

# Settling Old Scores

*The Cameron Diaries* by Clyde Cameron. Allen and Unwin, 1990. Hardback, rrp \$49.95. Reviewed by Mungo MacCallum.

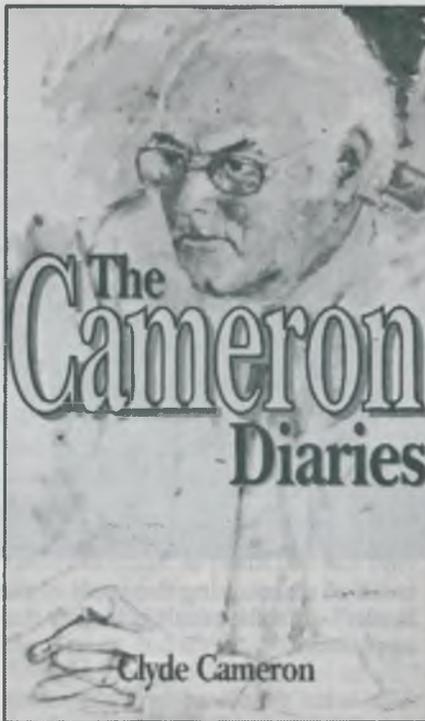
The difficulty with Clyde Cameron's diaries is deciding how much of them to believe. This is not because Cameron indulges in fantasies or memory lapses, as might have been the case had Sir William McMahon ever found a publisher for his memoirs; it is because a large part of Cameron's reminiscence consists of gloating accounts of how he was able to deceive and mislead his colleagues. It is the old logical paradox of the man who comes up to you and says: "I am a liar." In this instance, is he just for once telling the truth?

But let's be charitable - a concession Cameron himself seldom makes. Let's assume that the man once described by W C Wentworth, a politician with whom he had a love-hate relationship, as "a predatory owl" is being strictly honest in recounting his actions and feelings in 1976 and 1977. If this is the case, the Labor Party was in an even worse mess than it appeared at the time.

Not only had it to face the trauma following the devastation of the 1975 dismissal and the subsequent election; it had to contend with an extraordinary amount of internal conspiring, backstabbing and recrimination which at times went very close to outright treachery. And, again, if we are to believe him, the Hon. Clyde Robert Cameron, MHR, was the unquestioned ringleader.

It is quite extraordinary that Cameron should regard this as a matter for self-congratulation, as he does for nearly 900 closely written pages. To most normal supporters of the Labor movement, the events of 1975 were a catastrophe forced upon it by external enemies. Labor's own inexperience in

government and economic management did not help - nor did Gough Whitlam's insistence on standards far more rigorous than those adopted by any national government before or since - but, after all, it was not the government which perverted the composition of the Senate, or which blocked Supply, or dismissed itself.



When the parliamentary party left the caucus room on November 11 singing "Solidarity Forever", most of us assumed that the party's leaders and particularly the ones in a position to hold their seats would, indeed, be solid. The damage inflicted from outside was bad enough; to add to it from the inside would be sheer political masochism.

But Cameron saw it differently. Like his Calvinist Scottish forebears, he welcomed the prospect of a great cleansing fire to sweep through the party - provided, of course, he was the one who decided whom it should consume. Head of the list was Edward Gough Whitlam.

Cameron claims that his aim in constantly undermining Whitlam's leadership - sometimes openly, often not - was based on a genuine conviction that Whitlam had become an irrevocable liability for the party. Political rehabilitation was impossible and therefore amputation was the only option. He glosses over the fact that, at the start of 1976, no one else - not his favoured candidate Lionel Bowen, not Bill Hayden, not even Bob Hawke if a seat could have been found for him - wanted to take over the leadership. There was simply no alternative to Whitlam.

Cameron, however, refused to accept the inevitable, and spent the next two years working against Whitlam. In this way his "genuine conviction" became a self-fulfilling prophecy. Clearly, if it was obvious to any outsider that Whitlam's own party was conspiring against him, the general public would never accept him as leader. It is impossible to quantify just how much this constant destabilising operation affected the 1977 election result, but Cameron is totally disingenuous in not even considering it as a factor.

