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Alliances on the Radical Right
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Alliances on the Radical Right

The New Right has been in the news. According to government and media alike, it's all about a new fashion for free market revivalism. But the radical right is about much more than economics — it's also about bringing the private sphere into the public domain, and about the stuff of people's daily lives. This 'moral' side of the radical right revival is one we ignore at our peril.

KAREN COLEMAN

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The Chamberlain Case

It's a strange experience of deja vu, reading John Bryson's Evil Angels while the Royal Commission of Inquiry is proceeding into the conviction of Michael and Lindy Chamberlain for murdering their nine-week-old daughter Azaria at Ayers Rock in 1980.

For one thing, reading a book rather than digesting disconnected daily media reports over the years brings the issues into perspective — at least as far as the evidence of what happened over six years ago. Many people may now be sick and tired of the Chamberlain case — a luxury now available to those of us who could not make head nor tail of it, but not to its victims, their friends and their church, the Seventh Day Adventist. For many people, it is unthinkable that Lindy Chamberlain could have been innocent and yet sentenced to life imprisonment for murdering her daughter. "There must be something in it," was a common response of a couple of years ago. Yet, as the Royal Commission of Inquiry unfolds, it appears that there was nothing in it: if you leave aside trial by media, police bias, shoddy scientific evidence and popular prejudice.

Members of the left and the labour movement have historically often been the subject of grossly unfair police and legal actions. One has only to recall McCarthyism in the 1950s and, earlier, the Sacco and Vanzetti judicial murders. In Australia, Aboriginal people would have a fair claim to being the main contemporary victims. The puzzle is, why was the left virtually silent or unconcerned about the Chamberlain case? If the Chamberlains had belonged to some left sect (or been Aboriginal), rather than the Seventh Day Adventist Church, the matter would have been seen very differently. One difference was, of course, that it wasn't a case of religious persecution in the same way that frame-ups of left wingers are often part of a wider campaign. Nevertheless, suspicion and hostility to a non-mainstream religious group definitely played a role.

But of course it was more than just popular prejudice. The Chamberlains, on all the evidence, forced themselves to "accept" the devastating loss of their daughter because it was God's will. It was their life-jacket right from moments after the child was snatched, when Michael Chamberlain stumbled into an adjoining campers' tent and yelled "You are playing Christian music, what does that mean?" Amy Whittaker, nurse and social worker said calmly "It means we are Christian people." Chamberlain begged them to pray and then, after going outside, shouted "I am a minister of the gospel." Such bizarre responses aroused the suspicions of the police, particularly when, after a couple of hours, the Chamberlains appeared to calmly accept their loss. (Though even Christian faith couldn't prevent Lindy Chamberlain from bursting into tears hours later and then, from time to time, through the two inquests, the murder trial and the appeals.) "No normal mother would behave like that," then became a widespread expression of the reason why she had to be guilty. (Wasn't it one of novelist Albert Camus' characters who was convicted of a murder with part of the evidence being that he "hadn't cried at the funeral of his mother?") Some feminists picked this up, but few others on the left did. Lindy Chamberlain wasn't "normal", just as none of us are in another way: though she broke down many times in the court, during her trial she rarely concealed her anger and contempt for the prosecutor who was committing in her eyes, the monstrous crime of accusing her of killing her own baby. Her own counsel privately asked her to be "more demure", or perhaps she should have said more "ladylike" or "motherly".

Just one small example will suffice to outline the police-journalist relationship which helped jail Lindy Chamberlain. While drinking on a plane flight, a policeman hinted to two reporters, in that confidential way which occurs when someone has some hot gossip, that the killing of Azaria was probably some weird religious ritual. Bryson outlines it:

During the search of the Chamberlain's house at Avondale the detective had discovered a Bible in which a passage marked in the Old Testament, described a ritual slaying inside a tent. The weapon was a tent peg. The victim's head was cut off. The story was outlined in red. Apart from the presence of a tent in the narrative, there was not much to connect it with Azaria Chamberlain. The slain was a charioteer, the captain of an invading army... the captain was not de.capitated after death, even if, as the police supposed, Azaria was. For all that, the story enjoyed
The Bible had been in Lindy Chamberlain's family, according to an inscription on the fly leaf, since 1884. In keeping with the fervour of the times, the stories were generously illustrated, with a process not much different from etching. This is not now a popular technique because it breaks down, and transfers colour to the opposing leaf.

The "special connections" which a number of journalists had with the police was a material factor in the grotesque miscarriage of justice of the Chamberlain case. Another, perhaps more important, factor within the courtroom was the "expert evidence" which helped construct the scenario of a baby's throat being cut in the car, the "arterial spray" within the car, and the placing of the baby in Michael Chamberlain's camera bag. The expert evidence is now in tatters, particularly that which specified the presence of baby's blood (foetal haemoglobin) in the car.

The third leg of the Chamberlain case was outlined by Denis Barritt, the magistrate in the first inquest who upheld the view that Azaria was taken by a dingo:

Police forces must realise, or be made to realise, that courts will not tolerate any standard less than complete objectivity from anyone claiming to make scientific observations.

The NT police, it is said, were out to disprove the basis of this criticism from then on.

On each of these questions: the reliability of the police, popular prejudice against minorities, questioning "experts" and trial by media — the left has a position based on its own experience which should have alerted it to the possibility or probability of a frightening miscarriage. Yet there were no articles analysing the case in the left press, no petition campaigns, no participation in what became a grass roots campaign for justice. Why? Partly because, as layer on layer of evidence was submitted, the case became complex. It would have been a lot of work to understand it. But other people, not only Seventh Day Adventists, worked out what was happening. So there were other factors, including I suggest, the left's narrow definition of politics. The Chamberlain case was not "political" — yet it occurred because of prejudices and processes that, in other contexts, would be seen as highly political.

Another important reason may have been that the left's instinctive reductionism cannot explain the events. The combination of popular prejudices with the actions of journalists, police and forensic experts cannot be reduced to the will of media proprietors, reactionary governments or business interests. But this realm of cultural politics, in the broadest sense of culture, is becoming more and more important in understanding social attitudes and how they change. Not only that, it must be said that the left probably shied away from the case because of its association with what was perceived as a "crankish" religious group.

So, while the left is pondering its future and about social change in Australia, it might do well to ponder on the deeper reasons why one of the most celebrated cases of legalised injustice to an individual passed it by.

David McKnight
China's Environment

China has a population of over one thousand million in a country only slightly bigger than Australia. The people of China have a low standard of living, although all are fed, clothed and housed. Most Chinese would like to experience a higher living standard. A large population and the quest for economic growth are the major underlying causes of most of the environmental problems that affect or threaten China today.

The Chinese vision of the optimal future contains flying machines and tall mirrored buildings. In some respects this vision resembles that of conservative Australian politicians, with their touching faith in the magical qualities of tall glass hotels and curving concrete dams. However, the Chinese vision acts to reinforce the most effective of their environmental policies — one child per couple. The posters of people in technological wonderland show parents and single daughter with heads proudly raised in the sky. These advertisements are plastered on mud brick walls along rough dirt roads full of people, puddles, chooks and dogs. There are no ornamental plants in the village gardens. There is no waste strip beside roads, railways and streams. China would be very rich if it had only the population of Australia, but the present numbers at the present standard of living strain against the basic resources of arable land.

In well-forested Manchuria, half the harvested wood is used for heating. Some parts of the country are so lacking in fuel that farmers burn their stubble for very necessary winter warmth. The loss of organic matter necessitates fertilisation. Fertilisation is also required to improve yields to compensate for the loss of arable land to high-rise apartments, roads and factories. Fertilisers demand irreplaceable fossil fuels that are also essential for transport, electricity generation and industrial activity. Fossils cannot indefinitely fuel growth. Increasing living standards must ultimately depend on adjusting population to sustainable resources; thus the environmental virtues of the one child policy.

Unfortunately, even a one child policy does not immediately halt population growth which continues to respond to past fast increases through the medium of the reproductive age group. Thus, growth in industrial...
production is being planned and implemented in a context of population increase. This industrial growth produces some unfortunate by-products. Heavy metals pollute water where factories have been dispersed to the countryside, while water and air pollution characterise the big industrial cities.

The air pollution is heavily flavoured by coal. This sulphur dioxide and particulate pollution has a flavour and effect very different from our petrochemical mixes with their nitrous oxides and ozone. The traffic in Chinese city streets is dense, with the dominant vehicle being the bicycle. This non-polluting form of locomotion is leavened by a rich variety of petrol-driven vehicles and the occasional cart drawn by nappied horse. If the mix changes more to motor vehicles it is likely that the Chinese countryside could suffer the acid rain syndrome that is currently destroying much of the European forest estate, as this syndrome requires substantial quantities of both types of pollutant.

China has a higher percentage of its land under native forest than Australia. These forests are extremely rich in species, some of which, such as the gingko and dawn redwood, are famous as living fossils. The forest estate has been declining, particularly in Manchuria where the rich volcanic soils on gentle slopes can be used for agriculture. One of the most popular crops in the higher part of this region is ginseng, which also grows naturally in the forests.

As part of the UNESCO “Man and Biosphere” program, the Chinese have set aside forest reserves that put to shame the efforts of the various Australian governments. For example, the Biosphere Reserve at Changbai Mountain on the Korean border covers 190,000 hectares (ha), most of which is highly commercial forest. These forests will remain in their present delightfully virgin state, unlike most Australian forests. There is only about 35,000 ha of tall eucalypt forest in Australia that is left in large enough stands to have any chance of long-term viability, and all this area is threatened.

The scientists of the Academia Sinica have sought to understand regeneration processes in order to be able to devise the most appropriate silvicultural methods for those forests devoted to wood production. They have been extremely successful in this program, but the general feeling is that natural forests are being cut at a rate in excess of their potential sustained yield. However, the steep hills that abut the rice paddies of the wetter countryside are increasingly used for the establishment of plantations, and their growth probably compensates for the loss of production from the native forests.

Although there are communication problems between scientists and managers, the lack of a strong profit motive undoubtedly leads to more rational land use decisions than those which occur in Australia where the land use decision-making process is heavily distorted in favour of commercial oligopolies.

Environmental problems are of three types. The first is the maintenance of the heritage values of the natural and cultural landscape. In this area the Chinese seem, at present, very advanced, although the Red Guards were fond of smashing ancient monuments in the not too distant past. In the second area of productivity maintenance, hasty industrialisation and an increasing reliance on fossil fuel bode ill for the future. However, it should be remembered that traditional Chinese agriculture, as still practised over most of the country, is extremely energy-efficient and is in harmony with the environment, unlike western agricultural systems in which fossil fuels and irreplaceable soil are turned into food. Environmental impact on human health is the third problem area. Air and water pollution problems are locally severe, but the main environmental health problem, that of providing enough food for the people, has been solved.

The Chinese have demonstrated convincingly that starvation is a political, not a Malthusian, process in the world today. They may also demonstrate that the solution to the problem of low living standards is an adjustment of human numbers to the desirable per capita sustainable yield of the planet. Alternatively, they may attempt to follow a destructive quest for economic growth at all costs, following the model of the capitalist and state socialist countries of the rich and predatory parts of the world.

J.B. Kirkpatrick

Manul Handling

In October, changes to legislative and award restrictions on women's employment were announced at a national conference convened to review the processes for removing their discriminatory effects. As a result, many topics are now on the occupational health and safety agenda which would probably not have been addressed without pressure having been exerted to overcome the effect of the old legislation.

After the conference, the ACTU and the CAI (Confederation of Australian Industry) issued a joint statement on areas of agreement. Manual handling is at the top of their list. Manual handling activities — pushing, pulling, lifting, and moving loads — contribute to about one-third of work-related injury as well as general ill-health. Workers in most jobs and industries undertake manual handling. A participatory strategy to prevent injury from manual handling would need to be a core part of any workplace health and safety program.

In keeping with the 1983 Accord, the National Occupational Health and Safety Commission has established a Working Party to develop a Code of Practice on Manual Handling. The Draft Code and an accompanying Discussion Paper are to be distributed in December for two to three months of public comment.

The commission has no power to enforce standards, except in areas of Commonwealth government
employment and the territories. The Draft Code of Practice can be picked up in state health and safety legislation; and it can be developed for specific industries and work processes and then incorporated into negotiated agreements on workplace health and safety.

The notorious “weight limits” — of Wollongong Jobs for Women v. AI&S fame — are the only existing legislative provisions for manual handling. These limits are set for juniors and adult women (16kg) but not for adult men. These provisions are grossly inadequate and can operate to restrict women rather than restricting hazard. Sex-specific provisions of this kind are inconsistent with affirmative action and the Sex Discrimination Act. Beyond a paper inconsistency, they contribute to the sex-segregation of the workforce and to the exclusion of women from many areas of work. They can also be used unlawfully, as was shown in the case against AI&S.

The Working Party on Manual Handling is proposing a comprehensive preventive approach involving hazard evaluation and, where necessary, redesign of the job or task. It is consistent with the principle (and formal purpose of state occupational health and safety laws) of fitting the job to the worker and not the worker to the job. The principle of prevention encourages reduction of load-bearing and consultation between trade unions, employers and workers. The proposed Manual Handling Injury Management Plan, to be undertaken through consultation in the workplace, requires systematic reporting of injury, and job analysis to identify job demands and potential hazards. The Draft Code, therefore, focuses upon the working environment rather than categories of workers to be rejected.

Implementation of the Draft Code of Practice on Manual Handling is remarkably similar to affirmative action as a strategy to obtain equal employment opportunity. With the involvement of unions, work for both the affirmative action and manual handling plans can be undertaken together. The possibilities and problems are similar too — see the special supplement on Affirmative Action in ALR No. 96.

In some industries and workplaces, the level of manual handling is already being limited and reduced by smaller packaging, job redesign, and co-operative work practices. Both the QNU (Queensland Nurses Union) and the BWIU, for example, have recognised the problems created by the heavy, cumulative loads their members handle over a work shift; the BWIU has started a campaign to reduce these problems by limiting the size and number of besser blocks.

Taking risks and performing heavy, arduous work in certain kinds of jobs is identified with masculinity, although not so much with the economic and authority relations that keep men performing very heavy and wearing work. Querying existing relations, and proposing alternative ways of organising work could threaten patriarchal relations and the standard defence (what Hester Eisenstein calls ‘class/income/masculinity protection’) against women entering areas of work where the prevailing system of values can be challenged.

Chloe Refshauge
THE MORAL MEETS THE NEW:
Alliances on the radical right

Karen Coleman*

Up until the last few months it might almost have seemed that Australia was going to remain free of any concerted mobilisation of New Right forces, unlike the UK or USA. There, since the elections of Thatcher and Reagan, the rhetoric and politics of what has variously been called neo-liberalism, libertarianism, neo-conservatism, monetarism, supply-side economics or just plain Thatcherism or Reaganomics have virtually dominated economic debate and provided the rationale for rightwing assaults on Keynesianism, "big government" and the welfare state. Similarly, the backlash against the legacy of the "permissive" sixties has thrown into prominence the likes of Mary Whitehouse and Jerry Falwell and his Moral Majority. Their crusades against pornography, abortion and homosexuality have been the moral arm of the movement, fighting to protect the family from the ravages of feminism and sexual liberation and to restore authority, discipline and decency.

Recently, however, the Australian media have given extensive coverage to a group of business leaders belonging to the H.R. Nicholls Society who have been dubbed the New Right. Prominent among them are Andrew Hay, Chairman of the Australian Federation of Employers, Charles Copeman of Peko-Wallsend, Hugh Morgan of Western Mining, and ex-head of Treasury, John Stone. The focus of their attack is union power and particularly the arbitration system, and their aim is the complete dismantling of the present industrial relations system and a free and deregulated labour market. Already they have achieved considerable successes — most of the major union defeats suffered during the past year or so have been credited to the efforts of various H.R. Nicholls members — Mudginberri, the Queensland power dispute, the Dollar Sweets and Seymour abattoir disputes in Victoria, and the recent sackings by Peko-Wallsend at Robe River.

Union-busting, though, is not the only purpose of these economic "drys". In 1984, Hugh Morgan argued that miners have divine right to any resources on Aboriginal land and that this, being conferred by God, had automatic precedence over any Aboriginal claims to land. They echo their British counterparts in
advocating deregulation of the private sector and privatisation of government-owned enterprise such as Telecom, Australia Post, OTC and TAA. These policies, of course, are coupled with demands for a reduction in the size of state bureaucracies which would enable taxation to be minimised.

