, but it happens often enough, and Corris is warning us that the situation is ripe for development. In a sober moment, Peter January tells Hardy:

It’s organised there (in America), you know that. Here it’s more individual. It’s not built in.

And so, Washington is a bewildering series of impersonal attacks and disasters. On home ground in Sydney, Hardy stalks a single killer whose motives are at least personal rather than grounded in complex affairs of state. The killer, when he is eventually apprehended, is “a dangerous sociopath, a man obsessed with his own obscurity and a hatred of opinion-makers”. That’s a little reassuring, I suppose — but only for the time being.

The January Zone is a knotty, down-to-earth popular novel which keeps a firm grasp on psychological realism, even if what the characters actually do is restricted by the dictates of the genre. Corris’ writing can be irritating at times. Is Hardy’s sexism really necessary (“men were swearing and women were screaming”)? The attention to detail is essential to the realism, but some
I put my arm around her. She’d taken off her shoes and, barefoot, she wasn’t much above my shoulder. The afternoon sunlight shone strongly through the window and it was nice standing there with a warm woman who smelled good.

But these passages are exceptions, not the norm. Hardy is still a character you enjoy having around. And the ever-widening background against which he conducts his adventures is making the Hardy series increasingly interesting.

AUSTRALIAN LEFT REVIEW 45

But these passages are exceptions, not the norm. Hardy is still a character you enjoy having around. And the ever-widening background against which he conducts his adventures is making the Hardy series increasingly interesting.

MATTHEW HARDING is book reviewer for Sydney radio 2SER's "Sunday Arts" program.

Shark Fin Diplomacy


Muscovites are once again savouring Peking Duck and sipping shark fin soup after a twenty-year absence of Chinese cuisine from the tables of the Soviet capital. The newly-rebuilt Restaurant Pekin, with its Chinese cooks and weekly trans-Siberian train food deliveries is probably one of the most welcome spin-offs of rapidly improving relations between China and the Soviet Union. Even Moscow-based US diplomats must relish this aspect of Sino-Soviet rapprochement.

When relations between Moscow and Beijing deteriorated sharply at the onset of the Cultural Revolution in China in 1966, Chinese students still in Moscow found it necessary to demonstrate their patriotism by embarking on militant demonstrations. This democratic luxury not even allowed the locals was, of course, intolerable to the Soviet authorities, and soon there were no Chinese students left in Moscow. Although Chinese cooks did not run amok with meat cleavers in search of revisionist scalps, they too were withdrawn around the same time. From then on mainly bullets and insults crossed the border between the two communist giants.

China and the Superpowers is an attempt by the Soviet "dissident marxist" historian, Roy Medvedev, to interpret the falling out between the USSR and China, and to place their past and current relations in an international context. Medvedev is well qualified to write on Sino-Soviet relations, having carried out postgraduate study on China in the early 1950s and closely followed relations between the two countries ever since. The book is extremely valuable because it provides a rare insight into intelligent Soviet perceptions of China. It was completed just after Gorbachev came to power, and already a Medvedev style of thinking appears to have become part of the official Soviet approach to China. For example, Medvedev's opinion that the demarcation of the Sino-Soviet border along the Ussuri River section was "manifestly unfair" has now been acknowledged by the Soviet side.

A Georgian, like Stalin, Medvedev has written the most trenchant critique of Stalin's rule from within the Soviet Union, Let History Judge, published in the West in 1971. Medvedev joined the Communist Party in 1956 after the 20th Congress' denunciation of Stalin, and it was Khruschev's rise to power which allowed Medvedev to gather the material for his book. Brezhnev soon put a stop to denunciations of Stalin and in 1969 Medvedev was expelled from the party when he protested to the editor of the journal Kommunist about the appearance of an article defending Stalin. Since then, at least until recently, he has been a thorn in the side of the communist hierarchy in Moscow. Dismissed from his job in the early 1970s, he survived on royalties received from his various books and articles published abroad. At various times he has been threatened with imprisonment, the last occasion being immediately after Chernenko's accession to power. Under Gorbachev, however, he appears to have become untouchable.

