

The Non-Conformist

A Map of Days: Life on the Left, by Denis Freney. Heinemann 1991. \$24.95. Reviewed by Roy Forward.

For nearly 40 years Denis Freney has been the radical political agitator par excellence, deeply involving himself in campaigns for student rights, the Labor split, the NSW Teachers' Federation, the ALP, the CPA, various trotskyst groups, anti-apartheid—including stopping the Springboks—Algerian independence through the FLN, self-management, the Vietnam war, gay lib, Aboriginal rights, East Timor and Fretilin, the Nugan Hand bank, Polish Solidarity and now the New Left Party. To a big output in journalism and pamphleteering he has added valuable works on the CIA's Australian connections, on Nazi terrorism in Australia and on Timor.

Now, in this scintillating autobiography, Denis emerges as one of our very best writers. He is his own hero, and that is the autobiographer's privilege, but in Denis' case it is completely justified and ensures that the story of his personal and political development is enthralling, entertaining and thought-provoking. I am left with enormous fellow-feeling with, and admiration for, the subject/author.

Not content with fighting one good cause after another he has always agonised over the great question of revolution versus reform, coming up, not surprisingly, with different answers at different times and for different countries. His highly-developed ability to learn from experience and to change his ideas when they get too out of accord with facts leaves him musing over what this makes him now. Whatever his answer, it is obvious he will continue



Denis Freney (right) plays at being a journalist in a New Theatre play 1958

to be a valuable strategist to have on your side.

His revolutionary work took him to over 20 countries on many occasions. Given his love of mixing business with pleasure he is suitably wry about being a revolutionary tourist, though he has never been to the Soviet Union, China, Vietnam or the Americas. It is clear that he has relished it all, including the self-sacrificing grind of organisational work that was also sometimes dangerously illegal.

He is wickedly good at the thumbnail sketch, so the book is worth buying just for those of Douglas Darby, Bob Brown, Bruce McFarlane, Paddy McGuinness, Bob Gould, Nick Origlass, Bob Askin, Ken Kemshead, Joe Harris, Laurie Aarons, Ken Coates, Robin Blackburn, Brian Laver, Albert Langer, Joe Palmada, Alec and Mavis Robertson, Bernie Taft and others.

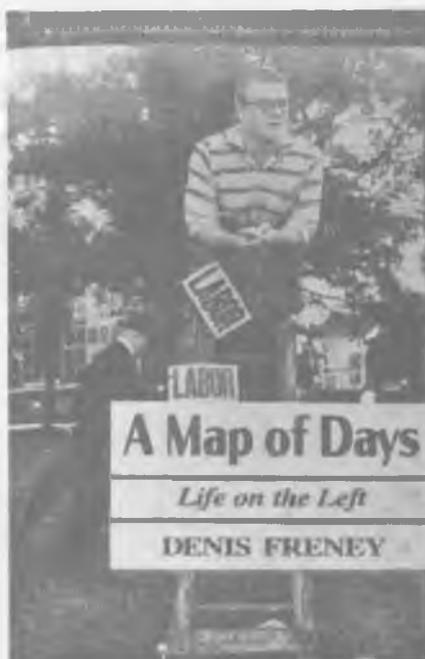
As one of the small band of Australians born in 1936 (the least productive

year quantitatively this century) Denis is also worth reading on what it was like growing up in the 1940s and 50s. His frankness makes it easy for us to identify with his experiences, though I'm not sure how far we can generalise from his habit of adding tomato sauce to tripe in white sauce to give a bright pink result.

Naturally, it is a frankness which is shaped. For example he tells us about his earlier heterosexual and his later homosexual encounters, thereby also tracing the changing sexual mores of Australians in the 1950s to the 1980s. But by telling us about them now, and by not telling us about other aspects of his sexual life, he is following a script society has written for him. That script, even in an age of gross overpopulation and rampant AIDS, continues to link sex and personal relationships. Omitted, after a reference to his first wet dreams, is the most common sexual practice by everybody—be they homos, heteros

or lesos—and that is masturbation. Since the personal is political, the consequences of this kind of self-censorship could do with some analysis: it probably perpetuates the loading of responsibility for one's sexual relief onto others (mainly, I suspect, by men onto women) and privatises the process of growth so that self-loathing or narcissistic self-love are the outcomes.

Even when he is frank he is sometimes incurious about himself, as about the sources of occasional outbursts of physical violence. In every other respect he presents himself as an almost unbelievable goody-goody who would "never even think of" crossing a school playground dividing line, was "prudish" about sex, "had a puritanical attitude towards cigarettes", was "embarrassed" at public swearing, and so on. He even claims, surely disingenuously, that he "never injected my political views on the Vietnam war, socialism or anything else into my classroom teaching". But on violence he lets it hang out: the dent in the kitchen wall where he hurled a frying pan at a younger sister in "one of those arguments about washing and drying up"; and while others held a Nazi on the ground he "began kicking his bald head. My rubber-soled desert boots bounced ineffectively off it as he whimpered like a child". Yet he says "my father never raised a hand against any of us, ever" and nowhere speculates about what could cause such uncharacteristic behaviour in himself.