There are very substantial gains in terms of economic efficiency to be had from the development of a competitive environment, with privatisation acting as a supplementary weapon designed to engineer further competitive gains and to wind back the size of the bloated public sector.

Andrew Hay.1

Public attention to the New Right, then, has focused on this small but very powerful group and its activities and aims in the economic sphere. This is hardly surprising, given their prominence in the business sector and the potential economic and political clout afforded by their positions. Likewise, media current affairs coverage over recent years has centred increasingly on "hard" economic issues as if this is the "real stuff" of public debate. It would be very easy to assume then that New Right activity in Australia is limited to those questions of government intervention in the market and free enterprise.

In fact, a number of groups and organisations have been energetically mobilising for some years over the same moral issues which have preoccupied their counterparts in the UK and USA. If trends there are anything to go by, we could anticipate that issues connected with the family, sexuality and law and order will be introduced squarely onto the public agenda in the future. Very likely, a Liberal-NCP victory at the next federal election would see a resurgence of demands for laws to control things like abortion, pornography, homosexuality and drugs, and for the repeal of the ALP’s Sex Discrimination and Affirmative Action legislation.

Just as union bashing has been in the vanguard of the New Right economic offensive partly because it appeals to the "commonsense" beliefs of most Australians that unions have too much power, the sort of issues pursued by the moral authoritarian arm of the New Right have the potential to attach to some deep-seated fears and anxieties in people. This is precisely the sort of strategy that moral campaigners pursue; obviously, fears of an AIDS epidemic could very easily be whipped up and manipulated by scare tactics to justify repressive anti-homosexual laws; concern about corruption in the police and justice system and about drugs could lead to a punitive law and order campaign.

The Moral Right attempts to link the fears which people have about economic issues to their anxieties about their children, family breakdown and sexual promiscuity. The linchpin in their two-pronged attack is the women’s movement, which they have scapegoated as the arch enemy of both the free enterprise system and the family. They argue that feminism is, on a fundamental level, opposed to democracy, freedom and liberty because it wants to engineer a society in which men and women would be the "same". By naming the enemy as feminism, an identifiable and relatively powerless group can be shown as responsible for the moral and even economic problems besetting society. So, unemployment, the size of the deficit, marital breakdown, problems in the education system, promiscuity, pornography and a host of other social ills can be perceived not as endemic to the structure and functioning of capitalism and/or patriarchy, but as actually curable by a free enterprise system allowed to operate un fettered by the demands of feminists and their allies.

A coalition of interests between what have been labelled "social authoritarians" and economic libertarians has operated successfully in the United States and much New Right philosophy and politicking there incorporates both strands into a cohesive (if somewhat contradictory) platform. Those successes inspired groups here, groups such as Women Who Want to be Women and Festival of Light, to sponsor visits to Australia by Phyllis Schlafly and Michael Levin. Schlafly achieved considerable fame in the United States by her campaign against the Equal Rights Amendment to the American Constitution. She founded a national organisation called Eagle Forum which successfully fought to prevent ratification of the amendment in 1982 despite its seemingly assured passage in the late seventies. Schlafly came out to Australia in April 1983 to address the Women for the Family Conference held at Macquarie University and sponsored by F.O.L. and W.W.W.

Whereas Schlafly’s public speaking engagements were confined mainly to the already converted, with Michael Levin’s visit we saw a determined effort to convince both social authoritarians and economic liberals (loosely speaking) that the wellbeing of the economy and democracy is inseparable from the moral health of society. Levin is a professor of philosophy at New York City College of some academic repute, he is also author of numerous articles on feminism which have been published in libertarian journals. His itinerary showed twenty-nine public speaking engagements. There were also press, radio and television interviews and he was invited to address a full meeting of National Party federal MPs at Parliament House just days prior to the party coming out in opposition to the Labor government’s Sex Discrimination Bill. His public speaking engagements included straight academic philosophical papers, papers delivered in academic settings on feminism and freedom, addresses on university campuses organised by conservative student bodies, fund-raising dinners for Women Who Want to be Women, addresses to traditional rightwing organisations including the National Civic Council and the Knights of the Southern Cross, addresses to business groups (Australian Confederation of Industry who subsequently came out against affirmative action programs, and Melbourne Jaycees), addresses to economic liberals (Australians for Commonsense, Freedom and Responsibility), and a variety of social authoritarian groups (Festival of Light, Australian Family Association and pro-life organisations).

Basic to both Schlafly’s and Levin’s position is the proposition,
which they claim to be indisputable, that males and females are born biologically, psychologically and aptitudinally different. For Schlafly, the difference is God-given; for Levin it evolves in terms of sociobiology and is absolutely essential to social order, cohesion and survival. They define feminism as the belief that there are no differences between men and women and that any observed differences are the results of artificial sex roles imposed by sexist education, social conditioning and a conspiracy of male chauvinist pigs. Apart from narrowing feminism down to a caricature and ignoring the diversity of the women's movement, this definition of feminism serves their purposes well. To any "sensible" person, the notion is immediately and obviously "wrong" and flies in the face of commonsense. Having "established" the irrefutable and irreducible nature of the sexes, both argue that feminist attempts to achieve equality in or out of the workforce, to force girls and boys into what they call "unisex" behaviour by non-sexist indoctrination will result in appalling damage.

Interestingly, the groups or institutions that they see as threatened are not the same. Schlafly fought the Equal Rights Amendment in the states on the grounds that it would take away the rights of marriage, adoption and spousal benefits, mandated tax funding for abortion, and given enormous power to the federal courts and bureaucracies to impose a gender-free society on people by denying them the right to discriminate between men and women.

In coalition with the feminists against traditional values and lifestyles, according to Schlafly homosexuals and lesbians, the "prostitutes of promiscuity" and the socialist spenders. The latter two are interesting, but for different reasons. The profiteers of promiscuity are the people who make money out of the promiscuous lifestyle associated with feminism — abortionists and contraceptive manufacturers, for example, and all those who profit through pornography on TV, cable television and video cassettes and magazines like Playboy and Penthouse. By sleight of hand, Schlafly thus includes as allies of feminism some of the very groups to whom she claims to be most opposed. The socialist spenders are those people or groups who have a vested interest in big government so that they can use taxpayers' money to carry out their political programs.

She claims that attempts by Ronald Reagan to cut out fraud in government, to be more efficient and fulfil his mandate are seen by these people as attacks on women. They talk about the feminisation of poverty, but the main reason why women are poor, she claims, is because they get divorced — and that's their problem, not that of the government of the taxpayers. The socialist spenders are working for affirmative action in jobs, which, on her definition, means giving a job to the less qualified woman in preference to the more qualified man in order to achieve a female quota in various levels of job category. This constitutes a direct attack on the family, she argues, because when a man loses out on a job to a woman it is his wife and children who suffer. The women's movement has undermined the self-esteem of the homemaker/wife and belittled the role. Its message is that every woman should put her own self-fulfilment before every other goal. And, she says,

... that attitude to life is not compatible with a happy marriage and it is not compatible with motherhood. A woman has to be self-sacrificing and put her child's welfare ahead of her own comfort, convenience and career.

But feminists, full as they are of envy, bitterness and hate, refuse to do this. They want to eliminate the role of wife and homemaker and force all women into the workforce. This also serves their purposes as it means a windfall of taxes to increase the power of government over people's lives, as many other duties and activities — such as cooking and cleaning — which women traditionally do would be mediated by the market and thus subject to taxes. By changing the tax system to disadvantage single income families, they push women out to work and hence their children into feminist-run, government-funded child care centres, where they can be indoctrinated with pro-feminist ideology at the taxpayers' expense.
To neglect the obligation to take whatever action is necessary to safeguard the moral, social and economic integrity of the family is to abandon the future to a bunch of marital misfits who are seeking their identity as Ms, mistaken about morals, misinformed about history, motivated by the axiom “misery loves company”, and who want to remake our laws, revise the marriage contract, restructure society, remodel our children to conform to liberal values instead of God’s values, and replace the image of woman as virtue and mother with the image of prostitute, swinger and lesbian.

While Schlafly may be anti-feminist, she is not anti-woman. She argues that American women are privileged and, if you are white and middle class, you undoubtedly are. The privileges she has fought to retain are clearly those of a minority of women — those with husbands able and willing to support them. Her wholehearted support for the free enterprise system, for small government and decreased taxes derives from her class position.

On the other hand, Levin is clearly misogynist. He argues that feminism threatens the institution of democracy and the values of liberty and freedom. Moreover, it constitutes an obnoxious affront to masculinity and to the proper development of little boys into men. He makes much of supposed innate differences between the sexes, all of which reflect pejoratively on women, but reserves his fullest enthusiasm for the instinct of aggression on which males have a premium. He refers to it as that “fantastic anarchical destructive energy” and uses it to explain and justify the totality of social structure, the inevitability of hierarchies and the dominance of men in the family and the workplace. Natural male aggression is so powerful, even in little boys, that if it is not properly curbed and channelled in the family via the mother’s unconditional love and strong dominant father, we would have a “Hobbesian state of nature, a war of all against all”.

If the family is broken up by the welfare state, as he claims feminists advocate, that “fantastic destructive aggression” is unleashed and the “result is eighteen year old sociopaths”. So, the preservation of the traditional patriarchal family is the only thing standing between us and social chaos and anarchy. It exists to socialise little boys. (Little girls don’t seem to need socialising — presumably, they are closer to nature.) Properly channelled, male aggression is transformed into the basic ingredient of the free enterprise system — the competitive spirit. The only form of social organisation compatible with male nature is pure capitalism which will arise spontaneously from that nature if feminists don’t interfere with the natural order of male/female relations in the family.

So, what’s this got to do with freedom, liberty and democracy? Having “established” what is “given” in nature, Levin can argue that feminist efforts to create what they consider as a more equitable distribution of power must be fundamentally coercive, because only by coercion can men be artificially prevented from naturally rising to positions of power. In libertarian philosophy, coercion is an illegitimate incursion on liberty and only the bare minimum is justifiable — to prevent the thwarting of other people’s freedom. For example, police can justifiably stop criminals from coercing others, while the state can use the military for the defence of a nation’s freedom.

In Levin’s interpretation, feminists have been most successful in using state coercion in two areas — education and employment. In this, he caters to the two strands of the New Right: the social authoritarians who fear what is being done to their children by non-sexist indoctrination and the thwarting of the “natural” development of femininity and masculinity; and to the economic liberals who fear that employers will be forced to hire inferior women in preference to men. What infuriates him most is that feminists have won governmental support for the implementation of their programs. Anti-discrimination legislation and affirmative action programs constitute government intervention in the free enterprise system and all such intervention is against liberty and freedom.

Indeed, those who endorse anti-discrimination legislation, endorse slavery.

When you’ve got a situation where the powers of the state can be used to make
people, resources and their money at the
disposition of others against their will,
that's slavery. That's what anti-
discrimination laws are.

By nature, women would prefer to stay
at home and look after their children,
says. They are not biologically
equipped to compete in the open
marketplace, and so they will have to
be forced to work and forced into
positions of power — and this deprives
men of jobs that should be rightfully
and naturally theirs. Because of the
high taxes needed for the excesses of
the welfare state, a male breadwinner's
income is no longer sufficient to
support his family, so women who
prefer to stay at home are pushed out
to work. If the government chopped
the welfare state and hence the need
for high taxes, according to Levin, it
could reduce the deficit and inflation
would go down so that a single
breadwinner could support a family,
women would get out of the workforce
and there would be no unemployment.

Unfettered by regulation, the internal
dynamics of free enterprise would
ensure that all people who wanted jobs
had them, and had the job for which
they were most suited. All this gross
interference in the free market is anti-
democratic as it is carried out by the
unelected bureaucracy and via the
courts who impose hiring quotas on
employers to achieve equality of
outcome regardless of qualifications.

This, according to Levin, will result in
permanent discrimination against men
since 50/50 equality will never be
achieved because those women who
can manage to do so will remain at
home.

Every time you pass over a man to favour a
woman you are actually penalising not
only the man but also the wife and family.
You make it that much harder for a
working man to make ends meet, that
much harder to raise a family on a single
income. And of course it makes it that
much harder for the father to earn the
respect of the family that he needs to
function and which makes family life
enjoyable.

For Levin, as for others on the
New Right who celebrate capitalism as
the perfect system of economic
organisation because it evolves from
human nature,4 completely free
markets would achieve a social
ecological balance just as nature does.
The driving motor of the system is the
entrepreneurial spirit derived from
masculine aggression. Taxation,
regulation and feminist charges of
male oppression have dampened and
stifled the free and economically
productive expression of the
masculine ethos, thus leading to
stagnation of economic security.

They fought the Equal
Rights Amendment in the
States on the grounds that
it would take away from
women privileges which
they already enjoyed at
law.

How can feminism be combatted?
It can only be crushed if men cease
being embarrassed by feminists and
stand up to them. He says:

Even feminists ... deep down inside each
feminist if there is a shred of femininity left,
will respond to some sort of masculine
dominance ... Men are going to have to
start taking feminism seriously. And I just
have a vision that ... suddenly a bunch of
big, commanding, virile, masculine,
dominant males are going to get up and say
"Whoa! Now let's start talking sense" and
then the whole feminist superstructure is
going to come apart. At least that's my
dream.

I don't think it's necessary to
point out the flaws in Schlafly's or
Levin's claims — they are abundantly
clear. What I do want to emphasise is the
concerted effort to marry the
concerns of the two arms of the New
Right and I think this is clear from
their arguments, and the organisational
linkages they are forging. This
alliance has proved successful in the
United States, but in Australia neither
group can muster the support they
need to effect change — despite some
successes. I think that the social
authoritarians are acutely aware of the
need to widen their appeal and have
looked to the American example. As it
now stands, their constituency seems
limited mainly to those people who
pursue a fundamentalist form of
christianity, and this is much less
predominant here than in the States.
Indeed, in the Australian context, this
itself may be a limiting factor.

Nevertheless, I think that they
have the potential to appeal to a far
wider group of people, especially if
they do succeed in publicly linking
moral issues with economic ones. The
family is the central focus of concern
to both Schlafly and Levin and,
indeed, it is to social authoritarians
generally. It is the social institution
which mediates between the public
sphere of life (the economy,
production and consumption) and the
private sphere of personal relations,
emotionality and childbearing and
rearing. Their view of the family is a
"common-sense" version of that held
by the American structural
functionalist school of sociology. For
the latter, the institution of the family
has two functions indispensable to
general social order. Firstly, it
socialises children so that they develop
into "autonomous" individuals who
can appropriately perform their adult
social roles. Second, it provides an
emotional haven from the public
world where its members (particularly
men) can withdraw to be rejuvenated
so that they are better able to return
and perform their public roles in the
economic sphere.

For all this to operate smoothly it
is necessary that men and women
conform to their appropriate sex roles.
Such conformity ensures harmony
and balance both in the wider social
system and in the family itself. With
such a view of the family and its
functional relation to society, it is not
surprising that social authoritarians
see feminism as constituting a
malignant threat to social and familial
organisation. A pervasive theme in
much of their anti-feminist rhetoric is
the claim that feminist social
engineering will spell the downfall of
western civilisation as we know it.
They point meaningfully to the
Roman Empire, indicating that the
authoritarians see feminism as
constituting a moral right is the strength of
emotional attachment to the family
and "family values". After all, most people are reared in families and it is the locus of a ferment of passions and desires. Family relations conjure up in most people deep emotions of love and hate, security and anxiety. For women who have experienced fulfillment as mothers, and love and the security of dependency as wife, for men who have their masculinities confirmed as providers and patriarchs, feminism does constitute an ignominious and devastating challenge to a way of life that they find rewarding and affirming. For the moral right, this is what the family represents to them and what it should represent to all people. A stable and sex-role divided family unit they see as ensuring happiness for its members and contributing to general social stability.

**Family relations conjure up in most people deep emotions of love and hate, security and anxiety.**

From observing at some length those groups to which Schlafly and Levin spoke, I gained the very strong impression that fear is one of the primary factors which motivates them and makes them believe what these people tell them. Economic recession and unemployment make them fearful of impending social chaos and disaster which has replaced the comfortable security of the long boom. They are concerned about failings in the education system, about the lack of discipline in youth, about promiscuity and immorality. They want a return to a social order which is stable, to a hierarchical order in which everyone knows their role, status and position, where social control is embedded in the internal organisation of the system in a rigid morality which excludes the possibility of behaviour and values changing.