It is also very difficult to accept that Cameron acted as he did for altruistic, rather than vindictive, motives. There are simply too many giveaways in his own words.

All the other characters who appear in his diaries are fairly consistently referred to either by given names (for friends and allies) or by surnames (for rivals and enemies). With Whitlam, there is a constant ambivalence: "Gough" on one page and "Whitlam" on the next. Cameron also describes Whitlam and his supporters as "the enemy", despite the fact that, whether he liked it or not, they remained the majority of the caucus and the overwhelming majority of the Labor rank and file for the whole period of which he writes.

But most revealing is Cameron's obsession with his removal from the Labour and Immigration portfolio in 1975. He keeps returning to it like a dog to an old bone, worrying away at it long after it is obvious that there is



Clyde Cameron as a "fresh-faced parliamentary tenderfoot"

no more meat to be extracted. He insists on referring to it as a "sacking" (it wasn't; Jim Cairns and Rex Connor were sacked, Cameron was moved as part of a fairly extensive reshuffle) and professes a total inability to understand why it happened. Indeed, he seems to have asked almost everyone he met for a theory, and comes up with some truly bizarre ones.

The more obvious explanation - that Cameron was identified with the old guard of big spenders, and had therefore himself become an electoral liability in a high profile economic portfolio - just does not seem to have occurred to him. Cameron's work in the early days of the government and his use of the Commonwealth public service as a crucible to test such things as maternity leave, anti-discrimination and equal rights, were of enormous social benefit; they will rightly be seen as his great political monument.

But they did not come cheap. By 1975 the public was no longer in a lavish mood. Just how far Cameron was from realising this can be seen in his condemnation of Hayden's 1975 budget, which he described as a Liberal document, a betrayal of Labor principles and a sell-out to conservative economics.

The irony of this summation can best be appreciated from the fact that he spent most of the next two years running Hayden to take over from Whitlam, whom even Cameron admits from time to time, in a rather sheepish fashion, was a major Labor figure. When Hayden eventually became leader after the 1977 debacle, Cameron backed him without much enthusiasm until Hawke entered parliament, when he immediately switched his allegiance. In the last few years he has spent some time writing increasingly critical and abrasive letters to Hawke.

At least there is some consistency here; the last Labor leader with whom he felt any real affinity (according to his own account) was Ben Chifley, and that was back in the days when Cameron was a fresh-faced parliamentary tenderfoot. Curiously, he still writes about Chifley almost as though they were contemporaries. It is hard not to conclude that he would much rather have had his time in the limelight in the 1940s than in the 1970s.

Apart from the ground-breaking industrial legislation he introduced, there is another, more physical, monument to Cameron's time in government: the Clyde Cameron Trade Union Training College at Albury-Wodonga, a regional centre which almost, but not quite, worked in the pioneering days of the Whitlam government.

From his days in the Australian Workers Union, Cameron had seen the imperative need to produce union officials with the skills to take the employers and their lawyers on at their own game; hence the project.

It is a strange piece of modernist architecture, full of winding corridors that pop out in unexpected places or finish as dead ends; a little, an unkind critic might say, like Cameron's politics. But this would hardly be fair. Twenty-three continuous years in opposition for a keen young reformist with a zealous sense of social justice had to be frustrating to the point of paranoia.

For many of those 23 years, and not only during the DLP split, Labor's members became progressively more introspective; their main preoccupation was internal. Cameron was very much part of this process and, while he was able to break the habit of a lifetime for at least part of his brief period as a minister, it was all too easy to revert when things returned to what most Australians (and most politicians, including Labor politicians) considered normal.

The *Cameron Diaries* are a valuable addition to the political library, but they need to be placed in context: the writings of an unusual man, about unusual events, in unusual times. Cameron's place in history as a social reformer is more solid, and more deserved, than that of an embittered diarist.

MUNGO MACCALLUM was traipsing the parliamentary corridors as a journalist at the same time, and after, Clyde Cameron.

# Pacific Pandemonium

*Blood on Their Banner: Nationalist Struggles in the South Pacific*, by David Robie, Pluto Press, 1989. Reviewed by Rowan Callick.