The bewilderment of many, Medvedev remains a marxist. Yet for him, marxist theory is not a closed and finished system of thought, but an historically evolving one. Furthermore, he maintains that there is no genuine socialism without democracy, a view he proclaimed most forcefully in his controversial work circulated in samizdat form in the Soviet Union and published in the West in 1972, On Socialist Democracy. Interestingly, according to a Russian-speaking professor from Beijing I talked to last year, this work has been translated into Chinese and circulated at the higher levels of the Chinese State and Party hierarchy. This fact would probably please Medvedev greatly, for at the heart of his latest book is the belief that China and the Soviet Union...
share a great deal in common politically and economically.

What is often forgotten ... is the general desire to build the just socialist society, as a factor that brings the Soviet Union and China closer together ... For all the deformations, distortions, personality cults, abuse of power and countless other lamentable deviations from the socialist ideal, both the Chinese and Soviet peoples are far from abandoning that ideal in order to adopt some other system of values as the basis for their social life and activity. This circumstance constitutes the firm foundation, however cluttered up with garbage it might be, on which the development of Sino-Soviet co-operation will take place.

Thus, whatever their antagonisms over recent decades, he argues, the two countries remain systemically compatible.

Medvedev's is a balanced assessment of Sino-Soviet relations. He acknowledges Stalin's lack of enthusiasm for the Chinese revolution. "The spectre of eastern Titoism seemed to Stalin a greater threat than the Titoism of a relatively small Balkan country." So, while providing the new Chinese Republic with considerable economic aid in its early years, the Soviets also insisted that Beijing defer to Moscow on the world stage. This insistence was a key ingredient in the final split.

On the other hand, Mao's own unreconstructed Stalinism led him to see himself as the natural heir to the leadership of the world communist movement after the death of Stalin. But, as Medvedev comments:

It was not only Mao Zedong, but the entire generation of Communist Party leaders of the 1930s and 1940s, who were raised in the firm conviction that the world communist movement must have a guide, and that it should be the most experienced and authoritative of the Communist parties, as well as the most authoritative, most "wise" of all the leaders of the communist movement. As the inevitable consequence of a semi-religious system of cults, the line of Marx-Engels-Lenin-Stalin had to be continued ... and the new prophet must be acknowledged as such by all communist parties.

Khrushchev's attack on "personality cults" was, therefore, a bitter blow for Mao. The Great Leap Forward of the late 1950s, designed as a rapid and new path to communism, was part of Mao's bid for leadership of the communist world. This combined with hostility to Khrushchev's policy of peaceful co-existence (Mao believed in the inevitability of nuclear conflict between capitalism and communism), led to Khrushchev's "hasty and politically ill thought out" decision, in Medvedev's words, to withdraw Soviet advisers from China in 1960, and to the final split.

The economic impact of the withdrawal of these advisers, claims Medvedev, was greatly exaggerated — especially by Mao who was thereby able to blame the disasters of the Great Leap Forward on the Soviets, and pin a pro-Soviet label on his critics, such as Liu Shaoqi, "the Chinese Khrushchev". Thus Moscow's heavy-handed action helped strengthen Mao's power in Beijing.

Neither side comes off lightly in Medvedev's analysis of the causes of the split, but he clearly has much more sympathy for Khrushchev's attempts at peaceful coexistence than Mao's militant foreign policy rhetoric, and for Khrushchev's anti-Stalinism compared with Mao's praise for the dead dictator.