What they see as the traditional family is, of course, the fundamental unit of such a social system. Consequently, feminist critiques of the family and feminist efforts to change it are particularly feared and resented. The notion of a unisex society appals them — they see the division between the sexes as fundamental to social order: rigid sex roles, a fixed division of labour, a sexual hierarchy seem natural or God given. Any questioning of these essential "givens" is therefore alarming and frightening. Simplistic explanations like those offered by Schlafly and Levin hold considerable appeal:

- Firstly, they reassure them of the "natural" order of things and, by offering them answers to what they are experiencing as social disorder, restore a sense of certainty and "knowing" which, despite the successes of feminism gives them some sense of security.
- Second, they scapegoat an identifiable group as the source of many of their anxieties.
- And third, by doing this, attention is totally deflected from the structural and systemic nature of the rapid and anxiety-provoking social changes confronting us.

The sorts of things that disturb them most profoundly, and for which they blame feminism, arise from a patriarchal capitalist system which relentlessly pursues the creation of new markets by tapping into desires and transforming them into demands. So we are witnessing the emergence of a multi-billion dollar industry which trades on the commodification of sexuality — of which pornography is the most graphic, but not the only example.

The mass media, particularly television, in both programming and advertising, has become a primary agent of socialisation, interjecting itself between parents and children. Schlafly, for example, abhors violence and sex on TV, and enjoins people to switch off or to complain to the advertisers. What neither she nor the right generally can countenance or dare grapple with, is the fact that mass marketing and mass advertising of the kind they despise, is an integral part of the free enterprise component of capitalism which they so wholeheartedly endorse, and are so eager to save from governmental interference. This sort of structural blindness permeates much of the New Right thinking.

In similar vein, they cannot comprehend that the technological and structural changes required by capitalism stem from its own internal dynamic. To maintain growth when market expansion is no longer a sufficient means to ensure the continued accumulation of capital, technology replaces labour to maintain profitability by cutting costs. In the words of the Myer Committee, "a situation of jobless growth". Again, it's the system which they support, rather than feminism or any other scapegoat, e.g. Asian immigrants or leftwing unions — which produces the consequences.

The conditions which have provoked the formation of many of these groups won't go away and will more likely deteriorate. Therefore, the potential for support for the sorts of ideas which they espouse could well grow. Their focus on issues connected with the family and sexuality can tap deep emotional responses in many people. In the past, groups like F.O.L. and W.W.W. have tended to be dismissed by the left as mere fascists or lunatics and hence beyond serious political consideration. The success of social authoritarians in the United States of America and the United Kingdom indicates that such an attitude may be short-sighted and even dangerous.

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**NOTES**


KAREN COLEMAN teaches sociology at Kuring-gal College of Advanced Education in Sydney, and is researching the area of sexual politics and the Right.
AFTER THE ACCORD: Looking for an alternative economic strategy

Frank Stilwell

The economic policy of the federal government has become increasingly conservative. Potentially progressive aspects of the Accord have been sacrificed on the altar of conservative economic orthodoxy. This article identifies the principal components of current policy, points to their limited effectiveness and adverse social consequences, and outlines a more progressive alternative.

The four main components of current policy are identified as (i) wage restraint, (ii) financial deregulation, (iii) reliance on the J-curve effect on the balance of payments, and (iv) increasingly restrictionist macroeconomic policies. The progressive alternative includes (i) a more broadly-based incomes policy, (ii) financial deregulation, (iii) interventionist industry policy and planned trade, and (iv) a more expansionary program of expenditure on the social wage.

Current negotiations over a new two-tiered wages system to replace the Accord Mark II have clearly revealed the government's commitment to enforcing wage restraint. As such, it has accepted — as have some sections of the union movement — the validity of the argument that wage restraint is the key to economic recovery. The extent to which the two-tier system would actually lead to further real wage reductions is not immediately obvious — some groups of workers in powerful unions would presumably do better than they have done under the Accord Mark II — but there is no doubt that the implementation of the system by the government and the arbitration system would be motivated by the objectives of achieving a reduction in overall wage costs to employers.

Whatever its demerits from a working class perspective, this strategy also suffers from the problem that the underlying theory is unsound. Lowered wage rates lower the level of domestic demand for goods and services and thereby undermines one condition for economic growth. True, wage cuts may also enable Australian firms to compete more successfully against importers and to reduce their competitive disadvantages in international markets. But whether these gains in terms of international competitiveness outweigh the effects of a more depressed home market is not self-evident. Moreover, the devaluation of our currency by over thirty-five percent in the last two years should have given the necessary competitive advantage to exporters. A couple more percentage points off the rate of wage increases is hardly likely to succeed where that massive devaluation has failed. Or is the objective to press on with such drastic measures that our wage rates are
reduced to the level of Hong Kong, the Philippines, or Indonesia? It is a long road to travel in pursuit of international competitiveness.

The experience under the Accord has been of significant wage-restraint. There is revealed in the statistics on the redistribution of income from labour to capital: the share of wages and salaries in the national income fell by five percent between 1982-83 and 1985-86, and the gross operating surplus has risen accordingly. Profits have been at record levels. However, investment has been low: only thirty-two percent of available investment funds were used by the business sector in the first half of the last financial year, compared with forty-six percent in 1982-83. It is the failure by business to invest in expanded productive capacity which is the basic problem, not insufficient wage restraint.

Deregulation of financial markets has been justified by Bob Hawke as having "improved the ability of the financial sector to allocate funds to the most productive uses". This sits oddly with the evidence just cited of a declining share of investable funds being used in Australia. What we have observed is a major rechannelling of funds into speculative areas, and into mergers and takeovers which involve financial gains without adding to productive capacity. What we have also observed are major increases in Australian investment abroad: this has risen in value from $1.5 billion to $7 billion per annum over the last four years. Moreover, there is no evidence that deregulation of financial institutions has led to lowered interest rates through the effects of increased competition.

In a similar vein, deregulating the value of the $A in the foreign exchange markets was originally justified on the grounds that it would lead to a balance of payments equilibrium and reduce the incidence of speculation against the $A. The reverse has occurred. The volatility of our exchange rate has been associated with greater balance of payments problems, and the incidence of speculation on foreign exchange markets has reached unprecedented levels. Even conservative estimates acknowledge that more than nine-tenths of transactions on the Australian market are purely speculative: even those transactions which do involve exchanges for the conduct of international trade are often timed so as to take advantage of expected market fluctuations. In these circumstances, deregulation adds to the volatility of economic conditions and undermines the capacity of the government to manage the overall economic system.

**The hoped-for J-curve...is looking like "Waiting for Godot".**

The government's principal policy for resolving the balance of payments problem has amounted to waiting for the competitive advantage generated by the devaluation of our currency to manifest itself in higher exports and reduced imports. There is no clear evidence of this happening yet, more than one and a half years since the major falls in the exchange rate in early 1985. It is looking like "Waiting for Godot".

In fact, there are some very clear reasons why the hoped-for J-curve effect has been so unresponsive. International trade is influenced by many factors other than relative prices. Some thirty to forty percent of trade has been estimated to involve intra-corporate transactions. Quotas and other non-tariff restrictions are widely used by other countries, such that Australian exports would have difficulty in expanding market shares even if they were more competitive in price. Bilateral trade agreements are common. In any case, much of Australia's exports are of primary products whose prices are determined on international markets. The success of the devaluation-led recovery strategy depends more on our capacity to export manufactured goods, and the marketing expertise in that sector is often conspicuously lacking.

On the import side, the development of Australian import-replacing industries has been likewise slow to materialise. Some importers have trimmed their profit margins to maintain their shares of our domestic market. In other cases, attempts to expand exports have only led to an increased flow of imports, particularly in the form of capital equipment or other intermediate goods not produced in Australia. The dismantling of major sectors of Australian industry has left the legacy of an imbalanced industrial structure which is seemingly incapable of rapid import-replacement.

The other major problem concerns the "invisibles" component in the balance of payments. This includes items such as interest payments on international debts (two-thirds of which has been generated by the private sector), tourism, shipping costs associated with international trade, and insurance. The negative balance on these invisibles has been approximately three times larger than the trade deficit over the last year. Since many of these "invisibles" are not responsive to devaluation of the currency, there is no general reason to expect a J-curve effect to operate.

Because of the failure of the J-curve to materialise, the government has re-oriented its macroeconomic policy towards a more restrictive approach. On this view, if devaluation won't reduce imports, then incomes have to be cut. That is the clear message in current monetary and fiscal policies. Of course, deflationary policies are an extremely crude way of resolving a balance of payments problem. In circumstances where consumers spend about twenty percent of their income on imported goods, their incomes have to be cut by $5 to shave $1 off the total import bill. The alternative is to adopt policies which divert expenditure away from imports without an overall adverse impact on the level of national income. The government's "buy Australian" appeal comes in this latter category, but the government is clearly reluctant to use more systematic means such as import controls to redirect expenditure to domestically produced goods.

The irony of the situation is that an increasingly restrictionist macroeconomic policy is being adopted at the very time when economic recession threatens. GDP growth has stalled, and the registered unemployment rate has risen again to over eight percent.
Traditional Keynesian prescriptions in these circumstances would involve more expansionary policy measures, including increased budget deficits. However, the constraints which the government imposed on itself by adopting the Trilogy have inhibited this response. True, the taxation leg of the Trilogy was exceeded in the last federal budget, but the commitment to a reduced overall deficit continued the "deficit fetishism" which had become a general feature of fiscal policy in the preceding years. The Keynesian notion of budgetary policy being geared to the manipulation of the level of domestic economic activity has been jettisoned. In its place we observe a policy geared to satisfy the expectations of international speculators. This may be a "realistic" approach in circumstances where financial deregulation has given those speculators unprecedented power to destabilise the economy. But even Keating's unexpectedly low deficit figure of $3.5 billion did not satisfy the speculators, judging by the response of the foreign exchange markets in practice. Thus, the government is pushed into increasingly conservative fiscal policy in a vain attempt to satisfy the demands of these market participants, even to the extent of causing a recession.

These four policy components add up to a program of conservative economic management. The potentially progressive aspects of the original Accord have been set aside in the process. In certain respects, the current policies can be seen as paving the way towards the more Draconian measures advocated by the New Right. One obvious task for the left is an oppositional one, emphasising the inadequacies, inconsistencies and inequities of the current economic policies. But there is also a need to go further in developing an alternative economic strategy, and mobilising for the implementation of at least some aspects of it.

The continuing problems of unemployment and an adverse balance of payments require a systematic and selective program to develop Australian industries. The necessary policies involve countering the de-industrialisation of Australian industry and promoting employment growth through import-substitution, export expansion and industry modernisation. These positive structural changes will not come about automatically.

Neither can the devaluation of the Australian dollar be relied on to generate them: as we have seen, the devaluation makes imports more expensive and cheapens our exports, but it is all too clear that this has not reversed the balance of payments deficit. Hence the need for selective government intervention to promote import-substitution, export expansion and industry modernisation.

Industry development agreements can be developed as a means of achieving these objectives. Trade protection and bounties could be provided in exchange for commitments on job-creation and modernisation. The problems of outdated and inefficient capital equipment can be thereby addressed. Industry development agreements involving union and workforce participation in the decision-making of firms also open up avenues for improved industrial relations and co-operative planning of the changes in functions, skills and location of employees in the process of industry restructuring.

These sorts of policies can be extended to include incentives for innovation, investment allowances and export market development grants. Increased public investment can stimulate the development of Australian industry, using the Australian Industries Development Corporation as a vehicle for government equity and loan finance. Support for new industries can also be provided through measures such as accelerated depreciation allowances, research and development grants, tax subsidies and infant industry protection. What is involved is not unconditional subsidies to capital but specific arrangements geared to the provision of employment.

Selective import controls can also be used in conjunction with industry policies to encourage import-substitution. This trade regulation involves the application of the principles of national planning to the external as well as the internal economy. Without it Australia is locked into the uneven development and volatile situation which characterises the international economy.
democracy and national/ regional economic planning. This provides a framework, not simply for the management of the capitalist economy, but for the construction of embryonic socialist institutions, which extend the principle of democracy into the economic sphere.

What would be the main components of a more progressive alternative economic strategy? The following policy proposals are presented as a contribution to the urgently needed debate on that issue. They build on various ideas emerging from the labour movement. What is attempted is to synthesise them into an integrated program of policies which could be implemented to deal with the current economic problems if only we could sweep aside the dominance of more conservative economic orthodoxies.

The proposals are presented in two parts. First, a set of four policies is outlined which directly counters the four policies discussed in the first half of this article, and which is a useful basis for immediate pressure to “change the direction”. Second, a set of further policies is more briefly indicated which could form the basis for building a transitional program to

What is unfortunate about the two-tier wages system is its tendency to narrow the focus of economic policy to wages policy.

In a similar vein there is a clear case for stricter price controls. The creation of an equitable incomes policy requires such controls as an indirect check on excess profits. The existing operations of the Prices Surveillance Authority are inadequate in this regard and stronger legislative provisions are necessary. In conditions where there is a resurgence of inflationary pressures this is particularly important. It should be stressed that this proposal is not intended to involve a wholesale replacement of the price system by bureaucratic decisions. The principal target is monopoly and collusive

It must be conceded that such controls may raise prices of goods bought by local consumers. This effect needs to be set against the effects on incomes of nor having the controls. In practice, the benefits of having access to an array of imported goods would be sharply eroded by the falling levels of employment and consumer incomes. In current circumstances, import controls are needed to prevent growing balance of payments and unemployment problems while industry policy brings about a planned program of import-substitution.

The original Accord clearly involved a commitment to redress the cuts which the Fraser government made in areas like health, education, housing, social security and welfare. This commitment remains incomplete, and is now being reversed by the current fetish of fiscal restrictionism. It is the more urgent in the face of an imminent recession. A program of expanded government expenditure can simultaneously stimulate domestic production, mobilise unemployed resources, improve socio-economic welfare and redress poverty. It is potentially of particular importance in redressing the “feminisation of poverty” – the stark over-representation of women among those below the poverty line.

There is certainly much scope for expenditure which simultaneously generates employment and satisfies social needs, e.g. in housing, transport and social services. Nothing could be more irrational than to have unemployed people and unfulfilled needs for social facilities and services. Employment in the public sector has a key role in this respect. Expanded government expenditure can do more than generate jobs: it can simultaneously meet specific demands that have emerged from the community, e.g. for retraining schemes, improved education and comprehensive child care facilities.

These proposals for an alternative economic strategy can be further developed to include progressive tax reform, policies for technological change and labour retraining, selective public ownership, industrial
limit the vulnerability of our economy
to international capital movements, much of which involves property speculation and takeovers of firms rather than investment in additional productive capacity. Permission to raise foreign loans can be linked to criteria of local employment generation and local procurement of goods and services. Regulations are needed also to control the extent of profit and dividend repatriation overseas and the extent of overseas corporate debt repayment.

What is ultimately at issue is the social control of the investment process.

What is ultimately at issue is the social control of the investment process. The social power of private property exercised through profit-oriented decision-making processes must become subject to social regulation and control. Otherwise public policy remains at the mercy of capital strikes, transfer pricing and destabilising capital movements. Likewise, an alternative economic strategy must involve a greater emphasis on economic planning rather than simply responding to market conditions. In a sense, economic planning already exists - a system of planning by large corporations designed to reduce the uncertainties of the market. An alternative economic strategy would seek to replace this form of indicative planning, but increased public ownership, import controls and regulation of foreign investment would provide the preconditions for more effective overall control of the allocation of resources.

Planning is no general panacea, despite its connotations of rationality and foresight. At the national level there is a potential conflict between economic planning as a technical exercise and as a process involving widespread public participation. Decentralisation offers a partial solution. Because of the size and distinct patterns of development of different regions in Australia, decentralisation on a regional basis is particularly appropriate. The development of a system of integrated regional planning would involve identifying the resources available and policy instruments appropriate for the development needs of each region. Likewise, the extended application of industrial democracy potentially has a major role to play in a transitional program, contributing immediately to productivity while also laying the basis for movement towards a more egalitarian and participatory economic system.

These proposals are wide-ranging, but together they can form the basis for a coherent alternative economic strategy. In effect, they build on the progressive features of the original Accord, but apply the principles of equity and regulation more consistently to all aspects of the economic system. The principal alternative is for government economic policy to slide further into conservative economic management in the futile attempt to satisfy the insatiable demands of speculators and multinational capital.