That "the South Pacific is no longer pacific", as Pluto Press exclaims in its breathless blurb for *Blood on Their Banner*, a new book by New Zealander David Robie, is not merely the ultimate truism; it was never in human history "pacific", save for a brief repressed colonial interlude - itself punctuated in the western islands by the devastating Pacific War.

Conflict, fear, treachery and inter-tribal colonisation were the currency of these islands as far back as oral history can reconstruct it, and as a visit to any of the museums of the region will testify.

Robie focuses on the stories of political development from about 1968-88 in - primarily - New Caledonia, and also French Polynesia, Fiji, Vanuatu, and - though not technically in the South Pacific - Belau, Irian Jaya and East Timor.

Marie-Therese and Bengt Danielson, brave voices in the wealthy Tahitian wilderness, claim in their introduction that Robie has produced "a series of well-documented analyses and overviews in which he clearly shows how the ultimate cause of the conflicts and revolts in the Pacific is everywhere the same, and has to do with the maintenance and strengthening of the colonial system".

Unfortunately, they are doubly wrong. First, the book's strength - indeed, almost its entire content - is its recounting of the narratives of struggle within the scenarios Robie has selected, with a valuable index to boot. Its analyses and overviews are few and thin. Second, and especially if the present tense is applied, the "ultimate cause of conflicts" might be viewed as much to do with the re-

emergence of traditional enmities and aspirations due to the stretching of ill-suited constitutions, post-independence, past their cohesive limits, as with the strengthening of colonialism - however deep the continuing anguish within the few remaining colonies, such as Tahiti.



Further, Robie himself goes on to claim that "nationalist aspirations now define the politics of the South Pacific", whereas again a stronger case might be made for the major impetus to be coming from economic aspirations in the 1990s. This factor of the creation and distribution of wealth, central in any social struggle, is only considered - and then in passing - in his treatment of Fiji.

Robie concludes with perceptive questions with which the book might more aptly have begun, questions such as: "Is the solution to colonial racism the substitution of indigenous chauvinist supremacy?" In the event, the question remains rhetorical. For a portion of Robie's own sympathies appear to be enlisted by a number of leaders whose main principle is remarkably akin to "indigenous chauvinism".

The labelling of island leaders - such as Kanak Eloi Machoro as the Che Guevara or Robespierre of the Pacific, Dr Timoci Bavadra as the "new messiah" of rural western Fijians, or of Timorese Rosa Muki Bonaparte as her country's Rosa Luxemburg (all three now dead) - presents the socially concerned Australian with an impression of the conscious participation by charismatic Pacific leaders in a global political struggle with which they only peremptorily identified.

Indeed, this in itself raises more unanswered questions. Why was there such little collaboration between independence movements in the region, barring sporadic conferences that chiefly focused on anti-nuclear themes? Why, 19 years after its first meeting, is it only the cause of New Caledonia which the South Pacific Forum has taken up with any seriousness in terms of decolonisation? Part of the answer lies in the very lack of seriousness with which the metropolitan powers, perhaps barring France, went about colonising 'their' islands in the first place. This was then reflected in the desultory manner in which colonies were largely managed and finally shed, if with onerous conditions on the part of the USA.

The roles of Australia and New Zealand, of the churches (especially through the Pacific Conference of Churches) and of the Forum - which have all voiced criticism during the period Robie is writing about, and are not always inimical to popular movements - only receive cursory examination.

The social context, too, is largely missing; how significant, numerically, are the movements under discussion? What social conditions drove them? How did daily life differ between the islands under investigation?

And what of the ironies that arrive with power - or with its frustration? Barak Sope is quoted, from his time as secretary general of Vanuatu's governing Vanuaaku Pati, as saying four years ago: "The trident submarine may be a far cry from a black-

birding vessel, but to us they are both ships from the same fleet. That is why Vanuatu is opposing nuclear colonialism in the Pacific." Earlier this year, however, the same ambitious politician - now in opposition, with his own party - was in Washington courting official support, pledging the reopening of Vanuatu ports to nuclear vessels; just as Bernard Narokobi, civil rights champion of Papua New Guinea turned Justice Minister, last July referred to an Amnesty International report damning PNG's human rights abuses on Bougainville, as "criminal, illegal and immoral". Pacific rhetoric is notoriously misleading at times.