To the extent that Medvedev is an orthodox marxist, he no doubt believes that the capitalist/communist divide is fundamental to world politics in the long run, but he is also sophisticated enough to recognise that the impulses behind current world politics are more intricate. Thus, the key organising principle of his book is not the polarity between capitalism and socialism, but the triangular relationship between the major powers: China, the USA and the USSR. It is their mutual manoeuvring in pursuit of state interests which, in the case of the two superpowers, also means state interests projected as global interests, which is the central thrust of China and the Superpowers. These contend with one another primarily as powerful states and not as competing social systems. Each attempts to manoeuvre with and to manipulate the other. Interestingly, Medvedev clearly recognises this:

It is a natural desire of the superpowers to try to increase their influence among other countries, many of which as a consequence try to unite and co-operate in a defence against one or other superpower. Everything depends on the means that are employed in forming these alliances and exerting this influence. What is certain is that China will never again become the sort of military and political ally of the Soviet Union that she was in the 1950s. But it is equally certain that she will not become America's political and military ally either, something which some influential American politicians have reckoned on. China will not become the junior partner in any military and political alliance ...

There are no permanent enemies and no permanent friends in this "eternal triangle" of major powers, he appears to be saying.

The important historical difference between capitalism and socialism which Medvedev does not mention is the growing international economic integration of world capitalism in contrast to the economic nationalisms and autarchic reflexes of communist states to date, which hinders the development of any genuine internationalist impulses in these states. Will the current economic changes taking place in both China and the Soviet Union — their opening up to the world in one perspective, their integration into world capitalism in another — significantly alter the practice of international politics? One is tempted to say yes, but really it is too soon to tell.

China and the Superpowers is essential reading not only because it is an accomplished overview of international politics, but more importantly because it provides an insight into a climate of opinion and discussion in a section of the Soviet intelligentsia in Gorbachev's USSR.
Affirmation


Since 1975, when the first Sex Discrimination Act was passed in South Australia, the legislative landscape in Australia has changed considerably. There are now two Commonwealth and four state Acts relating to sex discrimination. Several collections of essays critically examine the scope, historical background, effectiveness and theoretical underpinnings of this legislation: Marilyn Sawer's Program for Change, D.H. Broom (ed.) Unfinished Business and B. Baldock and B. Cass (eds.) Women, Social Welfare and the State are three of the best known.

Chris Ronalds' book differs from and complements these books. It is an examination of two Commonwealth laws: the Affirmative Action (Equal Employment Opportunity for Women) Act (1986) and the Sex Discrimination Act (1984). Although the author deals with the background to the legislation and with some of the key criticisms which have been made of it, such discussion is kept to a minimum. Rather, the main emphasis is on outlining the content and actual and possible uses of the two Acts, and on discussing and answering the main practical questions which will arise in their implementation.

Chris Ronalds is a barrister who was closely involved with the drafting of both laws. Refreshingly, her detailed expertise has a treatment which is accessible to ordinary people, and a style free from jargon. True to its title, the book is a thoroughly practical, informative, concise, authoritative, well-written and easy-to-use handbook which will be of use to all the different parties covered by the legislation.

Even those who are reasonably familiar with both of the Acts will find a few surprises. Did you know that only five percent of the complaints investigated by the Sex Discrimination Commissioner at the Canberra office and about one percent lodged with the state agencies under the Sex Discrimination Act involved cases of indirect discrimination, although the Act has considerable powers in this area? That written complaints to the commission do not have to be made in English? That the Social Security Act and industrial awards are exempt from sex discrimination legislation? Or that state government employees are not covered by the Act? (This is particularly important in Queensland, the Northern Territory and Tasmania, which do not have any corresponding state legislation.)

The two Acts which are the focus of this book are based on different approaches to inequality. The Sex Discrimination Act, which covers both men and women, is aimed at eliminating specific types of unequal treatment and at providing remedies to individuals who have suffered particular forms of discrimination. The legal process is based on conciliation, and the remedies prescribed are designed to be positive and educative rather than punitive. However, the Act is not primarily concerned with the provision of equal opportunities or equal results. The Affirmative Action Act, on the other hand, is concerned with women only, and addresses structural patterns which disadvantage women collectively. Rather than compensating after the event, it places the onus on employers to take active steps to prevent individual acts of discrimination.