The main political precondition for this alternative economic strategy is widespread popular support. It needs that support to establish its place on the political agenda. It would need that support to defend the program from the predictable responses of vested interests in the national and international economy. However, given that support, there is the potential for an economic program which replaces reliance on inequitable, volatile and disruptive market processes with democratic control over the economic system. The conflicts and contradictions associated with the Accord and its renegotiation make the consideration of this progressive alternative all the more necessary.

FRANK STILWELL teaches economics at Sydney University. His sixth book, The Accord and Beyond, was published by Pluto in Spring.
THE WELFARE DEBATE: The stakes are high

Adam Farrar

Recently in Sydney, the Communist Party took steps to fill what it perceived as an urgent theoretical gap on the left today by providing a series of lectures and discussions on the economy. As it turned out, the snag was that no speakers were available. They had already been booked for a swag of similar series. Suddenly, the volume of the left's economic voice has been turned up; and if it's not disturbing the neighbours yet, it's pretty noticeable in our own quarters.

Unquestionably, this is as it should be. But the accompanying relative inattention to the transformation of the politics of the community sector and what, over the past five years, has become known as the crisis of the welfare state, is almost inexplicable. I think it tells us something about the recent renaissance, the regrouping, of the left. At its worst, it may tell us that, for all its new energy and (in some ways) sophistication, the left has failed to see where the front line is; has failed to see what not very long ago seemed blindingly clear to many of us, that the changes which have taken place in the community and welfare “sector” are profound and profoundly radical.

On this view, the recent changes in the welfare state had begun to change beyond recognition what once might have merely been a “temporary settlement” between labour and capital. Perhaps we all recognise at some level that that temporary settlement is currently under attack in just the same way as the arbitration
system, economic regulation and organised labour is under attack. There is a battle on over the welfare state. But here it's a whole social vision which is under attack; and, sadly, that makes it rather different from what's at stake in the battle over labour and financial deregulation.

What I really want to talk about are some of the substantive problems of the battle for the welfare state. But first, it is important to fly some warning flags about the new articulation of the left alternative. It may even give us a few further glimpses into the current period of crisis; and that, too, is a topic which we in Australia have not faced head on, although we have had brief skirmishes with some of its raiding parties.

So what is to be made of the way the left is dealing with the welfare state and community politics? So far, I don't think there's much sign that the mainstream left — and that's what's regrouping around the banner of the broad left — has got a clue. Of course, this is not true of the left that has been involved for years in the politicisation of community issues — young people, child care, refuges, Aboriginal struggles, ethnic communities — and it's not true of some of those active within the Labor Party.

But that's just the point. If anything's clear, it's that the new "broad left" is unclear about where these groups fit in; and how to fit them in. Now it's not, or at least it's only superficially, the case that this is a re-emergence of the tendency to rank issues as "hard" and "soft" politics. The Broad Left Conference last Easter, which is the reference point for the rebuilding of a left alternative, was notable for three assertions.

The first was that the success of Aboriginal struggle is the touchstone of political achievements in Australia. The second was that economic understanding, economic strategies, and economic campaigns must be shaken down from its vantage point of capital flows, balances of trade and all the rest; and, instead, must be built up around the real experiences of people. Significantly, this wasn't a point about how to rally people. It was the much more fundamental point that if one does this, one's understanding of what the economy is will be changed. Lastly, it was agreed that campaigns must unite unions and the community particularly the organised "community sector". All of this genuinely undermines any notions of hard and soft political issues.

Now, I don't for a second believe that the participants underwent any conversion. Most of these assertions remain no more than that. It is, in fact, hard to know what action the first of the list demands. On the last item, the awkwardness and limited success of the campaigns which have been initiated so far between unions and community sector show that a lot needs to be learned. That's going to take quite a separate step to the genuine desire to work together that does exist in places. So far, nobody knows how that separate step will be taken.

For all its new-found energy and...sophistication, the left has failed to see where the front line is.

Perhaps more than that, there is a problem about the narrow way that the basis for unity is conceived. Generally, it's seen as a strategy to build a base of community support in order to resist both the push for privatisation of the public sector which will certainly come when the Liberals are in power; and the current, more directly industrial, attacks which are part of Labor's recent cut-backs. No one can doubt the need to build an alliance to fight possible privatisation; but this can certainly not be done by invoking some blanket commitment to the public sector. It demands careful alliances around specific issues. There are cases of these, such as the cooperation between unions and consumers over the introduction of the new STRATPLAN computer system into DSS offices. But these grassroots points of common interest are the only soil in which real alliances can grow.

Any common alliance between public sector unions and community groups over cut-backs generally will be even more difficult. Many in the community sector are deeply suspicious that they are simply being used to bolster an industrial campaign which, at bottom, is not about them.

This brings me to the general point about the narrow understanding of the connection between unions and the community sector. The public sector is not the same as the community sector or, indeed, the welfare state.

To make the familiar, but important, point: they stand on opposite sides of the counter. This, of course, was the impetus for the development of community-based welfare organisations, for self-help groups and so on. With this development has been a slow, but very significant, attempt to pull down the counters — to blur the edges between client and services deliverer. And it's from this point that alliances between unions and community have to be built up.

What's worse, the assumption that the natural alliance is between the beneficiaries of the welfare state (the community) and the agents of that state (the public service, in particular public sector unions) reproduces the narrow and distorted view of the welfare state and public spending which is the basis of current rightwing attacks. It is the view that limits "welfare" to a safety net for those who cannot or will not look after themselves.

It's worth recognising that this view extends to areas of the "social wage" such as health, housing and education as well as the pensions and benefits. In education, for example, a very sharp line is drawn between training/educating those who are not yet able to take their place in the work force, and education as an ongoing process of life enrichment. It's clear that this notion of "ability" is constructed politically, as different groups are pushed in or pulled out of education; but it is all part of the view of welfare as provided for special cases. As in all struggles for political hegemony, the real struggle is over the construction of what is normal and what is deviant. In fact, of course, "welfare" is embedded in all normal social functioning. It is nothing less than the allocation and reallocation, distribution and redistribution of...
social resources and products under state direction rather than purely individual or corporate direction. This cuts right across the more specific division of social institutions into public and private. Taxation reallocates between private incomes, just as much as pensions, benefits or services do. Investment incentives, energy concessions and so on, are not metaphorically but literally corporate welfare. Of course, it's in the interests of the right to obscure this point and to whittle away at each aspect individually as a special (and inevitably unjustifiable) case. It is not in the interest of the left to assist such narrowing by an ill-thought-out conception of the natural alliances between unions and the rest of the community.

But this leads on from the most serious reservation about the commitments of the Broad Left Conference. It seems that no one has found the way to break out of the classical stereotype of economic analysis. How does the alternative left economic analysis do a better job of talking about people's lived experience? I don't think it does. And it doesn't because it, too, is caught in the conservative narrowing of the very notion of the economy, which separates The Economy from what it delivers — the incomes, the standard of living — to the Australian people. It is only this division that allows the absurd claim that an economy can only be made healthy if standards of living decline. It is the kind of reification and alienation which Marx tried so hard to dispel.

Political economy does, of course, constantly challenge the narrow construction of orthodox economics. It challenges its construction as a value neutral science about an objective economy, arguing instead that politics constructs the very meaning and understanding of its object, and is not merely a separable decision about goals. It insists that the domestic economies must always be the reference point for judgments about the importance of international trade, and financial flows. It insists that productive capacity and employment, not profits, are the bottom line. But it only barely broaches the dividing line between public and private. Even when the inverted relationship between overseas finance and trade and domestic production is stood back on its feet, "domestic" still means the public world of production and distribution with its prices and wages struggles. It does not mean the world of private consumption and production — or, indeed, quality of life.

Why is this important? We are now at least able to pay lip service to recognition that a vast amount of production and service is private and usually female. This is sufficient reason to stress the point. But my reasons for making it are that it is in the private sphere that "standards of living" are measured in people's daily lives; and it is the private sphere that is the territory of the "welfare state".

The deviance, the special case, which marks off "welfare spending" (and the "social wage") from subsidies to business, the distribution of the wages system from the redistribution of incomes, is constructed around precisely the same notion of public and private that limits both the left's and the right's understanding of economics. (And while we know what a mistake it is to let it similarly limit the understanding of politics, the left — unlike the right — seems at constant risk of amnesia on this point.)

No one can doubt the need to build an alliance to fight possible privatisation, but this can certainly not be done by invoking some blanket commitment to the public sector.

What this means is that left economic analysis must start with a clear understanding of standards of living. Interestingly enough, this discussion is not being carried out by left economists. It is being carried out by the welfare sector who are working to provide an economic understanding of the whole package of wages, tax, benefits, unpaid work provided by a so-called dependent spouse, the cost of child raising, the price of unemployment and of training, of sickness ... and so on. This is an attempt to break the notion of reallocation (or, if you like, of equity or social justice) out of the narrow mould of distribution from the well-endowed rich to the unfortunate poor, or from the successful to the casualty; and to recast it as a method of overcoming the massive distortions in the system of income distribution which relies solely on the marketing of labour.

Perhaps it's also worth acknowledging that this is not neutral with respect to the overall social division of production between labour and capital. It does, of course, radically transform the traditional basis of this relation — the wage labour relation. It is also worth pointing out that this is just as effective and necessary in existing socialist societies, all of which base the preliminary allocation of resources on wages. And it is also worth pointing out that Australia, with its greater emphasis on universalism in welfare benefits, has been a world leader.

But the main point is that it is only by starting with this "welfare" approach to economic understanding that we can provide an economics which reaches to where people live. This isn't just a theoretical point, it's also a political observation. The "welfare sector" — broadly conceived and already politically alive as the "community sector" — is precisely where the economic strains are being experienced; and being expressed in political action.

There's another political point, too, which, as I promised earlier, goes to the broader question of the contemporary crisis. I don't mean here the "economic crisis". There is nothing new about the specific economic problems we face. There is certainly nothing new about the issues over which capital and labour are struggling.

Rather, I mean the cultural crisis which has produced, among other things, the "crisis of the left" and "the New Right", to both of which the attempt to articulate a new broad left alternative is a response. This crisis is a crisis of political discourse — an ability to find a way to talk about
reality which is felt to engage the fundamental issues at stake.

There is an economic crisis in this sense; but for just this reason it’s not what is promoted as the economic crisis. The real crisis is the inability of traditional economic discourse to come to terms with the way that the genuinely new feature of capitalism — the new flows of finance capital — are subverting commonsense economic meanings. The mystification of standards of living and incomes which is marching hand in hand with growing confusion and anger about these areas, is probably also a “crisis” in this sense. It’s certainly influenced by the same changes in capital.

But, back to the political point I promised above; which is that the awkwardness of the present attitude to the “community sector”, can only be seen as an ambivalence to the political and cultural transformation which we have just lived through from the late '60s to the early '80s. “The community”, even more than “the personal”, was the political agent of that transformation. Community tenancy, community health, community child care, women's refuges and environmental impact studies...they’re all the concrete manifestations of the era of the social movement. In an important sense, the assumptions of the welfare state were their vehicle, and they became its representatives; although they transformed, expanded and democratised it in the same way that they transformed left political structures. It would seem, therefore, that they ought to be the first and most familiar resource of the new broad left; why on earth aren’t they?

Certainly, part of the answer is that much of the new left regrouping is weighted towards an older set of left concerns, thinly coated with a film of experience gathered by their passage through the last couple of decades. This has been helped by the government’s construction of an economic crisis which, it is argued, no longer leaves room for the previous expansive social changes. This has allowed the left to return to refocus also on “the economy” — all that’s new is a new sophistication of the economic discourse itself.

But, in the process which culminated in 1968, this recognition was full of the confidence that the discourse could be transformed. It was full of what Stuart Hall called a positive vision. What we face now is the other side of that coin — the second stage of the process.

This has also two parts. On the one hand, there is the sense that although the possibility of radical transformation was renewed by an enormous multiplication of the sites in which radical change could occur, no one of these sites seemed to break through the barrier of the truly radical, and all around the cacophony of other charges wore away our nerves and we began to demand some quiet, even if only through inertia. This was lived out as the experience of compromise, co-option and disillusion. On the other hand, there is the corresponding demand of the new conservatism to cut through the tangled weeds of social experiment and to let the old channels flow again unchoked.

In the face of this failure of confidence, we don’t seem to see just how radical the change was in the latest version of the tired old debate about reform vs revolution, the phrase “radical reform” seems to have become popular in some circles. This is rather sad because it is always prefixed
with the word “just”, and yet to reform radically some aspect of society is just what we demand of social change. After all, no change, even the revolutionary capture of the state, is more than this. There is no change that will bring about the progressive transformation of most of society in its own right. But if change is radical—if it reaches to the root—then it may eventually change the social economy.

This is certainly what happened when, throughout the seventies, so many diverse sections of society began to bend the welfare state to meet newly discovered needs which were constructed around the notion of community. Given this, it is particularly disturbing that as the left once again begins to articulate an alternative left strategy, it doesn’t focus much more strongly on the community sector and the welfare state. It is even more disappointing that we have not seemed interested in taking up the work on incomes, taxation and welfare transfers being done by economists and geographers working in the welfare sector, which could provide us with a much more politically powerful view of the economy.

Part of the explanation may lie in the assault on the welfare system which has already made enormous changes in the way we think about “welfare” and has already seriously undercut the radical potential of the system. Peter Davidson has shown in the last issue of A LR how the ALP has begun to dismantle the universalist underpinning of our welfare state. The effect is to reintroduce divisions between taxpayers and beneficiaries and make redistribution a matter of charity. And of course it means that welfare activists are caught in a losing battle, dashing to defend one area of poverty after another and eventually being asked to provide rankings of need. The details of this change were ably outlined in Davidson’s article.

What I want to consider briefly is the way this change in perception has been organised. It seems to me to be a very successful process of changing our understanding on three fronts. The first is the view that we have reached, or are about to reach, a limit to what we can socially afford. The second is a very strong push to reintroduce the conceptions of dependence traditionally associated with the family. The third is a fundamental transformation of the notions of equity. All three bounce off one another. All three being contested in specific places. But put together they are changing the commonsense understanding.

It seems that no one has found the way to break out of the classical stereotype of economic analysis.

The first point is both the easiest and the hardest to refute it. It’s hard because, at on level, it is necessarily true. The level of social production as a whole sets limits on what can be distributed to satisfy social needs. More and more social needs have been “discovered”. Demographic, technological and social changes are also producing new demands. The growing outflow in interest, debt repayments and repatriated profits, on the other hand, is reducing the proportion of national product available. It would seem that there must be a limit to this process. That, at least, is the public perception.

In fact, gross domestic product per capita has continued to increase. So far (as even OECD studies have shown) it is quite able to keep pace with the growing needs being expressed. What has changed is the political will. More important, the new needs are not in one sense, new at all. What is new is their expression as social needs; and so what they require is some very radical restructuring of how income is allocated. Child care is a clear example since its bottom line is a realignment of access to the income distributed through paid work.

But perhaps a better example is child-related payments, because this introduces a new notion of equity—what the current Social Security Review calls horizontal equity—which demands that income continue to be distributed when people are periodically outside the system of wage distribution. This is a much more radical notion of redistribution; and the arguments of those who rightly point out that the limits to how much we can “make the rich pay” are far too low to overcome our economic constraints, are beside the point. (Their assessment of what is “realistic” is not beside the point, but that is another argument.)

However, it is often pointed out that some major changes in demographic and social balances are taking place. There is the change in the balance between those of working age and those (particularly the aged) of non-working age. There is also the change in the proportion of children being reared in a two-parent family—particularly one which includes a working male.

These have produced increased requirements in terms of pensions, unemployment benefits and supporting parents benefits. It is vital to see that these do not involve any net increase in the allocation of social production to meet these needs. But what it does do (and this is placing enormous strains on the notion of equity) is stretch to breaking point the nexus which has existed between social distribution and direct production. As long as we cling to the view that workers’ money is being used to pay for, say, aged pensions, there will be growing pressure for self-funding through a form of social insurance such as exists in Europe and the US. This, of course, reproduces all the inequities of the labour market. But we should also be aware that some of these changes do involve increased costs in social investment. The increased proportion of aged in the community places new demands on health care. The historic erosion of the youth job market has increased costs in social investment. The continuing decline in the proportion of those (particularly the aged) of working age and those (particularly the aged) of non-working age. There is the changing balance between those of working age and those (particularly the aged) of non-working age. There is also the change in the proportion of children being reared in a two-parent family—particularly one which includes a working male.