There is also a problem about his education. Sometimes university is wasted on the young, so it is distressing to realise that Denis graduated when he had only just turned 19. For he tells us nothing about any intellectual awakening for him there, or any scholar's influence, or any great debates—only that he crammed before each annual exam and wrote one history essay on the abolition of slavery in the West Indies and another on nationalism which paraphrased Stalin. Denis is inclined to blame himself and his political work, but it must be true that in large part he was let down by Sydney University itself.

In his 20s and 30s he found it impossible to reconcile the political, sexual and family parts of his life. His need to earn money also led him into further compartmentalisation as, when in South Africa, he taught white children the contents of apartheid textbooks by rote. He was able to find a more unified identity eventually by modifying his politics, by coming out, and by 'divorcing' (à la RD Laing and David Cooper) all the members of his 'family' and reconstructing more adult relationships with them.

For all that he remains a loner, although he does seem always to have enjoyed a close relationship with one of his younger sisters. It has given him a lot of not unwelcome freedom, and has been a precondition for his full-time activism—which in turn has given him many compensations for his lonesomeness.

His conclusion is that his first 50 years "had been fulfilling and the fight worth fighting...Happiness was a transitory illusion, while joy was something seldom experienced but which lived forever. It was won only through struggle, fought alone, sucking the stones of the desert of one's inner self." I would add what modesty forbade him saying—that those years also show a remarkable record of achievement on behalf of others.

ROY FORWARD recently returned to Canberra after teaching Australian studies in China.



ADVERTISE

with
Australian
Left
Review

For information on advertising
contact Ros Bragg on (02) 281 7668

Anal Sects

Redemption. A Novel by Tariq Ali. Chatto & Windus (London) 1990. \$39.95 and The New American Fascism by Dennis King. Doubleday, USA 1988. Reviewed by Denis Freney.

Tariq Ali is one of best known trotskysts in the English-speaking world. In the turbulent years of protest against the Vietnam War and the birth of student radicalism, Tariq Ali was to Britain what Danny the Red was to France. They were both outsiders—Cohn-Bendit a German Jew and Ali a Pakistani. Danny was an anarchist and Tariq a trotskyst, but nevertheless they had much in common.

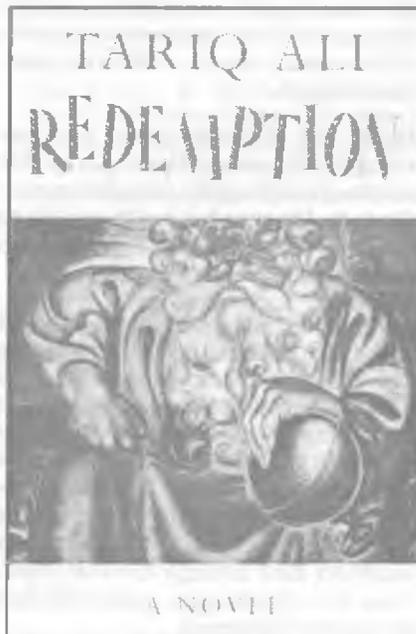
Tariq remained a follower of Ernst Mandel, the Belgian marxist whose prolific writings cover a bewildering number of topics. Now it appears the relationship has ended, in part as a result of the impact of events in Eastern Europe and the USSR in recent years.

Ali's satire on the trotskyst movement renders Mandel as the model for the main character, Ezra Einstein. Ali does not deal with him as harshly as most others in the satire, laughing at him more in sorrow than in anger. The book opens with Mandel/Einstein contemplating the collapse of stalinism in Eastern Europe, and specifically the execution of Ceausescu.

However, the workers' uprisings are not for socialist democracy and self-management, but rather represent a victory for pro-capitalist forces, despite Ezra's momentary enthusiasm for the new Romanian Prime Minister Petr Roman, who was a trotskyst 'sympathiser' in France in 1968. The book does contain as a sort of sub-plot some serious discussion of the collapse of communism and the future of socialism worldwide.

The ageing Einstein/Mandel decides to rebuild the movement by holding a special world congress at which he will unveil his latest grand scheme to achieve political salvation. He decides to invite all his old enemies in the various splinter trotskyst sects.

First there are the Americans of PISPAW (Proletarian International



Socialist Party of American Workers) modelled closely on the US trotskyst group, the Socialist Workers Party (SWP). Also invited are Frank Hood and the Hoodlums, (identical to the Socialist Labour League/Workers Revolutionary Party of the late Gerry Healy), and Jed Burroughs (uncannily like Ted Grant) leader of the Burrowers (the Militant Tendency) who are busily infiltrating the Labour Party.

Also from Britain come 'The Rockers' (International Socialists) led by Jimmy Rock (Tony Cliff), while the International Satanist Tendency (Spartacist Tendency) make their noisy 'intervention'! Comrade Diablo (Pablo) and assorted others including the sinister Swiss (The Cuckoo), the various French factions and Renard, the underworld contact of the movement, arrive. The renegade Austra-

lians' (the Percy brothers' Democratic Socialist Party/Socialist Workers Party) refuse to attend, after splitting because they backed Brezhnev on Afghanistan.