The first part of the book deals with the Affirmative Action Act. It outlines the legislative requirements for the content of affirmative action programs and mentions a number of approaches that can be adopted to meet these requirements. It goes on to examine the obligations of employers under the Act, including the coverage and the phasing-in periods of the legislation and the reporting requirements. It concludes with a summary of various statutory functions of the Director of Affirmative Action, and an outline of similar legislation operating in various parts of Australia.

The second part of the book deals with the Sex Discrimination Act. It details the grounds of unlawful discrimination prescribed by the Act and the definition of direct and indirect discrimination. It then looks at sexual harassment, unlawful discrimination in employment, education, provision of goods, services and facilities, accommodation, club membership and advertisement, and with provisions aimed to stop victimisation of people lodging complaints or helping to implement the Act. The last three chapters deal with general exceptions to the Act, with the conciliation and inquiry procedures established under the Act, and with the actual processes and methods of conciliation. The book concludes with an outline of other anti-discrimination legislation operating in Australia and examines the constitutional issues which can arise when selecting which act to lodge a complaint under.

The appendices include a list of addresses of the various Australian agencies dealing with affirmative action and sex discrimination, a list of some forty legal cases referred to in the text, a comparative table of sex discrimination laws and a brief bibliography which lists key public documents on affirmative action and sex discrimination, as well as further reading.

The book is well worth reading. Its main use will be as a practical guide to all those affected, in some way, by the legislation. To those who want to examine further the historical and theoretical issues involved, the handbook will provide a reliable factual starting point.

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Devastated, dismayed and distraught after the Great Crash of 1987? No? Perhaps you even feel like celebrating the festive season or the imminent demise of capitalism? (See our startling prediction on page 43.) Well, while the bottom may have fallen out of the market for Moet et Chandon in Toorak and Bellevue Hill lately, you can still indulge in some very palatable bubbly indeed for just a fraction of the price. Old reliable for budget conscious revellers is of course Seaview's Brut and Cuvee at $4 to $5, though Mildara's Windsor Brut Chardonnay at $5 or so pushes it close (and even has a whiff of real Chardonnay fruit). Even better value, though, is the discount chain Farmer Bros' own Cuvee Clara, a fine flavoursome drop and a steal at $7. Or, if you're really trying to impress, there's the $10-12 wines such as the redoubtable Yellowglen, Edmund Mazara, Tyrrell's Ashman and the predictably garish labelled Wolf Blass. Charge your glasses, please.

Melbourne is a veritable treasure trove of live entertainment over November and December. Here are just a few of the attractions:

Gertrude Stein and Companion. November 4 to December 6. Universal Theatre, Victoria Street, Fitzroy. Miriam Margyles and Pamela Rabe explore the fascinating life of one of this century's greatest characters.

The Victoria State Opera presents 'The Flying Dutchman' by Richard Wagner, conducted by Richard Divall. Nov 9 to 25. State Theatre. Tickets $25, $32, $42, concessions available. 'Wagner in his most darkly romantic mood'.

Weevils In The Flour. Nov 11 to 29. La Mama, 205 Faraday St, Carlton. This play is based on a collection of oral histories of the Great Depression of the same name, written by Wendy Lowenstein. The book was great. The play is a must-see.

The Three Musketeers, performed by the Australian Ballet and the State Orchestra of Victoria. Nov 13 to 26. State Theatre. 'A sparkling, swashbuckling success story ... Knowing the ending won't interfere with enjoying the dancing.'

Tokyo Rose. Dec 2 to 20. La Mama, 205 Faraday St, Carlton. What doesn't happen in real life can happen in the theatre. Vera Lynn and the Andrews Sisters meet Tokyo Rose in the war-ravaged Japanese capital. What begins as a lark for US-born Iva Togun (Rose) turns sour when she becomes the first American woman to be tried for treason against a background of postwar racism and McCarthyism. A comedy-drama with songs by you-know-who.