Recognising this not only means honestly acknowledging a problem. It also means recognising a danger. We are at a point where the balance of public spending could well tip; so that the bulk of it becomes public investment in social infrastructure while the reallocation of income is privatised—that is, becomes nothing
more than a secondary redistribution of income whose primary allocation is the wage system. This is not only equitable, it is also the point at which we turn our back on the possibility of truly radical change.

The second area of challenge is already well under way. Because it is Labor, not the Festival of Light, that is doing it, we seem remarkably unexcited by the huge push to restore the concept of family dependence. The existence of junior unemployment benefits and incredibly low education allowances such as TEAS have always been an expression of this. But the creation of a new intermediate level of support for 16 and 17 year olds on the dole or in education was a major extension of it. The constant pressures for tertiary fees which means-test, not the student, but the parents will make it even more pervasive. All of this has been argued for on the grounds of equity.

But the most difficult area is the dramatic change to maintenance currently under way. Again, what is happening is the playing off of one notion of equity against another. No one should be unaware of the increase of child poverty. Some of this is because the traditional child payment, what is now the family allowance, has been washed away by non-indexation.

This crisis is a crisis of political discourse — an inability to find a way to talk about reality which is felt to engage with the fundamental issues at stake.

Most of it, however, comes from the huge social change which has seen a vast increase in divorce and single parent families. The level of supporting parents benefits, like all social security payments, is below the poverty line and hedged about with poverty traps. Maintenance payments have beensomething of a joke.

This is a case for just the kind of income restructuring I have just talked about. Equity demands that children should be supported by those who don’t have actual custody of them just as much as by those who do. But how is this to be interpreted? In what is easily the most substantial social security reform for years, the maintenance scheme which is to be brought in next year says that it is the income of the non-custodial parent — in effect, the father — which must be redistributed, reproducing in its entirety all the distortions of, not just the wage system, but the patriarchal wage system. Even across the bounds of separation, the economic dependency of the nuclear family has been resurrected.

Even worse, the maintenance review is currently arguing strongly for the mother’s own income, the supporting parent benefit which she is paid because parenting places her temporarily outside the workforce, to be made conditional on her identification of her child’s father — in some cases, for example, as rape or artificial insemination, creating a social link which never existed. For socialists, these developments should be in the forefront of our activities; because for us, the notion of dependence is much closer even than “equity” to our central concern with human freedom.

And finally, there is the reconstruction of the notion of “equity” itself. In one sense, the replacement of the notion of universalism with a needs-based model is basic to this with all the political problems. Davidson and many others have identified. But this, in itself, is not a notion of equity at all. It may be humane, even Christian, to comfort the poor and needy; but equity, of course, is about the fundamental changes which will provide equal access for all to the goods of society.

We have seen the beginning of a slide in meanings. Today, equity is coming to mean two things, at least in political circles. The first is an inversion of the notion of need. It is the principle that if you don’t genuinely need something you bloody well shouldn’t expect to get it. At the one end of this gut-level appeal is the silver-tail who collects a pension they don’t need. Surely that isn’t equitable or just?

At the other end we have the “dole bludger” who collects taxpayers’ money which they don’t deserve or for which they are not eligible. Once again, there is the iron law of justice. As Finance Minister Peter Walsh wrote in a recent article of mine in Australian Society, “Social justice, like any other form of justice is indivisible, we cannot say we are against fraud in one area of society, but turn a blind eye to it in others... a properly policed and administered welfare benefit payment system is an essential prerequisite of a just and equitable system of income distribution”.

It may be humane, even Christian, to comfort the poor and needy; but equity, of course, is about fundamental changes...

Is this notion of “justice” we imagined when we first talked of equity? Equity has become a matter of policing legitimate need. It has totally lost sight of any attempt to produce new, just, principles of distribution of incomes. Even the rich “need” retirement income. Certainly, they don’t need charity — but who does? There are so many better ways of meeting the income than the inevitably clumsy attempt to judge genuine need. And this is the second notion of equity we have been lumbered with. It’s a notion of “social accounting”, of working out not what needs demand to be satisfied (“to each according to their need”), but how to quantify needs, to rank them, and to balance them. These notions aren’t just the domain of the right. They have, for example, found their way into the left’s Social Justice Strategies.

It’s time the left became involved in this contest. It is a fundamental part of a struggle for socialism, and unless we re-enter the contest over the popular understanding of its key terms, its prospects are very dim.

ADAM FARRAR is editor of the aCOSS journal Impact in Sydney, and a member of the Communist Party.
The Spanish Civil War Remembered

It began fifty years ago this year, with an attempted coup against the recently-elected government of Socialists, Communists, liberals and, later, anarchists. It ended three years later in bitter defeat for the fledgling democratic Republic: a defeat which, as the left at the time correctly predicted, was the last stepping-stone to the Second World War. In between, it inspired thousands of anti-fascists worldwide to devote themselves to solidarity work, or to give up homes and families to take up arms for the Republican cause.

In November, a major two-day seminar in Sydney recalled this greatest of all solidarity movements and its effects on Australia, with talks by veterans of the struggle, films, music, and a photographic exhibition.

All for Franco 1936: the bishops of Burgos and army generals show their support.

'A La Pasionaria': Dolores Ibarruri, heroine of the civil war years, is still a leading Spanish communist at the age of 90.

A women's militia unit leaving Barcelona for the Aragon front in the early days of the war.

Republican soldiers of the 43rd ('Lost') division return to Spain from France, June 1938.
AFTER CHERNOBYL:
Peace, rights and freedom

Ken Coates

When we gathered earlier this year to commemorate those who perished in the first nuclear explosions at Hiroshima and Nagasaki, we were compelled to add the name of Chernobyl to our deliberations. Chernobyl was not a deliberate act of policy, but an accident. As an accident, it was much less serious than it might have been, and certainly less serious than it would have been, were it not for the supreme courage of those Soviet firemen who prevented the spread of conflagration from one reactor to the others at the cost of their own lives. Despite great organisational efforts, the after-effects of this disaster will endure, and remove from circulation lands and amenities which have been polluted to more lethal effect than the territories of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Humankind is deeply worried by the warnings we have received from Chernobyl, no less than by the terrible warnings which were detonated in the Japanese skies in the first half of August 1945.

As Mr. Gorbachev told us during his broadcast after the Chernobyl events, we have been given a reminder of the awful finality of nuclear war. Bertrand Russell used to claim that human beings could seek protection from adversity in one of two ways: there was the East Asian method of the Chinese who fought the floods by building dykes along the Yellow River; and there was the West Asian method of Noah, who “thought that the best protection was a virtuous life”. Gradually, the Chinese point of view has come to prevail, and people are more and more concerned to tackle their problems by relevant action, informed by thought. Nonetheless, Russell was not wrong to conclude that “a virtuous life is as necessary to survival as dykes”.

The Chernobyl plant was built close to major centres of population. Many ecologists, following the “Chinese” viewpoint, advocated that it should have been constructed elsewhere, very far from population centres. Let us imagine that this had happened. From where, then, would the courageous firemen have come? Because people lived near to the hazard, they were able to deal with it. If the plant had been in the frozen north, hours away from the necessary human intervention, then the disaster could have been many hundreds of times worse. This is no strong argument for building all new reactors close to population centres. Instead, it should persuade us that Noah was not wrong to seek his answer in a virtuous life. Rational
The choice about nuclear energy is not one of where best to locate its perils, but of whether they should be unleashed at all.

A classic problem of this kind emerged when, on 13 December 1985, an international congress of intellectuals met in Warsaw at the invitation of the Polish authorities. The agenda was to consider the problems of peace and disarmament. A variety of Polish oppositional organisations addressed an appeal to those visiting their country: it carried the title, Peace and Freedom are Inseparable.

The Polish opposition stated a number of justifiable complaints. The independent trade union movement, Solidarnosc, with ten million members, had been outlawed, and many of its leaders detained. Numerous independent social organisations had been disbanded at the same time. Despite efficient and rigorous repression, however, such organisations continue to operate in Poland clandestinely. So the statement of the oppositionists proclaims “You have come to a country where there is no peace”.

In the same way, there is certainly no peace in South Africa. Central America knows no peace. There is no peace in Afghanistan, Kampuchea, Eritrea, or any of the other zones of conflict and civil war. While no-one thinks such wars should be fought with nuclear weapons, there always remains a risk that they could spill over to embroil nuclear powers, and thus “escalate”. Injustice, wherever it is found, invites resistance and retaliation. Few among those living in happier circumstances would withhold their sympathy from such rebellion, even though it is overhung by Hiroshima, the shadow of which never leaves us.

The Polish authorities might be genuinely distressed to figure on such a list of oppressions as this. They did not choose their geographical location and would doubtless insist that their effort to promote discussions on peace were part of a more sustained effort to improve détente, and thus establish a more secure space for independent action. Indeed, it is entirely arguable that Poland’s continuing present crisis resulted directly from the efforts of previous Polish Governments to secure greater freedom of action within the Soviet sphere of influence. Why, other than to buy a degree of economic independence, should Polish ministers have borrowed so indiscriminately from Western banks? After the world oil crisis, such banks were desperate to lend to governments, and particularly to communist governments, which were thought to be among the safest potential recipients of funds. This was a miscalculation on both sides. Solidarnosc itself emerged in those Polish ports which experienced most directly the resultant trauma. In a desperate attempt to meet spiralling inflation in interest repayments, more and more frenzied efforts were made to export anything that would sell. Polish port workers found themselves cramming every ounce of meat into export-bound holds, while their wives would queue for hours for a tiny piece of sausage. Poland most assuredly undergoes a crisis of national independence, and there are extremely serious problems in her relationships with the Soviet Union. But those are not the only problems she faces. It was not the banks which banned Solidarnosc, even if they did precipitate the social crisis in which it was born. Those of us who are trade unionists, operating with greater or lesser degrees of freedom outside Poland, will all deplore the suppression of Poland’s independent unions, and want to express our sympathy and support for their political prisoners. It is not surprising that the decision to outlaw the trade union has deepened the crisis in which the Polish government operates. No doubt, among the ten million people
who had organised themselves in Solidarnosc, there will be sufficient numbers of active spirits to continue their agitation. The more that such agitation brings down further repression, the truer it will be to say that there is “no peace”. Even in countries where repression has been more effective, like Czechoslovakia, injustice and intolerance invite criticism and opposition. No-one should be reconciled to cynical usurpation. Does this mean, then, that there can be no co-existence?

Surely not. The struggles of Polish workers are in no way undermined by the existence of relatively normal relations between Poland and other states. If there is a detente in progress, the foreign journalists will be present in Poland, while Polish journalists are also stationed overseas. The more freedom such journalists experience, the more information will be spread about the state of opinion inside Polish factories. The more trade and cultural exchange there is, the more channels of effective communication there will be. Detente does not at all imply support for the Polish government in its relations with its own people, and still less does it imply endorsement of repression and tyranny. It is arguable that the most propitious conditions for tyranny are those of isolation. The less a country interacts with the wider outside world, the worse its leaders can behave. The more direct material benefits a government receives from international contact, the more reluctant it will be to put them in jeopardy. Of course, if tyrannies cross the bounds of civilised behaviour they may arouse moral revulsion which can produce the international argument on human rights is neither disinterested.nor is it always honestly conducted. There are many countries in which it is almost obligatory to disapprove of repression in Chile, but where the invasion of Czechoslovakia is always whitewashed. There are other countries in which the sufferings of Polish trade unions can be fully reported, but where such dreadful facts as the genocide in Timor are almost totally unknown and unreported. Selectivity in the news media is only part of the difficulty. Governments weigh in to deliberate effect. Thus, in the United States, after the debacle of Viet Nam, President Carter unleashed a major “human rights” offensive which had two edges.
when democratic expectations were minimal; but the rise of such expectations renders subject nations turbulent and the client governments unstable. The election of President Reagan gave a savage blow to the United States campaign for “human rights”: but this strategy of President Carter was already plainly collapsing even before the fall of his administration. Noam Chomsky has given us a magisterial description of the way in which this policy was dissembled, and of its cynical evasion of responsibility for consequences it had been designed to produce.

The majority of members of governments are normally, most of the time, as concerned for the maintenance of peace as are peace movements themselves. But the methods of governmental action necessarily base themselves on what is often miscalled “realism”. Governments build dykes. In flagrant contrast, the idealism of peace movements can sometimes be represented as “unrealistic”. Bertrand Russell, for instance, was a convinced advocate of world government. This is a perfectly logical proposal, and one which would imply the development of frameworks in which a whole series of innumerable other problems which would imply the development of frameworks in which a whole series of issues simultaneously serves to do more than simply inhibit successful reform. It also separates the agencies of change, and compels the subdivision of the objective of change. Of course, we all truly live in one world. We all truly desire peace in the world, and freedom, and the prospects of satisfying personal development for each individual among our peoples. But to bring more than a hundred governments into line to secure even the smallest step towards disarmament requires a major campaigning effort. It is not easy to co-ordinate the efforts of thirty different peace movements, or trade unions. Since each of these organisation acts on its national plane, it evolves its overriding national priorities. Democracy, to the extent that it exists, operates at that national level and reinforces the partial view. National action is practical, step by step. “Rational” and, of course, limited.

Peace and human rights, jobs and freedom, these abstract goods are threatened in a crisis which results directly from uncontrolled competition within a system of separate political authorities. To overcome this separation, and obtain the joint action which is necessary, we quickly learn that we must separate our issues, focussing all possible attention on the most precise pressure points. For peace, we do require disarmament and, above all, nuclear disarmament. It is easier to agitate against “the bomb” than it is to change the economic world, and remove the causes of slump, unemployment, and military competition. And yet all of us can perceive, and clearly, that the arms race correlates with economic crisis, and aggravates it all the time.

What, then, can we do? Separate national peace movements will not be able to evolve policies for the abolition of hunger and oppression, without taking on the duties of fully-fledged political parties. Usually they will find it easier to persuade existing political organisations to address such issues, than it would be to elbow aside all established organisations. For the foreseeable future, peace movements will still need to prioritise their chosen goals, and to maximise pressures to the best of their ability. All this argues for a further development of international contact and exchange, as one necessary counter to the problems of specialisation. And yet, there are other international pressures, which have already ensured that we have international organisations for human rights, international attempts at economic co-operation and a new international economic order, and international campaigns against hunger and poverty. Are we not arriving at the time when there needs to be some exchange between these separate initiatives? Is it premature to suggest that we should reach out towards one another, to knit together our efforts, not only to prevent the
world from destroying itself, but also to render it fit to live in?

World government may be a long haul, and a difficult one to achieve. But we do have already an organisation of United Nations, bringing together diplomats representing each separate state. The intermediate project which we need to match this dialogue of governments, is surely a United Peoples Organisation, in which all the peace movements and social organisations can begin to refine the linkages which can form world public opinion, and make it effective.

If the United Nations were to move towards a more integrated structure it would probably seek to establish two chambers for its deliberations: one consisting of governmental representatives, as at present; and the other consisting of persons chosen in a process of direct elections. Such proposals are seldom ventilated at the present time: although there are many people who would support them, and it cannot be doubted that they would help the development of relevant pressure groups. In the meantime, we have to make do with a growing network of non-governmental organisations. Everything which enlarges the scope for international democratic action helps to knit the world together. But the struggle for peace with human rights remains most active at the national level, in separate national territories, albeit with varying degrees of moral support from outside.

The most efficient globalism in the modern world has been established in completely non-democratic organisations. The giant transnational corporations extend their influence around the world, with cavalier disregard for the natural environment, and systematic indifference to humane social objectives. Frequently, they are directly involved in political pressures to neutralise democratic decisions, wherever these might threaten profitable operations. Prominent among such corporations are the largest military producers. When unaccountable power has obtained a near-universal scope, it is at great peril that the democratic process restricts itself to partial, blinkered, separate national development.

Some of the countries with very good policies on nuclear disarmament have somewhat bad histories of disrespect for human rights.