I knew quite a few of the main characters satirised by Ali and although there's naturally exaggeration in the portrayal of them, it's not as great as the uninitiated may think. Fact is stranger than fiction in the world of the sects!

And when the fractured trotskyst church decides to unite in a new form of 'entrism', the brilliant conclusion of the book has a crazy logic...

Tariq Ali's satire reminded me of the broader impact cults have had over the past 20 years. Most think of these cults as being exclusively religious, arising from the upsurge of interest in Eastern religions and old-style Bible Belt fundamentalism. They've drawn on modern psychological techniques and the sophisticated science of mass marketing, public relations and media manipulation.

The political cults/sects have learned from their competitors in the religious field. The classic example are the LaRouchians, followers of former trotskyst Lyndon LaRouche, now in prison in the United States for fraud. They swung from ultra-left to neo-fascist in a few short years and in the Reagan years had access to the White House.

The amazing story of LaRouche, as told by Dennis King in *The New American Fascism* cannot be canvassed in detail here. LaRouche did, however, learn much from British trotskyst sect leader Gerry Healy who almost appointed him leader of the American Healyites. LaRouche however wanted to be the supreme leader himself and broke with Healy as he had with the American SWP shortly before.

"Any experienced leader in the socialist movement knows exactly how 'brainwashing' is accomplished," LaRouche later wrote. First, you "isolate and publicly

degrade dangerous individuals". Once they are psychologically "broken", you "assimilate" them into your machine as "useful party hacks". It's a fair summary of the Healy method, which was also used by most of the other sects satirised by Ali and by many stalinist and Nazi parties, for that matter.

LaRouche used techniques similar to those of confrontational therapy practised by psychological cults. He would choose a follower at random, who would be subjected to non-stop attacks on every aspect of the victim's behaviour by other followers. The victim usually broke down, sobbing uncontrollably. One ex-NCLC member described it as "pure psychological terror" resulting in an extreme form of "depersonalisation". NCLC members were transformed into "snivelling informers vying with each other for LaRouche's approval."

But this was only the first stage. In 1974, LaRouche "discovered" his very own 'Manchurian Candidate', Christopher White, who had annoyed LaRouche by marrying the leader's former girlfriend. White suffered something of a nervous breakdown. LaRouche announced that White had been tortured and brainwashed by the CIA and British intelligence. On hearing a 'trigger word', he was to kill his wife, then finger LaRouche for assassination by a Cuban frogman.

LaRouche and White filed complaints with the UN Commission on Human Rights and launched a lawsuit against the CIA. Lurid descriptions of White's torture were fed to the LaRouche membership in tales of heavy electric shock, eating excrement, homosexual rape of all variations...

To his followers, LaRouche announced that sceptics who didn't believe the story were "subhuman": "The human race is at stake. Either we win or there is no humanity". In the atmosphere of mass hysteria, his followers rushed forward to confess that they too had been brainwashed by the CIA and were 'Manchurian Candidates'.

With such depersonalised and terrorised followers LaRouche was able to take them from the ultra-left to neofascism. He was happy to see those not completely brainwashed drop out.

LaRouche could not have succeeded as he did politically without wooing the Reagan Administration and by shrewdly championing the nuclear fusion energy lobby and the Star Wars concept before they became fashionable. Through seemingly respectable rightwing lobby groups, he gained access to the far-right nuclear warriors and through them an open door into the Reagan administration at its very beginning.

While relations were being built at top levels in Washington, the LaRouchian empire was being maintained by defrauding elderly rightwing people of their life savings, given as loans which were never repaid.

LaRouche also sought respectability by launching his own 'War on Drugs' while secretly dealing with organised crime and heroin cartels. One of LaRouche's main theories relates to Dope Inc which supposedly controls the world narcotics trade and is in turn run by the Queen of England. And even she—naturally!—is a tool of the International Jewish Conspiracy.

Finally, such an outrageously daring operation had to fall to pieces. Defectors told the truth, some media had enough conscience to print it and the old ladies and men who had lost millions to LaRouche's loans fraud came forward. LaRouche found his powerful friends were not enough to keep him out of prison.

If you read these two books side by side, you don't know whether to laugh or cry. One thing is certain: you'll be doubly wary when you're button-holed by one of the followers of a sect...

DENIS FRENEY is the author of *A Map of Days: Life on the Left* (reviewed above).

Judy Horacek

Contemporary theory tells us that there is no objective reality. Different people will see things in different ways. For example:

Lesson 2 Not a Rorschach blot test	 A rectangle	 A window	 A parking spot	 A grave
---	--	---	--	--

Thus it can be seen that there are optional realities. However the USA mistakes this for "realistic options" as in the phrase "war is the only realistic option". This New Word Order leads to turning other countries into graveyards, or carparks, depending on your point of view.