But *Blood on Their Banner* is useful both as a primer for those who have not followed events in the French Pacific, in particular - including in the bizarre French-British condominium (or as Robie aptly quotes popular usage,

"pandemonium") of New Hebrides/Vanuatu - during the 1970s and 1980s, and as a reference work for those more familiar with events, here conveniently chronicled between two covers.

Robie's book must be welcomed, for all its shortcomings (chiefly, its failure to pull off the claimed trick of drawing disparate threads together, and its selective focus which overlooks major players, including PNG). For it adds weight - and conscientious, committed weight - to a very thin list of resources available to those both within and without the South Pacific who wish to comprehend something of this complex, fractured region of extraordinary cultures and peoples, with its poverty of isolation which is both a defence and a handicap. It is a region of considerably more significance to Australians than, say, Central America; one in which

Australia, by dint of its very geography and economy, let alone its military strategy, is inextricably involved. Yet how many leftwing Australians know as much about Fiji, say, as they do about Nicaragua?

David Robie, to his credit, has stuck to his focus of the South Pacific, all but uniquely among Australasian journalists. His sympathies may occasionally go awry, his heroes chase money or worse, but his heart is in the right place. In Australia, in comparison, it is too often by default the self-consciously 'pragmatic' Right that monopolises commentary on the region.

**ROWAN CALLICK**, for 11 years based in Papua New Guinea, is a staff writer for *Time Australia*, and a columnist for the *Australian Financial Review*.

## SPORT

### AND LEISURE

#### Trends in Australian Popular Culture

edited by

David Rowe and Geoff Lawrence

A unique book for the Australian market. Discover for yourself the truth behind Australia's sporting and leisure culture.

*From the introduction...*

The term 'sport', derived from the Middle-English word 'sporten', once meant 'to divert' — that is, to amuse. There is still diversion in sport, but it is diversion of people's minds from social issues and the diversion of their money into the hands of those who control the leisure industry. Similarly, the term 'leisure' is derived from its Latin root 'licere', meaning 'licence' or freedom. Today, leisure increasingly means the illusory freedom of the market and the licence to print money.

0 7295 0349 6    \$29.95    300pp    March 1990

Please order through your regular bookseller  
or from

**Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Australia**  
30-52 Smidmore Street Marrickville NSW  
Tel (02) 517 8999 Fax (02) 517 2249

Prices are recommended only and subject to change without notice.



## Refractory Girl

### A Feminist Journal

*Refractory Girl* publishes material on all matters of concern to women. Recent issues have included articles on women in the bureaucracy, feminist theory, sexual harassment, women and prisons, protective legislation, women's health centres.

Plus reviews of academic and popular texts and fiction and poetry.

RG 33 - Industry Restructuring, National health policy, Defactos.

RG 34 - from Western Australia

#### Next Issues:

RG 35 - Women and Technology

RG 36 - Women and Violence

**RG welcomes contributions:** Please forward two typed copies with S.A.E. to address below:

#### Subscriptions:

Individuals \$20 for four issues. Institutions \$30 for four issues. (Overseas mailing add \$12).

Back copies available \$4.

*Refractory Girl*

P.O. Box 696, Petersham, NSW 2049

# Whistle Blower

**Who Framed Colin Wallace?** by Paul Foot. Fan Books, \$12.99.pb. Reviewed by Denis Freney.

**Peter Wright of *Spycatcher* fame was not the first to tell of the plots that MI5 had hatched to remove British Labour Prime Minister Harold Wilson from office on suspicion that he was a Soviet mole.**

It was Colin Wallace, a former devoted member of British military intelligence and specialist in 'black propaganda' in Northern Ireland, who got the Wilson coup story into the British media while Wright and his publishers were fighting the Thatcher government for the right to circulate *Spycatcher*. The allegations against Wilson were ridiculous, based on the ultra-right paranoia of British spooks, of whom Wright himself was one of the worst.

Paul Foot, a well-known British investigative journalist with the *Daily Mirror*, and whose leftwing sympathies are never hidden, met Wallace in April 1987, several months after the former army officer was released from prison having served some five years of a sentence for manslaughter.