KEN COATES is chair of the Bertrand Russell Peace Foundation in Derbyshire, England, and has written widely on the labour and peace movements.
POLITICS AND THE PLEASURE PRINCIPLE

Carmel Shute

It is not surprising that it was a woman — and a woman anarchist at that — who uttered the immortal words, "If I can't dance, it's not my revolution". Male socialists have never waxed lyrical about pleasure in politics or the joy we might expect after the revolution. Altruism (saving the working class) and pleasure (having a good time) are mutually incompatible, or so we've given to understand.

Putting pleasure back into politics has been a bit of a hobby-horse for me over the last couple of years. Like all passions, all ideologies, it has a material basis — frustration with attending fifteen years of boring meetings on the left; exhaustion from attending these same boring meetings most nights and weekends; and despair about the diminishing influence of the left and the prospects for socialism in Australia.

Something must be wrong, I began to think, if we're all so tired and exhausted but getting nowhere fast. I became increasingly dispirited as I watched a number of my comrades-in-arms "burnt out" from to many meetings and not enough fun. Others got ulcers or retreated into their careers or middle-class lifestyles. Some have disappeared, never to be seen again, into the human potential movement, the Orange People. And who could blame them after so many years of mostly fruitless slog? I've been tempted myself by the idea of a more normal life — time to read, write letters or even articles, to see more of my friends, my lover, my lover's
children ... my mother's admonition that I should spend more time on myself rings in my ears. Undoubtedly she's right, but how does one square the desire to see socialism in one's lifetime with the need for a saner life on the left in the meantime?

So far, I've concluded that the only solution is to build a New, Larger Socialist Party (more people, less meetings) and, at the same time, to inject more pleasure into politics so there'll be more people to join the NLSP. One of the reasons that the left in Australia is so small is that our whole culture, our whole way of operating, is alien and unattractive. It is based on the denial of pleasure — and, by pleasure, I mean pleasure in the popular, everyday sense, not in some highfalutin' definition from the academics.

The leninist heritage of discipline, tight organisation, self-sacrifice and denial has undoubtedly played a big role in determining current left practice, more than seventy years on. But, in other societies, such as those of Southern Europe and Latin America, the puritanical aspects of leninism aren't so evident in many respects, perhaps because of vigorous peasant traditions of music, song, dance and festivities.

One of the reasons that the left in Australia is so small is that our whole culture, our whole way of operating, is alien and unattractive.

Unfortunately, we in Australia are saddled with a more repressive, Anglo-Saxon heritage. In Australia, the Irish perhaps came closest to meshing pleasure with politics — male drinking sessions in pubs, wakes, wonderful St. Patrick's Day festivals. However, this tradition was all but annihilated by the DLP split of the fifties and the rapid social mobility of the Irish in the post-war boom.

Most young activists “starting out” must find life on the left a bit strange. Our meetings are frequently characterised by harsh language and a<br><br>moralistic dogmatism. Often, we don't show a caring and supportive attitude towards our comrades. We aren't very understanding of comrades who can't make it to meetings for “personal” reasons. We often lack common courtesies like introducing strangers to each other. We don't go out of our way to make new activists feel at home. The gulf between the public and the private all too frequently becomes a chasm.

Activism on the left doesn't only mean little time for friends, family, and lovers, little time for sport, recreation, making love. It also means little time to do your share of the housework and child care. Of course, some male comrades still have their time on the left subsidised by women's labour in the home, though feminism has made this more problematic. “My wife's not interested in politics”, these comrades mumble defensively. Well, if she's not, we have to ask ourselves why? Is political activism on top of everything else (including perhaps financial support of professional revolutionary husbands) just too much? William Lane called women “the weary sex” in his 1892 novel The Workingman's Paradise, and political women are often even more weary with the triple burden of work, home and politics — often with little assistance from the men in their lives.

Though child care has now been tackled onto the agenda of every left group and party, we rarely address the larger question now of the oppressive relations between men and women on the left.

It's not simply a question of child care, as Marilyn Lake points out so urgently in the recent volume Moving Left: The Future of Socialism in Australia. Child care at meetings or conferences is not an answer for kids who've already spend thirty or forty hours in institutionalised child care. Nor is it an answer for parents who want to spend more time with their kids. It's a question of time, Lake says, determined by both the capitalist system and gender relations, and she advocates a twenty-five hour week so that men can enjoy the equal right to child care and housework while women assert their right to paid work. If men resumed their responsibilities as fathers, women might be freed to participate on more equal terms in politics. More importantly, the content and focus of our politics might shift considerably. John Halfpenny interviewed over a pile of steaming nappies? Laurie Carmichael speaking to the media while stirring a delicious pasta sauce? Who knows, maybe we could really come to grips with “Accord Mark III” over a hot tub or stove.
The denial of pleasure in left politics is reflected in our public image. We appear, too often, as latterday puritans, as hostile, angry and oppositional — “smash ...”, “ban ...”, “oppose ...” — always against something and not for much at all. Of course, there is lots to be angry about — but what we stand for, what constitutes our vision of a better society, gets lost in the welter of oppositional politics. A friend recently remarked that the left speaks the “language of hate”. She has a point — we should be speaking the language of love for our fellow human beings, of love for our natural environment, our country, for the oppressed people everywhere. At a recent conference, a comrade of forty-nine years’ standing remarked that the Brotherhood of St. Laurence had a better public presence than socialists. She advocated a more caring attitude on the left.

The bourgeois media, of course, loves to focus on our confrontations, strikes, demonstrations and internal disputes, but it is only partly to blame for the public perception of us. We could, if we wanted, also use the media more effectively to say other things — to project a more positive and attractive image. Our iconography — banners, badges, flags, posters, symbols — doesn’t do us much good in the public eye either. Too often, we borrow our symbols and slogans from overseas and they appear alien, un-Australian.

Last year, I twice tried to organise a discussion weekend on the theme “How to Survive Politics and Live to See Socialism in Your Lifetime: A Stress Management Weekend”. The camp never took place, however, because everyone had too many meetings to attend! What was also revealing, though, was that one male comrade asked me twice, “Who’s organising the group sex?” On another occasion, when I spoke about pleasure and politics, half a dozen male comrades made similar comments — which indicated that their only notion of pleasure was sexual pleasure.

Our notion of pleasure should, indeed, include the sexual. Eileen Phillips, who edited a book entitled The Left and the Erotic in Britain, quoted her friend’s reaction to the incongruous idea that there might be a relationship between the left and the erotic: “I can’t imagine anything less erotic than sitting on hard chairs in a smoky room trying to avoid the chairperson’s eye when they’re asking for volunteers for leaflets.” I believe we need to escape from that smoky room before we can properly discuss the left and the erotic — or, to put it another way, we need to work out who’s doing the washing-up before we ask if Lenin was correct to ask during his discussion with Klara Zetkin on free love, whether a normal person would drink out of “a glass with a rim greasy from many lips”.

If we’re going to convince more Australians that socialism offers a better future, if we’re to get a new socialist party off the ground, we have to abandon a politics where there are the speakers and the spoken to. We need more active, democratic forms of participation. In this respect, we have a lot to learn from the organising strategies of the environmental, peace and women’s movements.

While existing left groups and parties are increasingly moribund, these movements continue to draw in activists of all ages. I can’t speak from personal experience about the affinity groups which were the organising basis for campaigns — such as the successful action to save the Franklin — but, from all accounts, they were very effective. One of the participants at my Broad Left Conference workshop was an older leftie who confessed that he’d been initially sceptical about becoming involved in the Franklin campaign. At first, he said, he thought it was stupid for people to stand around in circles holding hands. Later, he found that...
"relating to each other" did not necessarily mean a loss of politics. "We sang, danced, chanted our way through the confrontations in front of the bulldozers, with the police, and even in going to jail". He concluded that massage, touching and closeness were essential for combatting the "heavy" machinery of capitalism — police, violence and jail.

I can, however, speak from firsthand experience of the women's movement and, to a lesser extent, the peace movement. Without a doubt, the women's movement offers a lot more pleasure than the men's (left) movement. Women's meetings do, to some extent, bridge the gulf between the personal and the political. Women are more caring, warm and friendly, less likely to be hung up on their egos, less likely to make long, hectoring speeches. The meetings are less structured, more likely to involve the sharing of laughter, food and drink.

The work still gets done. Women, more so than men, are likely to organise pleasurable things to do as part of a political campaign — dances, dinners, balls, film nights, raffles offering gourmet breakfasts in bed for one, two or three ... According to Cyndi Lauper, "Girls just want to have fun" and she's probably right. Before Lauper's song became a No. 1 hit, Doris Lessing spoke of the different behaviour of women when they're beyond male control: "... when the men go away, the women instantly create a kind of hedonistic, permissive world where they try on dresses, cook gossip and have a lovely time ..."

Lessing's point was admirably supported by one workshop participant who compared the divergent experiences of attending a Victorian ALP Socialist Left meeting and a meeting which celebrated the Women's Social and Political Coalition's first anniversary. The SL meeting, held, as always, on a Sunday morning — the same time as mass was, in fact, quite like mass. There were several priests, rather than one, but the fundamentals were the same — the word was given from the pulpit, there were ritual incantations at various stages, and then the money was collected (though not in velvet bags on the ends of sticks).

In contrast, the WSPC meeting's rituals were a lot less formalised and more friendly — discussion, films, a specially printed anniversary T-shirt, a cake decorated in purple, green and white, cups of tea, singing ... and no high priests!

What was clear from the workshop discussion is that women derive pleasure from a wider variety of sources in politics than do men. Men definitely get pleasure from a good fight, a good argument, a good win and getting drunk. Women are not immune from these pleasures but also enjoy other things — friendships (as opposed to mateship), exchanging confidences, and so on. I am reminded of Rosa Luxemburg's plea from the heart to her lover, Leo Jogiches: "Your letters contain nothing but nothing except for The Workers' Cause ... When I open your letters and see six sheets covered with debates about the Polish Socialist Party and not a single word about ... ordinary life, I feel faint".

We could well do with some small-scale hedonism in the left in Australia. Where are our festivals, our celebrations on a large or small scale? In much of Western Europe, the left parties maintain a rich and vibrant cultural life. They possess a long and
While we lost hundreds of thousands to the suburban wastelands, we gained millions of migrants...who brought with them different political traditions.

involving, music, song or theatre can be a great way of creating solidarity.

Singing *The Internationale* with 50,000 people — even if you don’t speak Spanish — transforms you into something greater. Music played a crucial role in drawing me and thousands of others into the left in the late 'sixties and early 'seventies. More recently, the songs of Midnight Oil have probably won more people to the left any more? The Workers’ Sports Federation of the 'thirties and, later, the Eureka Youth league, attracted thousands to the left by their organised sporting and social activities. We would do well to emulate them — and we might get fitter in the process.

The Palm Sunday rallies are the only vaguely leftish events to be successful in Australia’s recent past. This year’s Palm Sunday rally in Melbourne was a joyful, life affirming event — lots of street theatre, wonderful banners and costumes, anti-nuclear dogs, punks for peace, songs and music — all culminating in a festival near that monument to the dead, the Shrine of Remembrance. There were speeches for those who miss the ritual of mass and lots more besides — stalls, music, dancing, and lots of soft, green places to sit and talk with friends.

The peace movement can teach the left a thing or two about penetrating the outer reaches of suburbia and even country towns. Despite what some of the more elitist may think, it is possible to politicise the honest burghers of Glen Waverley and the disenchanted youth of Broadmeadows. The success of groups like People for Nuclear Disarmament rests precisely on its suburban network because this allows women to participate more actively. The left needs to concentrate less on overthrowing the state and more on building the grassroots organisation which, one hopes, will one day create a movement strong enough to tackle the state.

Palm Sunday rallies are positive, too, because they foster the equal involvement of men, women and children. If the left is really to encourage the greater participation of women, we have to organise more activities which children (and their parents) can attend — that is, less night meetings in the city, more picnics, festivals and recreational events. We will also need to reclaim some festivals like Melbourne’s Moomba, which was originally a labour movement celebration of the eight-hour day, but which has now been appropriated by the ruling class.

If we’re going to build a new broad-based socialist party and live to see socialism in our lifetime, let’s put some pleasure back into politics now, or, as they used to say in the days of my youth, “Keep a smile on your face, and a song in your heart, while you’re fighting the state”.

**NOTES**

1. Writing about her past in the Communist Party of Great Britain, Zelda Curtis says, “Some of the women in the party knew their place only to well. One such said she knew her role in the party was to make sure her husband, a leading comrade, was best able to perform his party responsibilities. She made sure, she said, he had good hot meals and clean clothing.” Z. Curtis, “Private Lives and Communism” in E. Phillips, ed., *The Left and the Erotic* (London, 1983), p. 154.


3. ibid., p. 144.


**CARMEL SHUTE** works for the ABC Staff Association in Melbourne, and is a member of the Communist Party.

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In our next issue, *ALR* will introduce a letters page to stimulate debate and to give readers a chance to air their thoughts and feelings about the articles they liked, the articles they hated, the “hidden agendas” they may have discovered, or the issues they feel are being ignored.

The deadline for letters for issue No. 99 is January 31, 1987. As a general rule, letters should be no longer than 250 words and, preferably, should be typewritten. The author’s address should be included, although this will not be printed.
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The cricket season is upon us again. We are relaxed, on holidays, well-disposed to share a Toohey's or two with our working class hero Doug Walters, eager to be told of the famous Gatting 'grittiness' and to view with pleasure the inevitable Border boundaries. We are prepared, in other words, to be entertained.

So it's with interest that we read that Greg Matthews, the 'punk of the pitch', really just wants to 'get married and buy a nice house in a good area, hopefully with a backyard for the kids'. We are asked to share the misery of Andrew Hilditch, who, though on top of the ACB payment scale, can no longer keep his place in the State team. We are required to applaud Geoff Lawson's courage and determination in overcoming a stress fracture in his back to return to the Test arena. We are taken behind the scenes to hear of Chris Matthews' dislike of televised cricket, and of the 'aggressiveness' of Merv Hughes, who has obviously been forgiven his errant ways.

And of course there is the larger-than-life Ian Botham, or 'Rambotham' as he has been dubbed by the English press. Botham's name is likely to appear as prominently in the gossip columns as in the sports features this summer. He has brought his mother with him on the trip — presumably as a ploy to defuse the constant sniping and media innuendos about his extra-curricular activities. Unfortunately for Ian it is likely that the presence of his mother will simply add to the media speculation. But fortunately for Ian he does have the services of an opportunistic publicity manager. If he does get some bad press, there is always the possibility that he'll embark upon a charity walk from Cape York to Wilson's promontory.

With all this media hype it is important that we don't miss another media event taking place this season. No, I'm not referring to the cricket, but to the strategies of the multinational corporations involved in sports sponsorship and promotion. What we will see on our screens this summer is further evidence of the penetration of cricket by big business.

Let me explain. In the pre-war years of corner-store capitalism — before the Age of Television — little advantage could be gained by a small firm which embarked upon an extensive (and expensive) advertising campaign at a sports fixture. An 'Eat MacDonalds' Hamburgers' sign placed on a picket fence in the 1930s would not have had much impact: it would after all have been viewed only by the spectators at the ground. And if poor old MacDonald had only one small milk bar (say in Caringbah or Coburg) it is unlikely that even the hungriest of fans would have taken the bus or tram from the ground to sample his wares.

Things have changed with the advent of television and the growth of transnational capital. Today's corporate firms not only have the resources to pour millions into advertising, but they recognise also that any modern advertising strategy requires constant brand exposure to foster sales and build corporate image. Our corner-store MacDonald has gone the way of the dodo, to be replaced by a transnational of the same name. More importantly, this corporate 'family' store has a branch in Caringbah and Coburg, and four or five more in the vicinity of any major sports ground.

For years the ABC, as the guardian of Australian 'high' culture, had a preserve in the quasi-religious ritual of televising Test matches. A reliable and receptive audience had been built up over this time, an audience which corporate capital was unable to exploit. It tried, of course. The first
evidence of change was the appearance of company names on the picket fences at all major cricket grounds. The growth of this form of advertising was the corporate response to the Australian government's decision in 1976 to ban tobacco advertising from television screens. One of the ironic side-effects of the ban was that the picket-fence promotions enabled the sponsoring tobacco firms to obtain exclusive coverage on the ABC — a non-commercial network officially off-limits to all forms of advertising! In value-for-money terms the cigarette sponsors appear to be doing particularly well out of brand-name exposure. It is a relatively cheap form of advertising which heightens public recognition of the role of tobacco forms in sports promotion — something essential in ensuring continued community acceptance of tobacco products. As sports writer Bob Stewart noted in the recent book *Power Play*:

Whereas in 1978 some $50 million was spent on corporate sponsorship, by 1983 it had risen to $150 million, with the tobacco and alcohol industries collectively contributing between fifteen and twenty per cent of total sponsored funding.