Wogs Out Of Work. Athanaeum Theatre, Collins St, Melbourne. WOW is rapidly becoming Melbourne's version of London's Mousetrap: it's been running for ages with no end in sight. Make sure you're not the only person in Melbourne to miss it.

Home movies is how British director Derek Jarman likes to think of his films. The man who established the iconography of punk on film with Jubilee (1977), put his latest film, The Last Of England, together out of home movies and Super 8, and filmed his newest Australian release, Caravaggio, in a noisy London warehouse.

Caravaggio, a life of the Renaissance artist, was seven years in the making and chewed up eighteen scripts. Yet, according to the critics, it's 'one of the most visually handsome of British films' (Times); 'brooding, sensual and pagan in the extreme' (Now weekly); and 'passionately erotic ... a treat for the eyes throughout' (London Financial Times). Definitely not one for confirmed pilgrims of agitprop.

Caravaggio opens at Sydney's Academy Twin, Paddington, on Oct 30 and will run for four to six week.

Xmas hots approaching and kids on your mind? Brave the Jaffas and Chocots and be dragged along to the movies; but watch your step — kids' movies ain't what they used to be. You'll probably be unable to avoid Beverly Hills Cop 2 (Greater Union), which somehow manages to make Eddie Murphy unfunny (but not, alas, unviolent). Dragont (Greater Union), a mild spoof with Dan Ackroyd, will have the kids asking you about the original. La Bamba (Hoyts), a sentimental journey through fifties Hispanic rock'n'roll, may do likewise. Or, you could treat the little terrors (and yourself) to the marvellous My Life As A Dog (Roma), (to dear, it's not like ALF), the kitsch cure for adults.

But they don't make movies like the old movies any more... Films from the National Film and Sound Archive. Nov 18 from 3:30pm. Glasshouse Cinema, RMIT Union House, Swanston St, Melbourne. A selection of early Australian films, including Australia's first sound feature. A Showgirl's Life, directed by Norman Dow. A Correspon dent's Course (sounds terribly risque) and Those Terrible Twins, a rare silent feature based on the Ginger Meggs comic, accompanied by a live pianist! All films from the golden days of Oz filmmaking.


RELAXATIONS

Cappuccino Culture. When in Sydney, try the froth-topsth at the Roma (Hay St, Sydney): the Cafe Zambezi and Cafe Latte (King St, Newtown); The Riviera (Parramatta Rd, Leichhardt); Bar Italia (Norton St, Leichhardt); and the Pudding Shop and Badde Mondays, Glebe Pt Rd, Glebe. But no stirring ...

Fishing Boat Hire. Every Sunday from 6am. St Kilda Pier, Melbourne. Bookings 521 444. A pleasant way to forget the world and cut food bills at the same time. But be sure to take the umbrella — after all, it is Melbourne!
Politics Can Also Be About Pleasure

Political thrillers are one very popular way to escape and stay ideologically sound at the same time.

As a special offer to new subscribers, *ALR* is offering a simply thrilling bargain: two Pluto thrillers, *Watching The Detectives* and *The Euro-Killers*, by Julian Rathbone, for just $10 the pair (normal price is $15).

Commissioner Jan Argand is an ordinary cop who starts to think twice about the system after an anti-nuclear demonstration turns into a near-massacre. Of *The Euro-Killers* the *Library Journal* wrote 'Quite exceptional ... subtle yet straightforward and truthful'; while the *Literary Review* commented that 'Julian Rathbone is a highly original artist who uses the thriller form to comment on the increasing violence and absurdity of the post industrial world we live in'.

Or, if thrillers aren't your bent, try this: the encyclopaedic *Book Of Business, Money And Power*, by Michael Kidron and Ronald Segal. Normally it retails for $40 in hardback — but to new *ALR* subscribers it's just $19.95. Of it Robert Heilbroner wrote: 'This will teach you more about modern day capitalism than you would learn by reading all the books of its Nobel Prizewinners.'

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