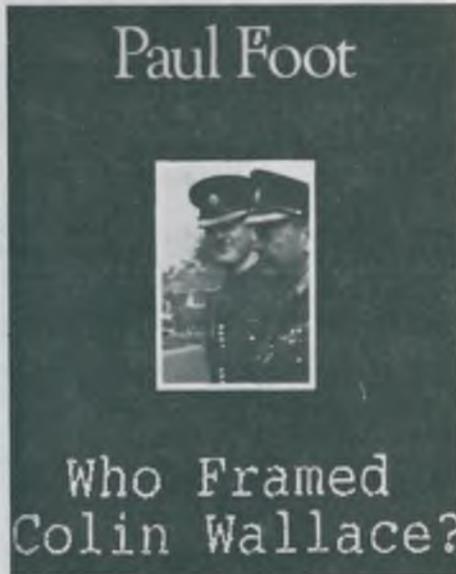
Foot took up his case, completing this book in 1989. It can be divided roughly into two sections: the first, an account of Wallace's activities with a special and secret British army disinformation unit in Belfast, and the second, an account of the events that led to his imprisonment.

The first part is undoubtedly the most revealing although the second has all the makings of a good murder mystery. Wallace's 'black propaganda' and manipulation of a British media only too willing to believe what it was told is a signal lesson for any journalist - and anyone reading dailies or watching TV.

Most of his activities were well within the framework of what various governments wanted produced - a certain view of the 'troubles' in North-

ern Ireland. And although the provocations and disinformation he manufactured were mainly aimed at the IRA, the 'Ultras' among the Protestants, such as the Rev Ian Paisley, also received attention, to the extent of attempting to set up false bank accounts to discredit them.

But it was after Harold Wilson met IRA leaders in Dublin in 1972 while Opposition Leader, and when even the Heath government began to con-



sider negotiating with them, that Wallace and his fellow thinkers saw a Russian plot. When Wilson came to power in 1974, Operation 'Clockwork Orange' began to move to destabilise the Labour government and any chance of a peaceful settlement in Northern Ireland.

Then Wallace stumbled upon a scandal at a Belfast boys' home involving the rape of inmates by the school's head, William McGrath, who was also a leading Protestant paramilitary extremist. Wallace was outraged but found that every attempt he made to bring McGrath to justice was frustrated, including by his own superiors. McGrath was an informer for the British and protected for that reason until the scandal finally broke years later.

Even worse, Wallace found himself subject to disinformation and soon

after was moved out of Northern Ireland. When he refused to accept this quietly and began to tell what he knew through the 'proper channels' such as his MP, he was thrown out of the army.

Wallace finally moved to the town of Arundel to a PR job with the local council but began to talk to some journalists about the 'dirty tricks' in which he had participated in Belfast. In July 1980 he helped organise a Europe-wide TV-style games competition in Arundel and after that job finished, the husband of the woman co-worker on the project was murdered.

There is no space here to go into the complex details of the murder case set out in the book. Foot is convinced that Wallace was framed by persons unknown, most likely by his former intelligence employers.

He certainly provides proof of many inconsistencies in the evidence produced - and not produced - during the trial. Yet Wallace had a motive (he had designs on the murdered man's wife) and his whereabouts at the time of the murder remain doubtful. Moreover, given his past mastery of deception and mayhem in Ireland, it is certainly not excluded in my mind that he was guilty.

And if the murder was committed by intelligence services, it must have been very much a last-minute decision on their part although there is strong circumstantial evidence that they sought to undermine Wallace's defence in every way possible. His former employers were certainly not unhappy to see him punished for the 'crime' of becoming a whistle-blower. But the five years in prison did not stop him in that regard.

Readers will no doubt draw their own conclusions. But the value of Foot's book doesn't rest on it proving that Wallace was framed or who framed him. It lies elsewhere, in the testimony it provides of the doings of intelligence operators out of any control.

**DENIS FRENEY** writes for *Tribune* newspaper.

# Big Spender

*Rosalie Goes Shopping*, directed by Percy Adlon. Opening at the Kino Cinema, Melbourne and the Dendy, Sydney in mid-September. Reviewed by John Slavin.