Unlike the cigarette firms, which are left with no option but to advertise at the grounds, many of the other corporations (including alcohol companies) have been keen to extend their penetration of televised sport. It was Kerry Packer who recognised that if he were to gain control of Test cricket he would be able to sell this audience — as a form of commodity — to prospective advertisers. It was also no coincidence that at the time Packer made his move on cricket, Australia's commercial stations were placed in the somewhat difficult position of having to increase Australian content while pursuing general cost reductions. It was estimated that an hour of Australian drama cost something in the order of seven times that of an hour's cricket coverage. Cricket clearly won the day in the cheap entertainment stakes.

The rest, of course, is history. While Packer failed in his 1977 bid for exclusive rights to televise cricket, his not-so-subtle strategy of purchasing the entire Test team (transforming the players, in the process, into rather expensive commodities) paid dividends. In a 1979 out-of-court settlement TCN gained exclusive rights to the Tests and one-day fixtures. Thanks to Packer we now have the pleasure of listening to the profoundities of Bill Lawry, and the computer-chip recollections of Ritchie Benaud, in between advertisement for MacDonalds, Toyota, Meadow Lea and Tooheys. In some cases a player holding up a Big Mac or a can of beer will be the same one who has cracked the ball for six in the previous over. In this way the key players become symbols of corporate power, transferring their prestige and credibility to the products they have chosen to endorse.

Advertising now saturates the TV screen. The needs of advertisers rather than the interests and concerns of viewers become the overriding preoccupation of the TV stations. The style and format of the one-day games — the breaks between overs and fall of wicket, the commentary, the camera angles, the replays — are all part of the media's contrived tension. And while the 'Bewdy Border' signs and other messages of hero worship from dedicated supporters may hang for a while in front of the coveted corporate signs, these little symbols of genuine enthusiasm are quickly and unceremoniously removed by the security guards, whose job it is to see that the roving cameras gain maximum coverage of the sponsors' brand names.

What happens when sport becomes totally commercialised? There are several obvious outcomes. For one, the players, most of whom were attracted to sport for its intrinsic pleasure, become little more than entertainers 'producing' performances for their sponsors. Behaviour which is aggressive, confrontationist and spectacular is highlighted. The crowd is persuaded that the only legitimate excitement in sport comes through gladiatorial combat.

Successful players are judged according to their 'productivity', measured by arun-rate or strike rate. Those with style, flair and genuine team spirit may soon discover that...
these qualities fall well behind performance and reliability in the hierarchy of desirable characteristics.

Moreover, Ian Harriss has argued that the demise of leg spin and the virtual disappearance of batsmen with the ability and temperament of players like Victor Trumper has mirrored a broader change taking place within society. He argues that efficiency and risk minimisation in bowling and batting parallels the technico-bureaucratic concerns of modern-day capitalists, rather than the aristocratic, 'gentlemanly' preoccupations found among the eighteenth century agrarian bourgeoisie.

A final outcome of the growing commercialisation of cricket is the increased incidence of player and spectator violence. Colin Tatz, writing in Power Play argues that commercialisation and corruption have gone hand in hand as two of the main features of professionalised sport. In international cricket, 'sledging' and intimidation have become normal features of the game. Crowd disorder has been of growing concern to the authorities. In January 1986 beer cans, concrete and metal strips were among objects hurled by rival Australian and New Zealand fans at a one-day international at the SCG. Eighty eight people were subsequently arrested. In January 1985 extra police were mobilised to curb violence during an Australia vs West Indies fixture. In February 1984 fifty-three people were arrested after brawls broke out on the Hill at the SCG. A month before eighty people had been arrested for brawling. The summer before sixty were arrested in a single day after a policewoman was attacked while patrolling the ground. In January 1982 seventy-nine fans were arrested following a beer can fight. And these incidents relate only to the SCG!

What sports psychologists and sociologists have come to recognise is that aggression, violence and intimidation on the field of play, as well as the social construction of violence via media commentary, actually increases the likelihood of imitative violence among spectators. And, of course, that violence is more than likely to occur when crowds are dominated by young males with access to alcohol — the very same alcohol promoted by the sponsors. As cricket becomes, or is construed to have become, more 'combative', so we are likely to witness the growth of violence in the grandstands. A NSW Government report released in mid-1985 confirmed that limited-over night matches were the games likely to promote the most violence and disorder.

We should not be content to criticise the manipulated action and 'language of warfare' on the TV screens without mentioning similar developments in the popular press. And we need not look far for examples. In an introduction to this season's England tour the Daily Mirror brought Jeff Thomson back from obscurity to preview the series. In Thommo's words:

I could never cop the Poms...As soon as they lobbed in here in '74 I couldn't wait to have a crack at 'em. I thought 'stuff that stiff upper lip. Let's see how stiff it is when it's split'.

He readily acknowledged that he had a 'taste for Pom's blood'. Thomson is trading upon our nationalism, our dislike of English pretensions, our support for the cocky but competent working class boy made good. But he is also trading up on violence. A more 'restrained' Dennis Lillee is on the record for similar remarks:

When you're out in the middle you have to hate the opposition player...I didn't mind hitting a batsman. If I could hit a batsman in the chest or the arm or the thigh pad, or the inner thigh or something like that, (I'd) maybe make him worry a little...I think it's all part of the game.

This new breed of cricket professionals, the entrepreneurs of the oval, expose the code of behaviour and provide the role models for the new breed of cricket spectator. As sport has become increasingly commercialised there is only one principle which is confirmed — by the media, by the sports stars, by Kim Hughes and his team in South Africa — nothing is sacred except the almighty dollar. Its pursuit is viewed not only as legitimate but as laudatory in a world of individual competitiveness and reward-for-risk ethics. I'm not at all sure I'm looking forward to this season's spectacle.

Geoff Lawrence

GEOFF LAWRENCE teaches sociology at the Riverina-Murray Institute of Higher Education in NSW. He is the co-editor, with David Rowe, of a recent collection of essays on the sociology of sport, Power Play, published by Hale and Iremonger.

Op-shop fashion

Most people like to dress nicely (leaving aside for a moment the definition of nice) but it's pretty expensive trying to do it on the dole, or even on the average wage. So how do you do it? Quite simply, with second-hand clothes.

Second-hand clothes are hand-me-downs, other people's throw-outs or, most often, goods purchased from an opportunity shop or fete. For a lot of us, before we can even think of dressing fashionably in second-hand clothes, we have to get over the fear/shame/bad memories thrown up by wearing someone else's clothes. I, for one, spent many an adolescent hour closeted in my room too ashamed to go to the school dance dressed in my St. Vincent de Paul specials. Somehow they seemed even worse than my sister's (or brother's) hand-me-downs, especially when a tell-tale fifty cents price tag would seem to appear suddenly on the cuff of my shirt just as my newest heart-throb approached. And certainly I felt a lot worse off than those who had newly-purchased clothes, no matter how daggy I thought they were in other ways. It was bad enough that my jeans came from the Best & Less boys' department, without the obligatory (or so I thought at age fifteen) Levi's tag, but to think that my "best dress", most of my
underwear, and all my jumpers came from one of the three op-shops in Hornsby. Shame ...

So how do you go from shame to pride still wearing basically the same clothes? For me it was a matter of necessity: either I had to give up any pretensions of being a well-dressed woman, or start op-shopping to fill the gaps in my wardrobe. I chose the latter course many years ago now, and I haven't looked back since.

Of course, with op-shop clothes, it is well-nigh impossible to dress to look like everyone else — but then that's also one of the nicer aspects of op-shop dressing. It gives you the chance to explore your own creativity, to find new ways of dressing appealingly, to make a new "fashion". It gives you much more scope.

Since it's a very cheap way of dressing you can afford to have much more in your wardrobe than if you depended entirely upon newly-purchased goods (especially if you go for what's currently "in" — the prices can be phenomenal). Many people, of course, are satisfied with just enough clothing to keep them warm and respectable — a basic need we all have, and one which is admirably fulfilled by second-hand clothes. But, then again, you can lay out and buy a couple of garments in one day if you've got the cash; you can have lots of dresses/shirts/trousers/skirts to choose from, and so increase your fashion potential at an exponential rate.

Practically every suburb or town has at least one op-shop. Op-shop clothes are very accessible. It may take longer to find something that suits than in, say, Grace Bros, but eventually you will find that half the pleasure is in the search. What you turn up is invariably a gem. Op-shop clothes are often better made than present-day clothing, and generally of sturdier fabrics too, not to mention the wider variety of styles to choose from.

For example, I could never afford a cashmere sweater if I didn't know about op-shops, but now I can boast the luxury and warmth of three or four cashmere garments in my cupboard. The same goes for warm winter coats — compare my $6.00 recently purchased woollen coat complete with silk lining, with the $100 wool-mix coat of similar style worn by a well-paid friend of mine. I find, too, that old-fashioned woollen spencers/singlets/long underpants and so on are far superior to modern ones, and though they may have kept someone else warm for many a winter's day, they still do a marvellous job of warming me — and for a fraction of the price.

Regardless of the style of clothing you like, you will soon find more than enough that is to your liking. Being practical, op-shopping may also turn up some garments that are no less than objets d'art. I have in my wardrobe quite a few dresses, almost unwearable because of their particularly outlandish style, which were bought for 20¢ each at a school fete some time ago. I know that before they leave my possession I will manage to wear each of them at least once. And you can have something for every occasion. Everyday wear, party clothes, gardening outfits, not to mention the necessary social security job interview outfit for those special days: for the price of a new pair of jeans, you can have all of these. And, with cheap clothes, you can better afford to mix 'n'match, as well as dispose of those things you're sick of to make room for new purchases. Once you have an idea of what you feel both comfortable and attractive in, you can have endless fun tracking down and wearing your new-old clothes.

The first step is to find your local op-shop. Look up the phone book (Under Organisations — Benevolent) or ask a local shopkeeper. Once you have made sure of its opening hours (op-shops being largely staffed by volunteers, tend to have erratic business hours) you're all set to get dressed.

Op-shops are usually run by church or welfare organisations, including animal welfare organisations — for instance, the Cat Protection Society Ladies Auxiliary, opportunity shop in the Sydney suburb of Enmore — but not, alas, at this stage by organisations on the left. You might worry about the politics of supporting a particularly conservative welfare or religious society (as, indeed, I do) but I figure that if they're prepared to sell very cheap clothes, kitchenware, furniture and so on, it can't hurt to frequent their shops. There are exceptions — I have to confess to having shopped more than once at the Loyal Orange Society's op-shop — something I once promised myself I would never do. School fetes, jumble sales and Tribune fairs are, of course, a must for every shopper. Details of these can usually be found in your local newspaper.

So now you know how to find these new-old clothes — go to it, and wear them. You may have to suffer some comments from friends or workmates about how terribly old-fashioned you look (but remember that whatever you've got will be back in mainstream fashion again eventually — tell them you're ahead of the times, not behind), but you will get admiring glances, too. And think of the savings you will make — paying the rent will never be so difficult again (only marginally, of course, what with the price of housing rising every day). For the price of one volume of Das Kapital, you can look like a million dollars ...

Cait Perry

Cait Perry works at Shelter, a Sydney housing co-op, and is a member of the Communist Party.
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Worlds Apart: The Books of Nawal el Sa’adawi

An overview by MARTINA NIGHTINGALE

The numerous cases which I saw in my clinic made me decide to devote a good part of my life to the task of unmasking the double face of the society in which we live, a society which preaches virtue and morality and practices something very different in secret.

(The Hidden Face of Eve, page 16.)

This quote explains a great deal about why Nawal el Sa’adawi’s books are so compelling, disturbing and yet ultimately hopeful. Although writing has always been an important part of her life, she trained and practised as a doctor and a psychiatrist and worked at the policy level for a considerable period. It is only more recently, in the last ten years, that she has devoted her time almost solely to the written word. Her experience as a doctor and psychiatrist treating women for the physical symptoms of their oppression motivated her to expose the real causes. This political commitment is infectious, even to the most apolitical of her readers, because the awful facts, the limitations, and outright cruelty inflicted on women are presented with such irrefutable logic.

At one level, Nawal’s writing is a passionate appeal to our basic feelings of humanity, justice and compassion. Nawal is not a writer in the ordinary sense. Her books are an expression of her political activism which also extends into participation in the organised women’s movement and to advocating women’s rights in every public forum available to her. She helped to establish the Arab Women’s Association which is the first staunchly feminist organisation in the Arab world. She is also playing a significant role in setting up a women’s publishing house. Her recent visit to Australia as part of the Adelaide Festival Writers’ Week was as much used to forge links with Australian feminists as it was to promote herself as a writer. Predictably, she was one of a very small number of international women writers invited to the festival. At least, the good press coverage generated by her visit offered some compensation and extended further her already well established reputation as a writer, a socialist, and a forthright advocate of women’s liberation.

Part of her familiarity can be explained by the very practical fact that she is one of the few Arab women writers whose work has been translated into English. As she herself points out, there are other brilliant Arab women writers who are well known in their own region, but who are simply not accessible to a Western readership. This is not to dismiss her considerable literary achievements, not to underrate her important contribution in assisting Western readers to develop a more informed understanding of women’s oppression in the Arab world.

Nawal has written twenty-two books but, unfortunately, only five are
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currently available in English. Nevertheless, they do give an indication of Nawal's major concerns and her approach as a writer of both fiction and non-fiction.

The Hidden Face of Eve was the first of Nawal's books to be translated into English. Using the straightforward style which is characteristic of her writing, she describes her own personal experiences of growing up in Egypt, and explains what it is like to become a woman in the Middle East. This book is remembered by many feminists for challenging our rather glib assumptions about Arab women. Regrettably, in hindsight, our tendency had been to pronounce that the oppression of women in so-called Third World countries was a result of religious superstition and underdevelopment. We pointed to the practice of clitorodectomy (the excision of the clitoris) and women being forced to wear veils, as evidence of extreme backwardness in the Arab world and, by inference, we viewed Western women as more liberated.

In The Hidden Face of Eve and throughout her other writings, Nawal emphatically rejects these notions. She asserts that Western imperialism, patriarchal relations and capitalism combine to maintain women's inferior status and to keep the majority of the population in extreme poverty. This oppression is justified on religious grounds, but it is not necessarily inherent in Islamic teachings.

The widespread practice of clitorodectomy is used to illustrate her point. Nawal traces the origins of this practice to earlier than the advent of Islam and beyond the confines of Arab countries.

She argues that clitorodectomy is not religious, but patriarchal. By diminishing women's sexuality it is more possible to keep women monogamous and thereby secure the patriarchal family line. Nawal points out that, in the West, the Freudian notion of infaltilc clitoral orgasm serves a similar function in stunting women's sexual pleasure.

But Nawal is in no way apologising for this cruel practice. In fact, the terrifying experience of clitorodectomy is a recurring theme in her novels and, as she explains in the opening chapter of The Hidden Face of Eve, had a devastating impact on her own girlhood:

I was six years old when I lay in my bed, warm and peaceful in that pleasurable state halfway between wakefulness and sleep ... They carried me to the bathroom ... I did not know what they had cut from my body and I did not try to find out.

The pain here is not only physical. The nightmarish quality is also the result of being kept in ignorance about her body. Nawal recalls other significant events which should have been natural parts of growing up, such as her first period. She remembers feeling dirty, ashamed and frightened. Yet Nawal came from a relatively well-educated family who at least understood the basics of physical health. Through her studies on women and sex, Nawal uncovered a level of ignorance and superstition too horrific to contemplate, including the widespread yet hidden incidence of sexual abuse and incest.

In the second half of the book, the earlier chapters on women's sexuality are placed in the wider context of the limitations placed on women's education and work opportunities, their lack of protection from abuse and their enshrined secondary status under the law. Hardly surprisingly, women in Arab countries share common ground with women all round the world. Yet, while the similarities should be emphasised, Nawal sees the differences as crucial. They mean that Arab women have different priorities from those of Western women, including national...
liberation and fighting against dire economic hardship.

Nor is it surprising that The Hidden Face of Eve, along with her book Women and Sex, was extremely controversial. As she explains in the introduction:

There is no doubt that to write about women in Arab countries, especially if the author is herself a woman, is to tread on difficult and sensitive areas. It is like picking your way through territory chasy with visible and hidden mines.

To question the moral codes justified as part of Islam did indeed prove a dangerous occupation. Her book Women and Sex led to Nawal's dismissal from her influential post as Director of Health in the Egyptian Ministry of Public Health. In 1981 she was imprisoned for her political writing.

During her visit to Australia, Nawal was cheerfully philosophical about this experience. When asked about her stay in prison she replied that, although it was a difficult time, there were also compensations which made the experience worthwhile. She met many brave and wonderful women, she said, and her time was not wasted because it had provided the inspiration for two new books.

One of these, Memoirs from the Women's Prison has recently been published in English. Like all Nawal's books, it is immensely readable. It shows Nawal's tremendous courage and resistance amid harsh and extremely squalid conditions. But, far from purposely depicting herself heroically, her crucial role in maintaining morale and organising resistance is considerably understated. Yet even a dispassionate record of events indicate her positive effect on the other prisoners.

Her descriptions of prison show that there was very little to be positive about. There were twelve women huddled together in the one vermin-infested cell, with disgusting food, wooden benches for beds, no proper toilet facilities, no contact with the outside world and no indication as to if or when they would be released.

They were political prisoners ranging from the extreme left to the ultra right, with Nawal placing herself as "more or less the independent writer in between". This combination is hardly a recipe for harmonious relations. Still, they managed to live together remarkably well. Their dire circumstances forced them not only to accommodate each other, but also to strong attachments which have endured well beyond their three months' confinement.

Memoirs from the Women's Prison is much more than a diary of a difficult experience. It is a study of political suppression under Egypt's President Sadat and the consequences of repression at a personal level. The life of an extreme fundamentalist woman entails being deprived of physical movement and independent thought. They are not allowed to laugh or cry or to show any signs of human emotion. They must be covered at all times and ordinary bodily functions are a source of unspeakable shame. At the other end of the spectrum, the dogmatic marxist revolutionary is also repressed. Every emotion has to be subsumed to the revolutionary cause, thereby stunting her capacity to communicate with others. Nawal's simple but significant point is that religion's fanaticism and political dogma converge to produce personal and political repression.

In both The Hidden Face of Eve and Memoirs from the Women's Prison, Nawal emerges as her own best character. Those of us lucky enough to have met her during her brief stay in Australia would testify that she is indeed a striking and dynamic personality, with a strong sense of the dramatic and an infectious sense of humour. Fortunately for her readers, she is able to transfer these characteristics to print. But such personal exposure is threatening for any writer, especially for a woman writing from a feminist perspective. By placing herself at the centre of her writings, Nawal not only challenges the assumption that objectivity is confined to academic conventions, she discards the protection offered by being removed from her subject matter.

From a literary perspective, Nawal also stretches the distinctions between fiction and non-fiction. Much of The Hidden Face of Eve is highly dramatic and, on one level, Memoirs from the Women's Prison can be read like a novel, with an identifiable plot and well-drawn characters. It is when Nawal moves into the realm of conventional third-person narrative that her writing often lacks the warmth and vitality infused into her other works. Two Women in One and God Dies by the Nile fall into this category. While still dealing with her central concern of women's oppression in the Arab world, the characters fail to do justice to this theme.

Two Women in One tells the story of a young woman caught between the powerful forces of tradition and the enticing but scary possibilities of an independent life. Although Nawal's political message is clear, the central character is one-dimensional, reduced to a mere vehicle for her feminist purpose.

Similarly, God Dies by the Nile can be read as a fictional account of the subject matter in The Hidden Face of Eve. A peasant family is relentlessly exploited and victimised at the hands of a corrupt village establishment. The novel is a metaphor for the Sadat regime, landlord oppression and the vulnerability of an illiterate and poverty-stricken population.

The characterisation of Zakeya and her family relies heavily on imagery from the natural world. Often it is as if they experience life through a series of inexplicable sensations and emotions. Even Zakeya's moment of revenge appears to come from a force outside herself. At times, the limitations of character development make very irritating reading. Evil characters are signalled by long, clinical descriptions of their nasty disabilities which are, in turn, linked to disgusting personal habits, a depraved sexuality and moral bankruptcy.

These devices are also used in Women at Point Zero, yet this book is by far Nawal's best novel to date. It is a powerful and inspiring account of a woman prostitute who is imprisoned and about to be hanged for killing a pimp. The novel begins with Nawal describing the events leading to her meeting Firdaus in prison. At first, Firdaus refuses to meet with Nawal. When she changes her mind, we are
transported into Firdaus' cell. The rest of the novel consists of Firdaus telling her life story just hours before she is to be hanged.

_Woman at Point Zero_ is based on the true story of a woman Nawal met while conducting her study on women and neurosis. Nawal has said that the novel is, in fact, eighty percent non-fiction and twenty percent fiction. Perhaps this firm basis in reality distinguishes this novel so markedly from the others. Certainly, the simple, direct and totally unsentimental voice of Firdaus, as she talks about her deprivation, abuse and ultimate revenge, is not unlike Nawal's own style in _Memoirs from the Women's Prison._

Undoubtedly, the situations described in _Woman at Point Zero_ contain the compelling combination of drama and tragedy, a fact recognised by several producers who lost no time in adapting it for the stage. For women readers, especially, Firdaus' revenge, however short-lived, on the pimp who threatened her life merits our applause. Equally, we cannot but admire her refusal to grovel to the authorities for a pardon, although we would not condone such violence as a means of combatting sexual oppression. But Nawal has explained that Firdaus and the character Bahaih in _Two Women in One_ did not win. The theme in both these books is that it is impossible for an individual women to fight alone. The two characters' failure is completely consistent with Nawal's feminist convictions enunciated so clearly in _The Hidden Face of Eve._ The only avenue for women's liberation is for women to unite together and connect our concerns with the struggles for economic and social justice everywhere.

While so much more can be said about Nawal el Sa'adawi both as a writer and a political activist, my purpose here has merely been to tempt potential Sa'adawi fans to delve more deeply and discover for themselves the many pleasures and insights found in her books. Hopefully, we can also help create some pressure for the remaining seventeen books still not available to us to be translated into English.


MARTINA NIGHTINGALE is a member of the _Scarlet Woman_ editorial collective in Melbourne, and a member of the Communist Party. She interviewed Nawal el Sa'adawi on her recent visit to Australia.

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**Guilty feelings**

_Eating Your Heart Out_ by Ramona Koval (Penguin, 1986). Reviewed by PAVALA MILLER.

On the back cover of _Eating Your Heart Out_, the publishers tell us that the book is for “everyone who worries about their weight”. They are wrong. The book is also for those, worried or not, who want to understand the making of one of the overwhelming concerns of people today. In her book, Ramona Koval takes on two important tasks. Firstly, she sets out to demolish the seemingly natural character of the “ideal” bodily shape. Secondly, she exposes the trickery and dangerous practices of many sections of the weight control industry.

Only fifty years ago, advertisements in Australian newspapers invited women to “transform ugly hollows into graceful curves”; a few years earlier, an advertisement offered to “put 10, 15, yes, 20 pounds of good solid ‘stay there’ flesh on your bones”. Today, teenage models, looking “like pipe cleaners”, entice mature women to “bite chunks out of their weight problem” and to “create a slim, sexy great body in record time”. The ideal changes, but the pressure on people to conform to it remains. Women in particular, Ramona Koval argues, channel many problems and frustrations of their everyday life into an obsession with food. Rather than attempting to deal with the causes of these problems, the “body industry” aggressively and enthusiastically cashes in. Conforming to a changing and elusive ideal body shape is presented as an easy solution to problems ranging from unemployment to poor health or an unsatisfactory sex life. In fact, dieting and other weight-control measures may be a source of greater health problems than those which they are used to solve.

With a degree in Microbiology and Genetics and a delightful sense of humour, Ramona Koval does a convincing job of demolishing the link between health and thin bodies — so much so that many thin people might feel a slight twinge of unease. Certainly, “those thin people who maintain their weight through a combination of rigorous dieting, food obsessions and self-hatred do not fall into the category of healthy”... Fatness,
on the other hand, may be one of the risk factors associated with some diseases, but does not necessarily cause them. Indeed, the book favours the view that fat and skinny people are part of the natural range of human diversity; and that the sickness and misery of fat people depend not only on their weight but on their sensitivity to persecution on account of their weight.

While research on the link between weight and health remains inconclusive, some parts of the weight control industry seem to present a considerable health hazard. In the chapter on the medical wing of the industry, the author presents detailed information on the various drugs and surgical procedures used by the medical profession to control weight. As yet, there seems to be no satisfactory drug which can lead to the permanent loss of large amounts of weight. The available surgical procedures are often dangerous and have limited success. Whatever the case, medical practitioners in Australia do not receive adequate training in diet and nutrition. Indeed, the author argues that fatness in itself is not a disease. White middle class doctors, however, tend to see the body shape acquired by the women of their class as the ideal, and assume not only that other social groups share their ideals, but that poorer women, too, have the time, resources and inclination regularly to attend fitness clubs and purchase health foods.

The food industry and many of its products are subject to even stronger criticisms. Even those who tend to be sceptical of the claims of advertisers will find some surprises. Did you know that Weight Watchers International is owned by Heinz (of the Heinz beans)?; that a Weight Watchers brand of breakfast cereal contains more kilojoules per 100 grams than the same kind of breakfast cereal produced by the same company under its own name?; that Purina toasted muesli contains 26 percent sugar?

In terms of quick profit, however, perhaps the highest stakes are involved in commercial weight-loss centres, dieting clubs and similar enterprises. Although little systematic information is available about these, Ramona Koval documents some of the rip-offs and dangerous practices involved. In particular, she points out that, for some people, some forms of exercise can lead to a serious deterioration of health. Once the first visit is over, however, health fitness club staff seem to offer little professional guidance to their clients. Several of the “miracle diets” analysed in the book do not fare much better: they might give miraculous profits to their promoters, but are based on misleading medical information, are dangerous to health — and do not work in the long run.

Unlike most books about food and dieting, Eating Your Heart Out leaves the readers guilty about their innermost desire to lose weight and, unintentionally, makes skinny people feel somewhat uneasy. Unintentionally, since the main message of the book is undoubtedly: “Feel good about your body, whatever size and shape it is”. Those readers who remain convinced that they, for whatever reason, need to lose weight, will have to read between the lines to work out the best way to do it.

The problem remains that in our society many people do have unhealthy jobs and lifestyles, and often develop serious disorders such as anorexia and bulimia associated with food. In her chapter on strategies for change, the author discusses two ways forward. On an economic level, this is a thorough and stringent regulation of the weight control industry. On an individual level, she discusses the possibilities opened up by feminist psychotherapists working with groups of women who have problems with food. Yet, in the long run, increased self-esteem and feeling good about our bodies is not enough. In the end, we must demand healthy, meaningful livelihoods for all people, adequate incomes and leisure (even for women), and cheap, widely available healthy foods. In other words, the emphasis should be only partly on feeling good about ourselves, but also on making sure we all have a lot to feel good about.

I highly recommend the book — it is not often that we can chuckle our way through a readable, scholarly demolition job on a major social institution.

PAVLA MILLER teaches Education at Melbourne University, and is a member of the ALR collective.

**Slimming: the impossible ideal.**

**Shelflife**

How times change! Twenty years ago, Australian books about socialist history or politics were a comparative rarity. Almost all of those published came from a handful of sources, usually closely tied to the organised left. The most prolific sources of progressive literature were Current Book Distributors (run by the Communist Party) and the Australasian Book Society.

Current Books, apart from being the distributor of almost all the works of Marx, Engels and Lenin available in Australia, published hundreds of pamphlets, booklets, and books about Australian politics, usually written by leading figures in the Communist Party. The Australasian Book Society concentrated more on fiction with a progressive bent, with a range of
authors such as Judah Waten, Frank Hardy, Mary Gilmour and John Morrison, and was responsible for making available, through its subscription list, a range of new writing long before Australian literature became widely fashionable. It was also a publisher of non-fiction, including Noel Ebbels' pioneering book, *The Australian Labor Movement 1850-1907*. There were other small left publishers, including magazines like *Dissent* and *Outlook*. Major commercial publishers, though, would have little or nothing to do with the left. Companies like Cheshire or Angus and Robertson published the odd book of interest to socialists, but virtually nothing which could be described as radical.

A short browse through the shelves of any good bookshop these days shows how much things have changed. Particularly over the last decade, there has been a real explosion of left publishing in Australia. Part of the reason for this has been the growth of small left presses such as Kibble Books (an offshoot of the journal *Arena*), the Melbourne feminist collective Sybylla Press, Sydney's Alternative Publishing Co-operative, and Stained Wattle Press, which have been responsible for the availability of an increasing range of socialist and feminist publications.

In addition, there is a number of new Australian publishers who cannot really be described as radical publishers, but whose lists include numerous socialist and feminist titles. Probably the most notable of these is the Sydney company Hale and Iremonger who, alongside such delights as *Stumpjumpers: A New Breed of Australians*, with its profiles of Bob Ansett and his kind, have published or republished a wide range of books on labour history and politics and various feminist writings, including two collections from the Women and Labour Conferences. Others who are publishing radical work include Hyland House and Kangaroo Press.

What has been most important, though, in widening the availability of radical writings in this country is the readiness of major international publishers to handle books which are explicitly socialist or feminist. With one important exception — Pluto Press Australia — these companies are straightforward capitalist concerns, and their willingness to publish such books is basically because they believe they can sell enough to make a profit. Of course, there are socialists and feminists working for such companies but, ultimately, decisions about publishing programs in what are merely local branches of multinational enterprises have to get past the accountants.

The number of these companies which have been tempted to explore the radical market in recent years, and the successes of those who have developed a good list of books from the Australian left, is an important reminder of the potential size of the left in this country. For major publishers like Penguin and Collins to print 3,000 copies of a book is to do no more than break even, and most of their publications have much larger print-runs. I think the beginning of Penguin's radical publishing was with *A New Britannia* in 1970 (a book which they are about to reissue in a revised edition) and their persistence with such publishing ever since points to their ability to reach an audience far larger than those of us on the left usually contemplate.

Pluto Press is somewhat different — being the Australian branch of an established radical publisher in Britain. Of course, radical publishers are still motivated by concerns of profit, even if only to pay for more publishing, but their reason for being is to develop a strong list of left books. In the short time it has operated in this country, Pluto has certainly started to do that, with local publications like *Moving Left, Health and Safety at Work, Thank God for the Revolution*, and *The Accord... and Beyond*. It has also done an excellent job of producing and promoting Australian editions of books like *Red Brotherhood at War* and *The War Against East Timor*.

At least in scale, however, the biggest publisher of radical books in Australia today is Allen and Unwin, the local branch of a very old and established British publisher. It is certainly not just a radical publisher — one of its recent lead titles was *Thoroughbred Studs of Australia and New Zealand* but its lists include numerous titles on feminism, labour history, and contemporary Australian society, politics and culture from a radical standpoint.

Anyone who knows Allen and Unwin's British publishing concern would probably get a big surprise to see what it is doing in Australia. Apart from a solid, conservative academic list, the UK parent company survives on books on cricket, cooking and railways, and the novels of J.R. Tolkien. Who could have guessed that all those readers of *Lord of the Rings* would end up paying for the publication of books like Lloyd Edmonds' *Letters from Spain*, Game and Pringle's *Gender at Work*, or the works of Bob Connell? In one way, though, the wheel has come full cycle. Allen and Unwin has been formed over the years by the merger of various smaller publishers, and one of the original ones was a company called Swann Sonnenschein — the original publishers in English of Marx's *Capital*.

But the problem for the left in relying on publishers who are simply in it for the money is that, in a world of takeovers and mergers, the publishers whom we now rely on for dissemination of our writings may end up, in a year or two, concentrating on publishing texts for business management. One of the more enthusiastic sharks of recent times in British (and Australian) publishing is an American named Rupert Murdoch — a figure quite capable of making decisions about cutting radical publishing, even if it does make a profit. Similarly, Allen and Unwin UK has recently been sold to a new owner. At this stage, it seems that this won't make any difference to the way the Australian branch works — but the possibility that it could show up the difficulties, as well as the possibilities, inherent in the present state of publishing on the left.

KEN NORLING works in the International Bookshop in Melbourne, and is a member of the Communist Party.
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