Dickens' Mr Micawber memorably summed up the underlying economic structure of human happiness: "Annual income twenty pounds, annual expenditure nineteen pounds nineteen and six, result happiness. Annual income twenty pounds, annual expenditure twenty pounds nought and six, result misery." In German director Percy Adlon's latest film, his heroine Rosalie Greenspace manages to turn this supply-side realism on its head. "If you're \$100,000 in debt, it's your problem; if you're a million in debt it's the bank's!" she explains at the conclusion of her passage into plastic card credit and debit.

Rosalie (Marianne Sagebrecht) describes herself as a peacetime German war bride. She and her crop duster husband Ray (Brad Davis) live in a migrant community of wheat farmers in Arkansas, called Stuttgart. Germany is a remembered peasant economy light years away from the modern social pressures in which the Greenspaces now survive. Each Wednesday Rosalie collects Ray's pay cheque with a brief kiss and an expert snatch at the money.

She provides for her large family in spectacular style. Her son, Schnucki, a trainee chef at nearby Little Rock, proudly announces the delicacies he has prepared as though the family dines at an exclusive restaurant. Daughter Barbara has a bad attack of the sulks until Rosalie provides the credit to buy her an expensive computer. The personalised number plates of Rosalie's combi read 'Charge It'. Even in bed the Greenspaces discuss mortgaging a relative's home



Marianne Sagebrecht and Brad Davis in a scene from *Rosalie Goes Shopping*

before making love. The cash nexus is at the basis of every relationship in the film.

"I'm running a family business here," Rosalie declares bluntly when her husband complains that she no longer wishes to video his air acrobatics. Indeed, she is the only member of the family who appears to have grasped the pervasive effect of economic realities on human relations. The quality of the family's lifestyle is paid for by an intense amount of financial game playing on the mother's part. As each final notice from her various

banks arrives in the post she shifts limited cash reserves, pays one credit card debt with another and adds thousands to the weekly pay cheque which she draws on a trusting company boss's authority.

If there is tension and stress in this precipitous lifestyle Adlon has provided what becomes an increasingly cute and repetitive device. For Rosalie, a practising Catholic, ducks into the local parish church each afternoon to confess her monetary peccadilloes. Exploitation and its concomitant guilt is thus erased in

preparation for the next day's housekeeping.

Adlon's previous films have been entertaining exercises into what has been described elsewhere as 'magic realism'. The magic in his two earlier films, *Sugarbaby* and *Baghdad Cafe*, has been provided by his polymorphously perverse star, Marianne Sagebrecht, who comes on like a female impersonation of Oliver Hardy. This film has clearly been crafted as a vehicle for her lightweight talents and it is her presence, attractive as it is as the classic fat lady, which destroys any sharp social insight the film might have had.

The script's original idea is not only charming. In a broad satirical way it drives right at the heart of America's debt-ridden middle-class affluence. The comedy is at its most pungent when the family sits around the television after dinner for its favourite

viewing - those channels which showcase endless ads for the consumer goods the family longs for. "That's what I'm going to be!" a son recently returned from military service in Germany - another price to be paid for ongoing affluence - shouts when the ads push an expensive motor bike. Reification of an individual's identity couldn't be more explicit.

The problem is that once you've grasped the family's obsession, Adlon has nowhere to go with it. He heaps on a number of potential crises - a burdensome mortgage, a plethora of unpaid domestic bills, the arrival of Rosalie's parents from Germany, Ray's approaching blindness - but nothing has any impact on Rosalie's relentless surge to corporate ownership, bank overdrafts and million dollar debts. Greed is not only good; it is all consuming. None of the crimes detracts for a moment from the folksy charm of the eccentric family nor the ruthless exploitation of

the economic system which underlies their wellbeing.

More seriously, the film makes no attempt to show us the realities of the cash nexus as nasty, competitive, divisive, or alienating within the terms of human relationships. Instead, it settles for a Walt Disney kind of unreality in which everyone lives happily ever after, and the horrendous void in which such lives are lived is papered over with Rosalie's unbelievable genius for wallowing in filthy lucre.

The film, in fact, falls for the seductiveness of its own product and so it emulates the obsession it is parodying.

JOHN SLAVIN - no relation to Roy - contributes on a regular basis to ABC Radio National's Arts programs.

**Judy Horacek**

